CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Living in the Southern part of Africa makes one intensely aware of race, ethnicity and cultural heritage, as these constructs deeply inscribe identity in both the personal and the social arena. The people of this country, still haunted by its recent traumatic political past, on a daily basis attempt to re-evaluate, reconstruct and ultimately suggest revised ways of thinking about themselves, their environment and interrelated relationships. Although race, ethnicity and cultural heritage remain the primary issues of dispute in identity politics, it appears that the spaces that occur between these contested constructs yield a more representative approach to the interpretation of constructed identity.

For the purposes of this study, I have investigated these "in-between" spaces and propose an alternative view of identity – one that can represent our multicultural society more efficiently. During this investigation I have explored the works of the artist Berni Searle and their various conceptual implications, in an effort to negotiate altered positions and figurations for South African identities.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As the dissertation is primarily focused on the artistic expression of Berni Searle, it may be helpful to provide a brief overview of the artist's recent accomplishments and background.

1.1.1 Brief overview of Berni Searle's achievements and early works

Artist Berni Searle was not a particularly familiar name in the South African art circuit until this Cape Town artist was awarded a UNESCO prize by the International Art Critics Association at the 7th International

Cairo Biennale (1998) for a work from the *Colour me* series, namely *Red, yellow, brown: face to face*. Later Searle was selected to participate in DAK'ART 2000 (the Dakar Biennale) and subsequently she received the Minister of Culture Award. It was then when those interested our country's artistic heritage began to take note. After Searle's participation in the Dakar Biennale in Senegal, she was awarded many residencies and noteworthy awards crowned her efforts. But let us return to the basics for my introduction of this profound artist.

In an interview with Kathryn Smith[1,2] (2000b:2), Searle noted that for her, the process that led her to launch into an art career is "very vague" and "not as clear-cut or as uniform" as one might anticipate. Searle matriculated from the Harold Cressy High School, situated in the Western Cape. Because the school did not offer art as a subject, she was not accepted to study fine arts at the University of Cape Town the following year. Searle went on to the Peninsula Technikon where she received strict formalist training in graphic design and "learnt to draw an apple in a box", as she so aptly describes it (Searle, quoted in Smith 2000b:2). After completing the first year of the training offered at this institution, Searle concluded that a commercially viable art career would restrict her expressive desire, and re-applied to the Michaelis Art School at the University of Cape Town the following year. This time, she was accepted.

Searle received a bursary from the Education Department, which required her to teach for a number of years after the completion of her three-year undergraduate degree in Fine Arts (BA(FA)), where she completed in 1987, followed by a Higher Diploma in Education (HDE). After teaching for two and a half years at the Livingstone High School in Cape Town, Searle felt the urge to do some work of her own, and returned to Michaelis

[1] Kathryn Smith is a Johannesburg-based artist and critic. She is a co-director of the Trinity Session.
[2] Information on several of the art critics and theorists is provided, where relevant, in the interests of greater transparency, because the particular situation, position and background of a critic or theorist can influence his or her position.

for an Advanced Diploma in Fine Arts in an attempt to develop her abilities (Smith 2000b:1).

Figure 1: Berni Searle, *For fatherland* (1994). Concrete, bronze and mixed media. Work on exhibition for Master's degree (1995). Source: Jones (1997:302).

It was only in 1995 that Searle completed her Master's degree at the same institution. She titled the work she produced during this time *Illusions of Identity – Notions of Nationhood*. This work was primarily focused around "nationalisms and nationhood in the face of a rapidly transforming culture" (Smith 2000a:1). In the accompanying thesis for her Master's degree, Searle investigates a work displayed during the 1993 Whitney Biennale[3] which invites discussion of the representation of black bodies in a so-

[3] Smith (sa:1) notes that this exhibition dealt with the "complexities of 'multicultural' genders, identities and race" and displayed the photograph of a group of young black children in Madison Avenue. The image was "graffiti'd with the words 'what ya lookin' at?'.

called post-colonial society (Smith sa:1). Smith (2000a:1) notes that these works by Searle "laid the foundations for her explorations into a fluid conception of identity, and the creation of ambiguous spaces in which to consider these issues", although for Searle, her "object-based sculptures", such as *For fatherland* (1994), executed in concrete, bronze and other mixed media seemed "too rooted in a phallic configuring of power relationships in which she could locate little of her own lived experiences". They did not seem conducive to the seldom-heard voices of a "culture which affirms the impossibility of hard, separating edges in South African society" (Martin 1997:8).

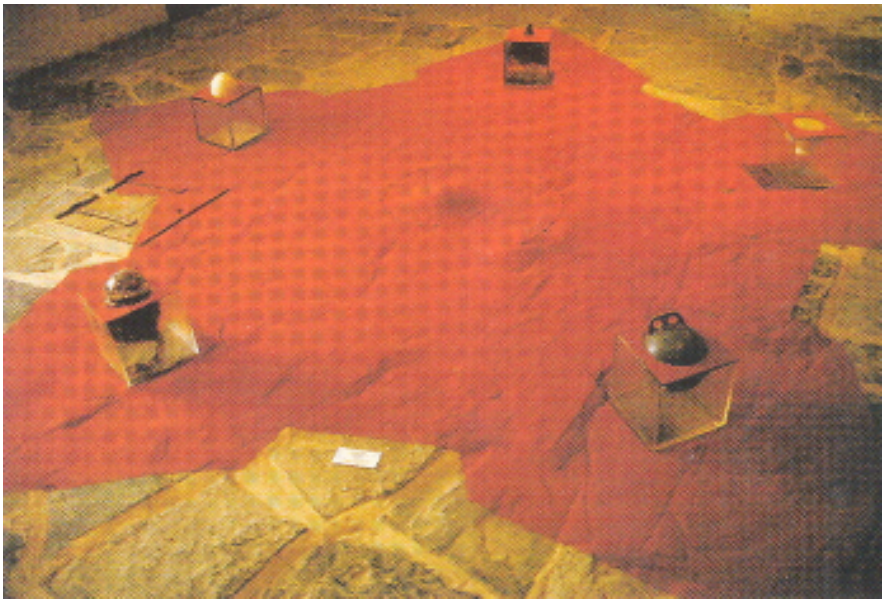

Figure 2: Berni Searle, *Com-fort* (1997). Spice and mixed media installation at the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, approximately 3 000 x 3 000 mm. Source: Bester (2003:15).

Searle came into the public eye in 1997 with an installation, *Com-fort* (1997) that formed part of a core exhibition, *Life's little necessities*, at the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, based at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town. The work maps the five-bastion outline of the Castle in an attempt to establish a relationship between Searle's use of spices and the space as an "utterly masculine symbol of colonial power and later apartheid" (Bester 2003:15). The impact of her conscious engagement with the history of that space and, in what seemed to infer, of her own placement

within that history, became a catalyst for further questions and interrogation of how she defines and represents herself.

It was here that Searle first introduced the medium of spice to her audience. It was later explored further at Robben Island for the exhibition *Isintu*, co-curated by Tumela Mosaka and Zayd Minty, where artists were given an opportunity to explore and discuss ideas pertaining to an exhibition entitled *Ceremony, identity and community* (Smith 2000b:3). Although the application of spices employed in the work produced for this show was merely a historical reference to the particular site, Searle states (quoted in Smith 2000b:4) that this allowed her to view herself "in relation to that history, which was the impetus for the new body of work". The associations drawn from the spices she uses became a multiplicity of applicable references and out of these the body of work, the *Colour me* series was born.

The *Fresh*[4] Artist-in-Residence project was initiated in 1999 in an attempt to support the development of young South African artists and to promote their artworks both locally and abroad. For the programme, each artist was given the opportunity to work at the South African National Gallery for a month to generate a work of art. Emma Bedford[5] (2003:6) explains, in the foreword to the catalogue accompanying Searle's work (published later in 2003), that the project brief stated that each artist should consider "the broader context of the country and/or examine the history of Cape Town as a port city … the colonial settlement on the southern tip of Africa and outpost on the lucrative trade route between Europe and Asia". During this residency programme, Searle produced works such as *Profile* (2002) and *Relative* (2002).

[4] The project involved seven young South African artists and was funded by the Prince Bernhard Cultural Fund through an award made to Marlene Dumas.
[5] Emma Bedford is the curator of Contemporary Paintings and Sculpture at Iziko: South African National Gallery and Head of Art Collections in Iziko Museums. She has curated exhibitions in South Africa and abroad and has authored and/or edited many publications. She serves on the national and Western Cape committees of the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) and is a board member of Public Eye.

During 2000, Searle participated in many projects, ranging from her highly visible billboard poster *Returning the gaze* for Cape Town's One City festival, to her participation in Rory Bester's travelling show *Kwere Kwere: Journeys into strangeness*, *insertion* at the Apex Gallery in New York, curated by Salah Hassan, and an exhibition entitled *Distinguished identities: contemporary African portraiture*, curated by Barbara Frank at the Staller Centre for the Arts, at Stoney Brook in New York. Searle was also invited by the British Council to take up a two-month residency at the south London's Gasworks' studio were the artist worked and produced more works related to the *Colour me* series.

In June 2001, Searle was also a participating artist in *Authentic/ex-centric*, a sideshow exhibition that formed part of the 49th Venice Biennale. The work she presented at this extensively documented exhibition was widely reviewed and received considerable acclaim. Since then, she has exhibited in the USA, Netherlands, Ireland, Germany and Spain, and has participated in residencies at Civitella Ranieri in Umbria, Italy, and at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. Searle's first solo exhibition at the Axis Gallery in New York, initially scheduled to be opened on 11 September 2001 (9/11), was described as "healing, meditative and restorative for the time" by Laurie Farrell[6] (2001:unpaginated) in her review of the show. The show comprised works produced from 1998 to 2001, and was an enclosed installation entitled *Still*. The *Colour me* series and the video piece, *Snow white* (2001) was the main focus of the show.

The artist was commissioned during 2002 to produce a video installation for the NMAC Arte Contemporaneo in Vejer, Spain. She was selected as the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year for 2003. The video-piece, *Home and away* (2003), produced during Searle's stay in Spain, formed part of the exhibition entitled *Float* which was shown at the Standard Bank Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2003. *Float* later travelled around South Africa. It focused on three main video installations, *Snow white* (2001), *A*

[6] Laurie Farrell is an associate curator at the Museum for African Art in New York.

matter of time (2003) and *Home and away* (2003). These video projections and the complementary prints and lithographs, as well as the works from the *Colour me* and *Discoloured* series, could be seen as Searle's seminal works. These form the focus of the research explored in this dissertation.

During 2003 Searle was invited to exhibit at the Berkeley Art Museum in California as part of the Matrix programme. After being nominated for the Artes Mundi Award, she displayed her work at the Artes Mundi exhibition held in Cardiff in 2004. Later that year, the artist also participated in the Busan and Shanghai Biennales.

Some of Searle's works currently form part of local and international collections, including the highly regarded BHP Billiton Collection, the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) and the South African National Gallery's permanent collections, and the collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, the Berkeley Art Museum and the Daimler Chrysler Collection in Germany.

1.1.2 The South African political milieu

> I am the product of the South African intelligentsia of every colour, who have laboured to give our society knowledge of itself to fashion our people's aspirations into a reasonable dream (Mandela 1999:1).

It is against the background of a newly born democracy in South Africa that Searle embarked on her visually expressive journey of finding what would comprise her identity. Bedford (2004:4) comments that South Africans have been "faced with the massive challenge of transforming an apartheid regime into a democratic government and society". In many respects, one could look at art in South Africa during our first decade of equality, since 1994, as a mirror of social and political developments and uncertainties. These works of art presents us with the embedded

complexities and challenges that such a multicultural nation presents. One of these challenges is the expression of the notion of identity. It is necessary, now that we have abandoned the system of apartheid and its racial classificatory systems, to negotiate new explorations and figurations of subjectivity.

This is exactly the gap that Searle's works attempt to fill. This dissertation explores the notion of nomadic subjectivity and hybridity as an inspiration for a new sense of self within South African culture and politics.

1.2 NEED FOR THE STUDY

As I have outlined in the previous section, the issues of race and identity are particularly tricky aspects of the situation that South Africans are faced with. Moreover, there seems to be an urgent need to redefine exactly what and who we are – not as one united people, but rather as a multicultural nation with a sense of identity that includes and celebrates the many diverse and often contradictory aspects of our society. In order to establish such a wider notion of identity, we need to review alternative conceptions of subjectivity, particularly our notion of identity, because in its current, essentialist state, it seems insufficient to account for the assortment of cultural and historical influences that we are shaped by.

Secondly, the study attempts to contribute positively to the discipline of art history and visual studies in South Africa. As has been pointed out in the previous section, Berni Searle has gained considerable international recognition for her artistic *oeuvre*, yet in her own country, she has been ignored to a large extend. The artist tackles the above-mentioned issues head on and should therefore form an important part of South Africa's contemporary artistic heritage and debate. In addition to this, so far there are only exhibition catalogues, newspaper and journal articles and Internet articles available on the artist. It is then also the intention of this dissertation to provide a complete account of the work produced by this

artist to date and to represent and analyse these within the context of current South African artistic and political debates.

1.3 BRIEF LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In this study, the work of Searle is discussed parallel to the idea of film as a format for the process whereby identity is constructed. Hence, it was apposite to use some seminal texts published by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze on the process and theory of film and cinema. The first, *Cinema 1: The movement-image* (1986) focuses on the notion of movement as depicted in film, with specific reference to three cinematic elements namely the frame, the shot and montage. *Cinema 2: The time-image* (1989), the second volume by Deleuze, presents a more abstract consideration of movement, by focusing on time. These theories are not incorporated merely as information on the process of making a film, but are discussed as revealing some of the underlying principles present in Searle's works, as well as the process whereby identity is constituted in film. In this study, the notion of film as a format is applied, and film is also discussed in terms of its techniques, application and considerations, as film (and photography) forms Searle's primary means of expression.

In addition to Deleuze's film theories, the study also explores his proposal for an alternative view of identity, namely nomadic subjectivity. Deleuze and his co-author, Felix Guattari, wrote several books that investigate this notion of fluid identity. *Anti-Oedipus* (1984) and *A thousand plateaus* (1988) serve as the theoretical grounding for this study in combination with the theories of nomadic identity (adapted from Deleuze & Guattari) by Rosi Braidotti.

In an attempt to comprehend this notion of identity, comprising binary oppositions, it is also necessary to consider those spaces often found between current debates and constructs. For this purpose I refer to Homi

Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the "in-between" as described in *Nation and narration* (1990) and the *Location of culture* (1994).

The information gathered on the artist, Berni Searle, was gleaned mainly from exhibition catalogues, and from journal and Internet articles. Of these sources, *Floating free* (2003) by Rory Bester and *Memories are made of this* (2003) by Annie Coombes were the most useful.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to overcome monolithic and essentialising views of identity, I apply the nomadic theory of subjectivity, as set out in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. In the study I investigate the work of Berni Searle – a South African artist of mixed race kneading the concept of personal and collective identity – in the light of this alternative view of identity. Searle's art questions basic assumptions regarding stereotypes, people's heritage, history and classification, not only from a racial and ethnic perspective, but also within the domain of gender. By means of her photographic installations, video productions and performances, Searle challenges accepted notions of becoming when she proposes a hybrid, fluid figuration of identity, governed by oppositional forces and constraints, as they pertain to South African politics.

This study of Searle's art takes the reader on a visual journey as the theory surrounding nomadic subjectivity is explored, in an attempt to engage with an alternative way of thinking about race in South Africa. It is important to note that the discussion of the works in question within the parameters of this study does not only focus on a post-colonial interpretation, although this aspect is blatantly obvious in most of the imagery and titles. This research document aims to expose other aspects and interpretations of Searle's work between the palpable stereotypes and dichotomies and to present these on a more universal platform.

The idea of a film – a succession of images, which, when shown at a particular speed, appear to recreate the illusion of movement –serves as an investigative tool to explore the process whereby nomadic subjectivity unfolds and the application of these theoretical implications in the work of Berni Searle. This theory of film is also applied at a more technical level in terms of the artist's personal use of photographic and film projections and installations.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The research document unfolds the theory of nomadic subjectivity in relation to the art of Berni Searle in terms of the three core cinematic elements defined by Deleuze in *Cinema 1: The movement-image* (1986), namely frame, shot and montage and the concept of time and memory theorised in *Cinema 2: The time-image* (1989). These elements serve to organise the various chapters as they appear in this study.

1.5.1 Chapter Two: Framing marginalised subject

Deleuze defines the frame as a slice or instant of movement in time, carved out of the open whole (the entirety of the film). Framing demarcates a limited set of elements whilst maintaining the indirect presence of the open whole. This chapter begins by unpacking the most implicit and stereotypical assumptions as they are represented and confronted in Searle's earlier works such as the *Colour Me* series (1998 – 2000) and the *Discoloured* series (1999).

It is within these works that Searle uses a unique method of referencing to explore a number of gendered and racial classification systems. This method frames contentious issues as they function within the cultural context. In *Lifeline* (1999), and *Not quite white* (2002), Searle extracts some of these problematic systems of classification and encloses such

debates surrounding race and gender stereotyping by tracing and staining her body.

1.5.2 Chapter Three: Weaving a collage of multiplicity by erasing and inserting the body

This chapter revolves around Deleuze's (1986:23) definition of the shot as it pertains to cinema. Each shot frames a limited set of entities (frames) and the relations beyond itself that may guide assembly in a montage sequence. The shot, with its collage-like qualities, represents the nomadic space where subjects occupy multiple positions which set the process of becoming into operation[7]. The notion of collage and hypertext is applied here to demonstrate Searle's process of assembling her own identity. I also employ a hypertext artwork by Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995) to illustrate the technical and conceptual implications of Searle's method of constructing her sense of self.

The space that I refer to is an anonymous space, a point of transit between places of importance. It is here that multiplicity, hybridity and other liminal[8] states of being reach a point of implosion. For the purposes of this chapter, Searle's works *Show white* (2001), *Julle moet nou trek* (1999) and *Relative* (2002) are critically analysed in an attempt to capture a hybrid, fluid view of identity.

The mutability extends to Searle's used of media: from the possibilities of manipulation offered by digital photography to the use of glass to distort the photographic subject, the artist actively disrupts the viewer's expectations regarding photographic representation. She also includes

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[7] "*L'espace quelconque"* ("any space whatsoever") was originally a concept coined by the anthropologist, Pascal Auge. Although Deleuze does not use this concept as a direct reference in his own theory, he applies the idea of such a space in a subdued way.

[8] For the purposes of this dissertation I use the concept of that which is "in-between" with various intentions. The liminal space represents a threshold and therefore refers to identities that are often found between binaries (Sykes 1976:629). When I refer to spaces that attempt to bridge these binary oppositions they are described as interstitial as they form "interstices" – intervening spaces or crevices (Sykes 1976:566). Interjacent refers to that which is between the adjacent (Roget 1985:122).

the markers of the photographic process – including the exposure number along the edge of the photographic negative – as a metatextual element to highlight that her editorial choices are acts of manipulation.

1.5.3 Chapter Four: Nomadic locations and fluid identities

It is in the act of manipulation of her media chosen by the artist that the process of montage comes into play. Montage, the third cinematic element defined by Deleuze (1986:30) and the focus of this chapter, refers to a splicing of shots in accordance with the concept. It implies the composition and the assemblage of the movement-image to constitute an indirect image of time. In this chapter, it is this sense of movement and mobility that forms the primary locus of concern, because it inscribes and explains the constant process of becoming, as explained by the theory of nomadic subjectivity.

Works such as *A matter of time* (2003) and *Home and away* (2003) offer a possibility of a space liberated from the limitations inscribed by traditional identity politics. Bester (2003:53) points out that such a free and unassuming space "poses the threat of space that has to be negotiated entirely without the scaffolding and support that expressions of identity so often provide". He adds that it is exactly this paradoxical position that forms the primary concern of Searle's negotiations of identity and the self.

1.5.4 Chapter Five: Memory and the concept of time

In this chapter the focus is the concept of time as it pertains to film and the work of Searle. Memory, as an expression of time, is explored by means of the video presentations *Uitsug* (2002) and *Vapour* (2004). The implications of history, the partiality of memory and the disruption of the space-time continuum that this produces are investigated, as time inscribes and shapes personal and collective identity.

1.5.5 Chapter Six: Conclusion

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I offer the reader a summary of the concepts that I have dealt with throughout the study. In addition, I point out several contributions made by the study, as well as the limitations of the research. In conclusion, I propose a few suggestions for further research and study.

Chapter Two, *Framing the marginalised subject*, opens the study by unpacking some of the most implicit and stereotypical assumptions represented and confronted in Searle's earlier works, such as the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000) and the *Discoloured* series (1999). By exploring the act of framing, as it pertains to the theory of film, as a metaphor for Searle's approach, the investigation aims to isolate a number of aspects centring on the rhetoric of race and gender in South Africa. Searle employs two strategies to frame the body and various notions of identity, namely tracing and staining.

In the act of tracing the subject, Searle employs a palette of spices, resembling different skin tones, which highlights various debates surrounding history, gender, measuring and the lifecycle as they pertain to a South African consciousness.

The use of spices is most evident in the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000), which includes *Looking back* (1999), *Not quite white* (1999) and *Traces* (1999). The act of staining which was used pertains to the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000) which includes works such as *Lifeline* (1999), *A darker shade of light* (1999) and *Conversing with pane 1 & 2* (2000). This series investigates the influence of history and heritage on identity, the insufficiency of categories of classification and the violence and suffering resulting from such essentialist systems.

CHAPTER TWO
FRAMING THE MARGINALISED SUBJECT

During the apartheid era in South Africa, subjects were categorised and identified by assigning one colour or identity to an individual or a group. This monolithic practice was employed as a means of commanding power over others, in an attempt to keep the racial category "white", intact and to reinforce it as supreme (Bullock & Trombley 2000:41-42). In order to maintain such an ideology, various strategies were deployed, ranging from strict systems of categorisation to political acts of control. All these tactics strategically framed the black subject in South Africa by stereotypical attributions added to a clearly delineated system of classification based on racial and ethnic characteristics.

This chapter aims to expose some of the inherent problems and difficulties of such a fixed system of racial classification for and in constituting identity with regard to people of mixed race. The technique of framing (as found in film theory) is investigated in detail as a process employed by the artist Berni Searle in an attempt to trace her own identity. Searle illustrates how a variety of fixed systems of arrangement, as enforced by colonialism[9], continually frame her identity. For Searle, framing is not merely an ideology – it is integral to her process of making conspicuous art.

Searle's attempt at framing the various issues involved in the construction of her own identity mimics[10] colonialist practices in that she extracts

[9] Colonialism is recognised as a form of imperialism based on maintaining a sharp and fundamental distinction between the ruling nation and the subordinate (colonial) populations. Colonialism is the consequence of the conquest of a remote territory with a population of a noticeable different physique and culture (Bullock & Trombley 2000:418-419). The term "colonial" here includes original colonists (Dutch, British, French, etc.) as well as white rule from the Union (1910) to the offered end of apartheid rule (1994).

[10] Homi Bhabha (1994:85-86) explains in *The location of culture* that within colonial power and knowledge, mimicry arises as an "elusive and effective" tactic. He adds that it represents an "*ironic* compromise" (Bhabha's emphasis) to account for the tension between the desire for an identity (the proposed norm) and difference (the notion of the Other). For Bhabha, mimicry subjugates the Other "*as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha's emphasis) and is therefore a strategy of control whereby the Other can be appropriated.

stereotypes and fixed categories akin to previous classifications based on race and gender. Therefore, by taking control of the construction of her own identity Searle overturns the validity of such external systems of control. As the process of framing played a pivotal role in apartheid strategy, and in Searle's works (as mentioned above), the notion of framing as it pertains to film warrants closer investigation.

The act of framing the marginalised subject (as explored in this chapter) involves the application of two prominent strategies by Searle, namely tracing and staining. Both these strategies are implemented in much the same fashion as the process of framing: both tracing and staining attempt to expose and isolate a specific concept about identity construction in a challenge that violates colonialist desires.

The concept of film – a succession of images, which, when shown at a particular speed, creates an illusion of movement – serves as a tool to investigate the process of a construction of identity to interpret the theoretical implications of this process as it pertains to the conceptual grounding of Searle's work. The theory of film can also be applied directly to Searle's work, as she herself employs film and photography as her media and as her primary means of expression. It is therefore essential to discuss film as a format, as theorised by Gilles Deleuze[11] in *Cinema 1: The movement-image* (1986) and *Cinema 2: The time-image* (1989).

2.1 Film as a format that reflects the process whereby identity is constructed

Searle's earlier works dismantle some colonial control strategies used in South Africa, particularly with regard to those classified as 'coloured' under the banner of apartheid. In bodies of works such as the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000), which includes *Traces* (1999), *Looking back* (1999) and *Not quite white* (2000), and the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000),

[11] Gilles Deleuze is a French philosopher of *différence* who has made a number of significant contributions to current debates on postmodern culture and film theory.

comprising *Lifeline* (1999) (Figure 10) and *A darker shade of light* (1999) (Figures 14 and 15), Searle attempts to frame these strategies of control with the lens of her camera. Her works aim to undo the act of framing employed by colonialism of people of colour as the so-called Other, and attempt to abolish fixed groupings based on colour. In each case, Searle presents a palette that does not merely consist of the binaries of black and white, but includes various shades and hues that are not always representative of the colour of anyone's skin.

Deleuze defines a frame as a slice or instance of movement in time, carved out of the open whole (the entirety of the film). Framing demarcates a limited set of elements whilst maintaining an indirect presence of the open whole. Deleuze (1986:18) explains that the frame of the camera demarcates a closed set of elements and that "framing is the art of choosing parts of all sorts that enter into a closed set".

The framed image is then eventually projected onto a screen of fixed dimensions, with the screen functioning as the "frame of frames" (Deleuze 1986:14). It is important to note here that, whether the image is a close-up or a panoramic view, the framed image fills the same screen space and, in this sense, the screen provides a "common measure for that which has none" (Deleuze 1986:14). Such a common measure tends not to unify so much as to disorient, for it forces a juxtaposition of qualitatively different views of things within an arbitrarily delineated surface area. This strategy of framing correlates closely with those employed by the apartheid era: a colonialist desire manifested a strict measure for its subjects, a measure which ultimately offered an essentialising view of identity.

The frame of the camera detaches a square of the world from its surrounding context, and the frame of the screen temporarily juxtaposes heterogeneous blocks. No matter how hard one may try to normalise the cinematic image, then, there is inherent in it a destabilising force. The frame, whether it is a camera frame or a screen frame, at the most

rudimentary level "assures a deterritorialisation of the image" (Deleuze 1986:15).

It is exactly this destabilising force that Searle re-enacts in her renderings of the self. These self-representations are carefully isolated from their context, as Searle frames them with the lens of her camera. It is this inherent sense of control over the image that provides the artist with a far more powerful image than she would have been able to achieve with a performance. This notion of regaining power over her own body is reinforced by the fact that these images can also be manipulated digitally.

Therefore, for Searle, the act of framing is not merely a technique of isolating various issues as they pertain to colonialist discourse, it is also an act of regaining control over the self and the representations thereof.

2.1.1 Framing as an act of regaining power in Searle's conceptual grounding

The search embodied in Searle's work for an alternative figuration of the subject requires a process of employing what Rosi Braidotti[12] (1994:6) refers to as "a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now".

In *Traces* (Figure 3) it is exactly Searle's framing of the past that enables her to trace the issues inhibiting the construction of her identity, necessary for transformation of the self. *Traces* is an installation consisting of spices and flour, measuring scales and six digitally enhanced images, printed onto tracing paper and exhibited in two rows of three images, facing each other. Between the two rows of prints three strips of aromatic spice

[12] Rosi Braidotti is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht and Director of the Netherlands Research School of Women's Studies. The author published many books and essays focused around female identity and the influence of technology and our postmodern culture on the subject. Braidotti is strongly influenced by the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray.

connects the prints in the front to those at the back. The front row showcases three outlines, formed by a residue of spice that once covered Searle's body. The absence represented in these images is strongly contrasted to the prints found in the back row imaging the presence of the body, covered by the various spices. Searle's aromatic palette, consisting of paprika (red), turmeric (yellow), cloves (brown) and pea flour (off-white), resembles the different categories of racial classification of which the colour of one's skin seems to be the organising principle. The installation is completed with scales (with their measuring dials fixed at a central point) printed on the bottom of the six panels containing small quantities of spice, positioned at the bottom of the prints.

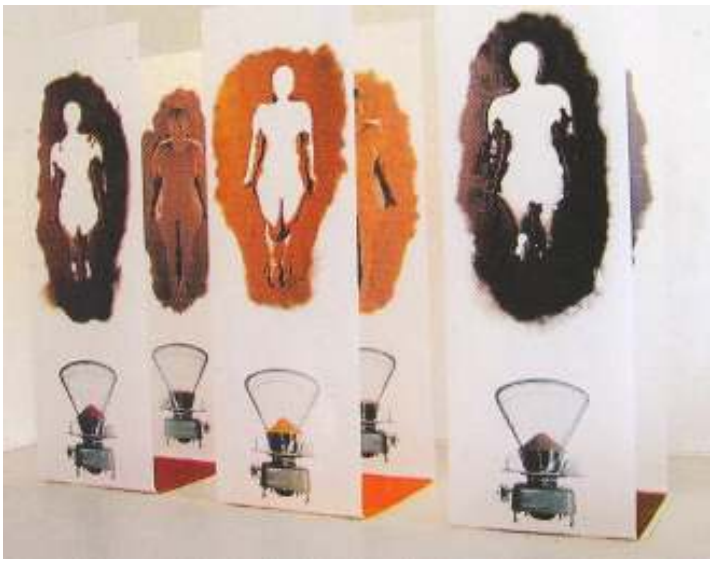

Figure 3: Berni Searle, *Traces* (1999). Installation view at the Axis Gallery, New York, 2001. Digital prints on tracing paper, 6 prints, 3000 x 913 mm each, spices and flour. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:20).

By tracing the outline of her body, Searle literally traces aspects of her identity from the past. By highlighting these issues of heritage and family, different aspects of classification, measuring, gender and race are analysed individually. It is, ironically, in these earlier artworks that a dialogue is set up consisting of delineated, singular concepts born from an essentialist, unifying belief in a fixed state of identity.

Searle's literal taking apart of the race and gender debate foregrounds notions of multiplicity and a succession of differences which clearly rely on "deliberate agency and lived experience" (Braidotti 1994:6). By framing various aspects pertaining to the self, Searle appropriates some of the colonialist act of essentialising the subject. This appropriation renders such acts of control inadequate, as Searle has taken charge of the rendition of her own identity. It is the nature of such a deliberate act that Katherine Hayles[13] (2000a:51) asks for when referring to the "embodied subject". Searle's visualisation of the "embodied posthuman subject"[14] both constructs and signifies meaning of the real world through its representational practices.

Stuart Hall[15] (in Mirzoeff 2000:21) argues that identity is not transparent, but should be viewed as "a production which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside, representation". It is then in Searle's attempt to open up a continuous dialogue on or investigation of the subject of her identity that the artist casts some light on the issues at stake, by inscribing her cultural difference and environmental context. Hall (in Mirzoeff 2000:23) comments that although people share many similarities, these are also critical points of "deep and significant difference, which constitute 'what we really are'". It is therefore not possible for subjects previously categorised as "black" or "coloured" simply to reconstruct their identities without reviewing the past.

In the same way as in the dislocated cinematic image, a framing and subsequent juxtapositioning of concepts elucidate the inherent differences and similarities that inscribe cultural identity. The frame (created by the camera or screen) and Searle's tracings, which frame her body, then

[13] Katherine Hayles is a Professor of English at the University of California. She writes on literature and science in the twentieth century and on how they affect conceptions of identity and the self.
[14] The "posthuman subject" is a concept that functions in a similar way to nomadic subjectivity, although it is more bound within digital worlds, whereas the nomad is applicable both within our current social parameters and the technological world.
[15] Stuart Hall is a Professor of Sociology at Goldsmith's College at the University of London.

assure a deterritorialisation of the concept, and allow for a critical engagement with identity and promote an open-ended dialogue or process of becoming. For Searle, this disembodied inscription of an image (a frame), removed from its context, becomes part of the process by which she renders reductivist notions pertaining to race, class and gender obsolete. Searle's method affirms Braidotti's (2002:2) figuration of the self as a "politically informed map that outlines our image in terms of a decentred and multilayered vision of the subject as a dynamic and changing entity".

Searle's application of the technique of framing is first and foremost a political act of reclaiming her past, her body and her self. In addition, the concept of framing extends itself to the artist's choice of media, namely photography, video projections and digital prints.

2.1.2 Searle's application of framing based on her choice of media

Although many of Searle's works are strongly rooted in performance, most of her installations include photographic and video documentation, where the dimensions of the screen and/or the photographs function as a viewfinder, focusing on specific forms of framing. Each time her camera demarcates a closed set of ideas or strategies, Searle is able to juxtapose and analyse the extracted dualities as removed from the process whereby identity is constructed. By attempting to utilise such an objective *modus operandi*, Searle questions the validity of the boundaries implied by classification and systems of control. Smith ([sa]:5) comments:

> … it is her body we witness, covered with spices or stained with henna, performing testimonials of experience in a space and time that has been frozen photographically.

Searle's process itself is ambivalent, as she chooses to disrupt the spatio-temporal aspects of the performance by presenting these as photographic

images. Photography serves as a method to document these performances. At a symbolic level, this is ultimately what the performances are all about: a re-enactment of personal experiences in an attempt to come to terms with Searle's own historical, racial and gendered identity.

In addition, the artist's use of digital imaging processes extends the possibilities of the photographic process, allowing the manipulation of the images at will, giving Searle full control over her rendering of her own image. *Looking back* (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 8) is a series of images consisting of the artist's body covered in the various spices and substances mentioned earlier. It is Searle's direct gaze, penetrating the consciousness of the viewer, which makes these images so poignant. A direct confrontation with the viewer on a larger-than-life scale would have been difficult to achieve by means of a performance, but the digitally enhanced representation of Searle achieves domination over its audience.

Smith ([sa]:6) argues that it is her need to control her body and her own image, that makes Searle wary of engaging with performance art directly. She states that Searle's works "allow us to dwell in this charged, abject space". It is this alternative space where one's own sense of self is juxtaposed and queried in relation to the artist's identity. Smith ([sa]:6) continues that Searle presents intangible subject positions which "resist [,] all that seeks to compartmentalise it". Searle's subsequent undermining of apartheid strategies is a result of her appropriation of power, as she takes control of the manifestation of her own identity.

Considering the emphasis placed by Searle on control, the use of spices – fairly transient media, difficult to contain or control – is a curious choice. Spices and flour form part of the artist's *oeuvre* from 1998 to 2001, and this choice is laden with cultural and conceptual references as she attempts to trace her sense of self.

2.2 Tracing the body by means of spices

Tracing refers to the act of mapping points of contention that pertain to the production of identity in a South African milieu. These mappings are represented within Searle's artistic intervention and set up a critical debate based on the artist's own lived experience in terms of race, class and gender. The discussion that follows deals particularly with Searle's identity as she struggled to adhere to self-contained categories of race exclusively designed for so-called "black" or "'white" subjects.

In *Traces* (Figure 3) Searle presents her audience with a variety of spices that represent various colours of skin in an attempt to expose the practice of racial classification based on the colour of one's skin. By outlining and isolating these complexities (in the form of her physical body representative of her own mediated experience) by means of spices, she frames (in a similar way to that in which the camera or screen frames dislocated images of time and space) a number of issues regarding identity construction that require revision. As part of her strategy, Searle uses of a variety of spices that act as tools for framing. The framed instances appear to set up an oppositional post-colonial debate in an attempt to sabotage fixed and monolithic cultural production, akin to colonial discourse[16].

In the *Colour me* series Searle explores various forms of tracing, by means of visual narrative and the artist's employment of racialised and gendered concepts of both her own body and the body politic as it pertains to South Africa. These concepts of the body are used to stage various narrative identities. The investigation focuses on history, race, ethnography, gender stereotypes and the gaze that serve as tools in Searle's self-imposed task of framing the subject by means of spice. In each instance Searle, in her attempt to surmount prevailing notions of

[16] Okwui Enwezor states, "an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (in Oguibe & Enwezor 1999:388).

identity, attempts to expose monolithic thought and pleads for a more elusive view of the subject.

2.2.1 Racial and historical tracings of the Other's body

First and foremost, the use of spices makes reference to the spice trade during the seventeenth century, which brought many Europeans to the Cape of Good Hope[17] (Williamson & O'Toole 2003:1). It is mutual contact between the indigenous peoples, the slaves imported from the Far East and the Europeans and their descendants that fashioned a "new" race of mixed heritage, which later came to be classified in South Africa as "coloured". A reading of this kind also comments on the colonial obsession by successive sets of authorities to classify and fix identities in an attempt to maintain an imposed ideological structure.

Figure 4: Berni Searle, *Looking back* (Detail) (1999), from the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000). Colour photographs, glass, silicon, spices. 12 photographs, 420 x 500 mm each. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:18).

[17] For the purposes of this discussion I only refer to the spice trade as a source that brought many Europeans to South Africa during the seventeenth century. However, there were many other causes of settlement such as attempts to escape religious persecution.

Considering the historical references linked to Searle's aromatic use of spices it is clear that the artist sets out to attack colonial projects of apartheid and more specifically those subscribing to the notion of a categorisation of subjects based on the colour of their skins. Added to this, the subsequent absence or denial of Othered bodies in the cultural and political practices in South Africa reinforces the need for Searle's project of relocating herself within a post-colonial discourse (Smith [sa]:2).

In line with this argument, Rory Bester[18] (2003:16) interprets Searle's choice of palette as a method of demolishing traditionally fixed conceptions of identity, but points out that the hues of "brown cloves and off-white pea-flour approximate the colour of flesh". The application of red paprika and yellow turmeric leaves Searle liberated to render her body "free from the rhetoric of race" as these colours are not directly representative of a specific race. Such an interpretation foregrounds Searle's intricate play between reality and fantasy which later becomes the focus of works (after the *Colour me* series) such as *Snow white (2000), A matter of time* (2003) and *Home and away* (2003).

The use of spices in the *Colour me* series presents a cross-cultural appropriation of a multi-layered history and heritage, within which Searle positions her artistic production. It seems that, for both Searle and Braidotti (2002:2), the point then is "not to know who we are, but rather what at last, we want to become, how to represent mutations, changes and transformations, rather than being in its classical modes".

2.2.2 Gendered framing and the gaze

The racialised body often intersects with the gendered body. Explorations of the gendered body, especially in relation to the question of nakedness or nudity, can be distinguished by differences between self-representation

[18] Rory Bester is an art historian and curator based in Johannesburg. He teaches at the School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, and has curated a number of local and international exhibitions.

and a representation by others. These different kinds of representation are interwoven with questions of power and vulnerability. The debates initiated by early feminist criticism about the relationship between nakedness, nudity and consumption have motivated many artists' choices, to either use or not use their bodies as vehicles for political statements. The effect of gendered representation has also sparked a discourse around the "androgynous" body and its role in weakening gender stereotypes.

The history of the representation of black women fuses questions about race and gender. The complexity of such representations in constructions of nakedness and nudity has been a highly charged theme throughout colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid histories. From art to ethnography and back again, the unclothed black subject has consistently been the focus of voyeurism and science. But almost as much as such gazing has "disarmed" women, so too have women used their nakedness to disarming effect, to claim or reclaim a power that is threatened or lost.

A gendered reading could interpret the employment of spices as an attempt to excavate the neglected history of South African women as a way of recovering from European colonialism and imbedded challenges to race, class and gender that have remained (Jacobson 2003:1). Searle (quoted in Murinik 1999:2) explains:

Placing myself or my body in the work exposes other aspects of my identity, for example gender. Exposing myself therefore involved a process of claiming, and points to the idea that there is a range of axes that inform identity which are interconnected, determining relationships of dependency and domination in any given context… . Agency is executed in what one chooses to show or not.

Figure 5: Berni Searle, *Looking back* (Detail) (1999) from the *Colour me* series. Colour photographs, glass, silicon, spices. 12 photographs, 420 x 500 mm each. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:19).

The *Colour me* series explores this intention of disrupting the gendered and racialised notion of exoticism. Using her own nude body, Searle presents a purposefully ambiguous and complex position on this issue she states, "… using my own body is a tricky thing to do, because it can reinforce stereotypes"[19] (Searle quoted by Pollack 2001a:2).

To resist any form of voyeurism, the artist intentionally inserts an element of confrontation into her self-portraits. Smith (2000a:2) concurs that Searle "gazes as much as she demands to be gazed at", thus returning, what bell hooks refers to as an "oppositional gaze"[20] in an attempt to confront and subvert essentialised notions of the gendered and racialised body. The capacity to resist any facile consumption of the female body as

[19] Searle's insistent use of her own (nude) body could be understood to belong to a tradition of African women resorting to naked protest in an attempt to be heard and demand attention from their oppressors (Coombes 2001:198).

[20] bell hooks, who insists that no capitals be used in spelling her name, explains that this so-called "oppositional gaze" undermines monolithic practices, as slaves were denied the right to gaze. She adds that "black people" can both "interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see" and therefore the gaze could be utilised as a site of resistance for the colonised. Here hooks refers to a "critical gaze, one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional…" (hooks 1992:115-6).

a commodity undermines patriarchal views. Instead, Searle sets her body up as a source of confrontational power and control. In addition to Searle's confrontational gaze, Brenda Schmahmann[21] (2004:100) notes that the artist often "underplays signs of her femaleness" in an attempt to avoid a colonialist objectification of her as the exotic or as an object of "voyeuristic scrutiny".

Figure 6: Berni Searle, *Looking Back* (Detail) (1999), from the *Colour Me* series. Colour photographs, glass, silicon, spices. 12 photographs, 420 x 500 mm each. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: (Bester 2003:17).

Braidotti (2002:3) notes that a project focused on alternative figurations expresses creativity by representing the kind of "nomadic subjects we have already become as well as the social locations we inhabit". For Searle, the simultaneous occupation of multiple (and often ambiguous) positions of race and gender validate such a process, which "attempts to recombine the prepositional contents and forms of thinking so as to attune them both to nomadic complexities" (Braidotti 2002:3).

For Searle, the body functions as a "point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological" (Braidotti 1994:15). Therefore,

[21] Brenda Schmahmann is a professor at the arts faculty, Rhodes University.

by inserting her own body and experience into her works, Searle enters the process of construction of her own identity not from an essentialised position as the corporeality forces subjective specificity according to lived experience with multiple discourses and physical positions. The artist frames fixed notions about gender and the female body with her camera lens, and, most importantly and encloses the viewers' location by means of her direct "oppositional" gaze. Searle's direct confrontation of the audience speaks of a sense of power and control and challenges the individual viewer to reconsider his or her own positioning within this debate.

Searle's insistent affirmation of her control over her body and her self translates not only to the concept of power, but is also linked to the notion of precision. Whether one looks at the perfectly sculpted images Searle presents, or the well thought-out conceptual frameworks within which these representations exist, attention to detail seems to be critical to her work. This meticulous approach, as well as the inclusion of scales, measuring tapes and exposure numbers alongside Searle's representations, directs the discussion towards yet another form of framing, namely measuring.

2.2.3 Measuring as a form of framing the subject

Searle's application of and overt meta-references to measuring as a method of framing criticises an apartheid ideology, in which it was accepted that people could be classified based on race and ethnicity. In such a controlled and controlling framework, signs of ambiguity and "contamination" required careful management and therefore people of diverse heritage were coupled together and labelled "coloured". Schmahmann (2004:70) refers to this as "a fear of the marginal" and suggests that Searle attempts to deliberately dislocate the tag "coloured" to reveal "its slippages and anomalies".

In *Traces* (Figure 3), the inclusion of scales in the installation makes a direct reference to the practice of measuring. Measuring could be interpreted as the physical evaluation of the colour of one's skin for the purposes of categorisation and as the act of computing the validity and worth of the subject based on such a classification and representation within the apartheid system. The act of measuring seems akin to many colonial practices employed to determine various differentiating factors between individuals.

In the digitally printed images where Searle's body is absent, the spices or flour removed from her body form a larger measure in the corresponding scale than in the prints where Searle's body is present. Regardless of the amount of spice or flour weighing down the scale, the dial remains in the same position. It is here that the play of absence and presence becomes apparent as the artist seems to assess these polarised positions (absence versus presence) and their validity. Bester (2003:23) points out that the inherent immutability of such a measuring system lies in the tension between "being neither black nor white and either black or white". Bester (2003:23) adds that it is this tension that questions the established "desirability of whiteness"[22] which often came at the expense of innocent lives and spaces of, in this case, "coloured" people in South Africa. Searle, herself of mixed race, then does not seem to accept the burden of the weight required of her for being represented as either "black" or "white".

In the absence of Searle's measuring up to be classified, this tension is posited as an abject space where Searle's identity is then located. The legacy of contested identities that exist in a vacuum between the binaries of "black" and "white" remains an integral part of many contemporary forms of expression of and resistance to identity classifications based on skin colour (Bester 2003:23). Traditional hegemonic practices and parochial views of identity construction seem inadequate to represent an

[22] The desire for whiteness was offset by the allure of blackness in political resistance to apartheid (Bester 2003:23).

identity of such an interstitial nature, and therefore demand an alternative form of identity construction.

Figure 7: Berni Searle, *Not quite white (Returning the gaze)* (2000) from the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000). Billboard image shown at the One City Festival in Cape Town, 2000. Source: Bester (2003:21).

In *Not quite white* (Figure 7) the artist's body is covered in pea-flour that is slightly off-white in colour, as opposed to ordinary cake flour. The body is represented in a horizontal position, reminiscent of a body ready for forensic examination. Two old measuring tapes frame her body, horizontally, from top and to toe. *Not quite white* (Figure 7), with its blatant references made to quantification and measuring continues to frame Searle's conception of the self. Here it is not only the worn-out measuring tapes that literally frame the artist's body, but also the positioning of Searle's pea-flour coated body, which appears to anticipate forensic investigation.

The title implies the oppositional categories of white and black, and reiterates the earlier interpretation of Searle's hybrid identity operating between two binary oppositions. Again, as Searle frames and undermines

practices of categorisation, such a state of "in-between" pre-empts the need for alternative views of figuration and subjectivity.

Reinforcing her critique of the practice of assessment, the digital print as a medium to convey the concept of measuring is associated with the supposedly exact, scientific characteristics of computers. Apart from the sense that Searle exerts control and power over her imagery, the digital world offers Searle an alternative reality where she can mould and alter her image at will, introducing a fluidity beyond the scientific gaze. Since Searle does not seem to measure up to be counted within traditional classification systems, this alternative space might be her only other option. The inherent play between reality and fantasy requires a closer look at Searle's depiction of the cycle of life and death in an attempt to frame space and time.

2.2.4 The cycle of life and death framing the space and time continuum

The threat of inadequacy imposed by the racial classification of Searle is conveyed in part by her choice of spices as a means of expression. Smith (2002a:2) agrees that there is a sense of finality, as she indicates that the powder covering Searle's body seems to suffocate and bury her. The most obvious connotation of spice would be food, as a substance that is meant to sustain life, but in *Looking back* (1999) it covers her entire body and mouth, which subverts the careful measuring of spice usually found in cooking[23] (Bester 2003:15). This excessive and suffocating use of spices also renders the subject immobile and inarticulate, arousing notions of death.

[23] The subversion does not merely apply to the carefully measured use of spices in cooking, but also the gendered view invoked of the domestic space.

Figure 8: Berni Searle, *Looking back* (Detail) (1999) from the *Colour me* series. Colour photographs, glass, silicon, spices. 12 photographs, 420 x 500 mm each. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:11).

In *Traces* (Figure 3) Searle's body, covered with spices is present in three of the digital prints in the installation. In the remaining prints the viewer is only confronted with the spices, carefully arranged to trace the outline of the artist's body, once present. This subtle play of images takes the polarities of absence and presence to a point of implosion, where the viewer is confronted with the final implication of life and death. Then, in death, in the absence of the body, Bester (2003:16) writes, "all that is left is the fragrant aroma of spice".

It is clear that by framing the subject and the body by means of spices, Searle maps some points of contention pertaining to the production of identity in South Africa. Searle sets up a multiple reading of the subject, with regard to his or her race, class, gender and location, which subverts the project of essentialising identity by means of assigning a number of possible fixed categories. Searle attempts to initiate a multiple reading of identity as a process whereby the self is read as a tangible being.

In much the same way that Searle traced discourse of identity in spices, the artist has continued to frame herself and her identity by using a more permanent vehicle. The use of henna and ink to stain her body frames Searle's search of self with a sense of urgency and substance. The next section explores the conceptual implications embedded in these acts of staining as Searle presented her audience with a much more potent visual narrative than before.

2.3 Staining as a framing tool

At first glance, the *Discoloured* series appears to be an intensification of the artist's process of framing. Her discolouration of her skin ultimately reshapes and restructures identity formation in terms of race and gender, in an attempt to emphasise the need for a multi-layered process contextualised within its own unique network of knowledge and experience.

The process of staining by definition promises not merely a temporary state of dislocation, but enforces a more permanent altering of one's identity. Although the alternative figurations of identity presented here are unfixed and intangible, embodied figurations become stained by the histories and lived experiences through which identity pass.
Discoloured is a series of works that involved staining the body rather than covering it with spices, in an attempt to engage with differences and the process of layering across internal and external surfaces in a more explicit manner. Part of this series, *Lifeline* (Figure 10) is an installation that consists of several prints making up the composite whole. These digitally transferred prints, printed on tracing paper, showcase the palm of Searle's hand as discoloured with henna powder.

Figure 9: Berni Searle, *A darker shade of light* (1999) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Installation view at the Granary, Cape Town, 1999. Digital prints on backlit watercolour paper, dimensions varied. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Coombes (2004:149).

Continuing with staining her body, Searle produced a series which she called *A darker shade of light* (Figures 9, 10 & 11) in 1999. This series consists of images of Searle's stained body parts, presented as large-scale digitally reproduced transparencies mounted in light boxes. Polaroid images of various body parts were submerged in hot water to loosen the image, which was transferred onto paper (Smith [sa]:3-4). Searle attached the scanned and printed translucent images to light boxes, which reminds the viewer of x-ray plates put up for medical inspection. In *Conversing with pane 1* (2000) (Figures 14 and 15) and *Conversing with pane 2* (2000) (Figure 13) Searle pressed her stained body parts against a sheet of glass exaggerating the changed and changing colour of her skin even more.

By utilising the effects of staining as a mode of framing, other aspects of Searle's identity come into play. Here the process is not merely external and temporary, as the colour becomes more than skin deep. Searle investigates the "discolouration" caused by history and heritage, the stain

left on a person's identity as a result of the colour of one's skin. There is also an inherent reference to violence[24] by an implied bruising of the skin.

2.3.1 The stain of history and heritage

Searle's personal, complex family history highlights the fallacy of an easy essentialism. It spans a network of colonial encounters and migrants from Africa, Asia and Europe. As Searle (in Jacobsen 2003:14) points out, the apartheid context has made such histories very difficult to map effectively. Schmahmann (2004:70) stresses that the category of "coloured" is an "uneasy label". This sense of complexity is demonstrated by Searle's own account of her heritage:

> It is difficult to trace my heritage but as far as I know I am not a descendent of slaves. There is also an assumption that all Coloured people have a Khoisan heritage. On my mother's side, my paternal history goes back to Mauritius and Saudi Arabia, and on my father's side, to England and Germany. But this only constitutes the origins of my great-grandfathers. I have not been able to find out much more about my great-grandmothers who could possibly have been descendents of slaves or have had indigenous blood. But actually, right now, I don't know this for a fact (in Bester 2003:23).

Deleuze and Guattari (1988:272) conceive the process of establishing concrete material and semiotic connections among subjects in terms of a multiplicity of impersonal forces. The body then becomes a complex interplay of forces, a surface of intensities: it is the difference between these forces that marks different lines of becoming in a web of rhizomatic[25] connections. Thus, the space of becoming is a space of

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[24] Smith ([sa]:4) notes that this sense of trauma could be interpreted as colour-based differences within the coloured community of the Western Cape, "where the lightness of one's skin may once have guaranteed the perverse 'privilege' of 'whiteness'". She adds that Searle's darkening of her skin disrupts the notions of "light/good and dark/bad".

[25] Deleuze and Guattari (1988:272) coined the rhizome as a theory of multiplicity that makes non-hierarchical interpretations possible. This concept is discussed at length in the first chapter of *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (1988).

infinity and symbiosis between adjacent particles. The intense network of relations between these binaries appears to stain one's sense of self.

Searle's cultural history and traditional constructs stain and colour her identity, which results in an individual process of negotiation and becoming, focusing on the interstitial space which seems to be the only adequate representation for instances pertaining to gender, race and class. The act of appropriation changes not merely the metaphorical representation of subjects, but the very structure of subjectivity, social relations and their symbolic representation that is in upheaval (Braidotti 2002:14).

As Smith ([sa]:3) notes, "bodies with spices can brush them off… body parts stained with black henna are penetrated by a cultural marker of 'otherness'", and so the method of staining sets up a new binary within Searle's conceptual grounding, namely that of permanence and impermanence.

Figure 10: Berni Searle, *Lifeline* (1999) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Digital prints on watercolour paper, 24 prints, 500 x 420 mm each. Source: Conradi (2003:5).

Cultural paradigms literally get under the skin and alter our conception of identity altogether, in a way that cannot be ignored or disregarded, as we witness in *Lifeline* (Figure 10). The block-like presentation of this work frames and isolates aspects of heritage and history as they pertain to Searle's identity. The subsequent juxtapositioning of these heterogeneous blocks foregrounds a destabilising force within the concept of the self, as it consists not of one, but of a multiplicity of facets simultaneously.

Entitled, *Lifeline* (Figure 10), the image of an open palm explore the implications of destiny versus choice implicit in the theory of the so-called lifeline as a predictor of our lives, as used in palm reading. In addition to this, the title suggests that the work contains imbedded complexities of cultural heritage and social practices, and embraces the construction of identity. The intense network of lines unique to Searle's palm underscores the experiences and differences. This work furthermore illustrates subjectivity as a complex network of integrated aspects, in a continuous process of becoming, as life moulds and shapes and even sometimes bruises our identities. It is this awkward relationship between heritage, race and gender that the *Discoloured* series aims to investigate.

2.3.2 Discolouring the appellation "coloured"

The semiotic play inherent in the title of the *Discoloured* series introduces aspects of "coloured" identity, as located between the paradoxes of black and white categorisation. As mentioned earlier, identity of mixed heritage does not quite fit the polarised system of classification put in place by an apartheid regime (Bester 2003:26). The title also plays on both the act of colouring (where Searle used Egyptian henna to stain various body parts to varied degrees of blackness) and a removal of the concept of colour.

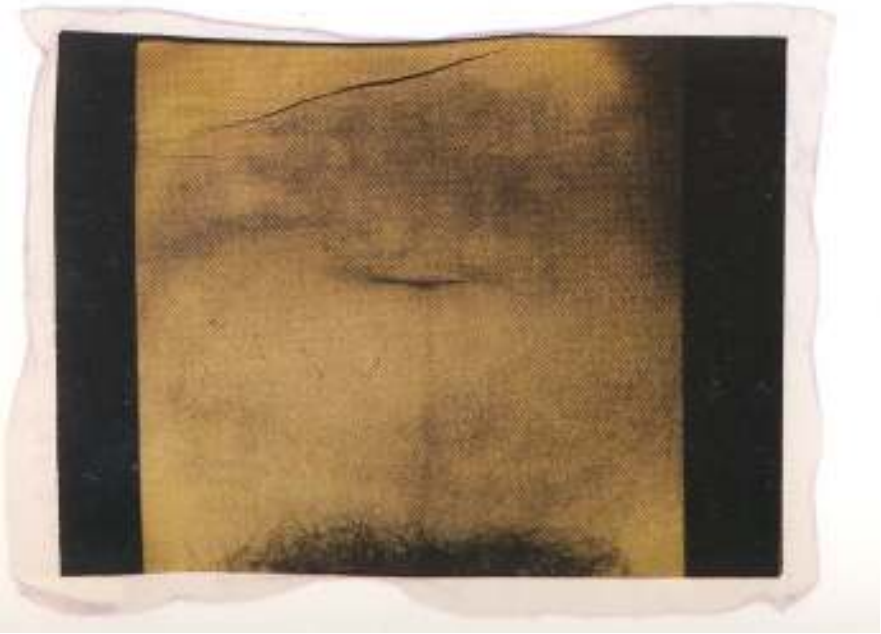

Figure 11: Berni Searle, *A darker shade of light* (Detail) (1999) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Digital prints on backlit paper, dimensions varied. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit.
Source: Bester (2003:26).

At a more implicit level, Searle's use of henna can also be traced back to her link with the East (albeit tenuous), where henna is used to decorate the body and communicate various meanings in several cultural and religious practices and events. In Searle's work henna does not embellish the skin, but instead becomes representative of unspoken violence implicit in essentialised readings of the body, including racial and gendered readings.

By staining her skin, Searle engages in a critique of the complex relationship between dark and light, black and white, where "worth has been traditionally measured by the lightness of one's skin" (Bedford 1999:11). As mentioned earlier, tracing one's origins is difficult for a person of mixed race in a South Africa in which "whiteness" signified social status, while "slave" or "indigenous antecedents" signified the lack thereof. Searle (as quoted in Coombes 2003:24) notes that her own endeavours in this regard have been "hampered by the reluctance of relatives to talk about where they come from, especially those who were

re-classified white". She observes further that "amongst coloured people, tracing this heritage is avoided because of the negative stereotypes surrounding indigenous people and slaves that were brought to the Cape". A further complication is the lack of official documentation, such as birth certificates, that forms an essential part of this process of framing her identity.

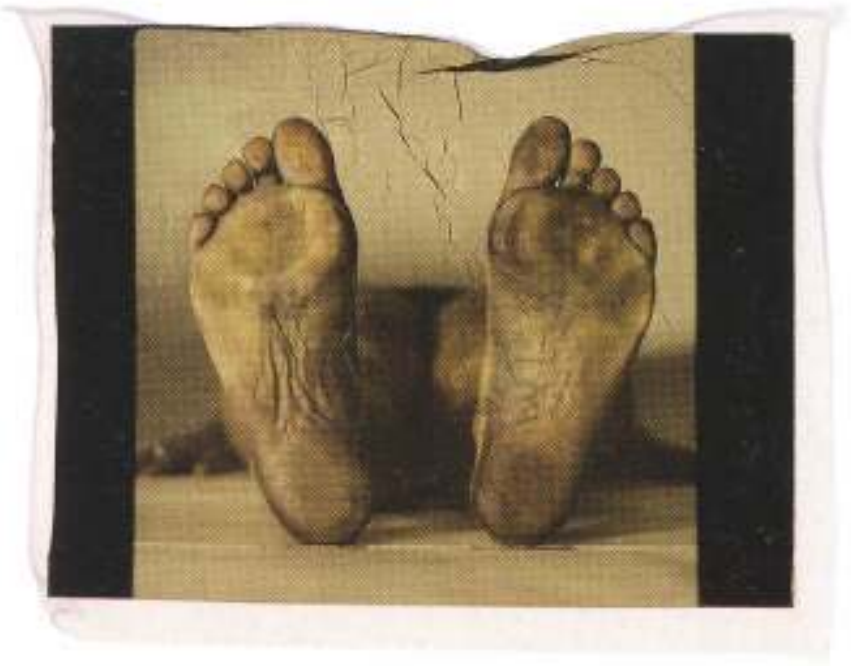

Figure 12: Berni Searle, *A darker shade of light* (Detail) (1999) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Digital prints on backlit watercolour paper, dimensions varied. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit.
Source: Bester (2003:26).

Searle's deliberate act of darkening her skin denies the perceived desirability of whiteness and sets her identity up as the opposite, as desiring blackness. Searle employs this act of discolouration not only as an act of rebellion, but uses it to complicate the already complex reading of her being a person of mixed race further. This act of staining frames the notion that it is impossible to assign one view of identity to successfully communicate an individual or a group.

2.3.3 Marking the bruised body

A feminist reading of Searle's work proposes that Searle's selection of intimate and often hidden body parts plays an important part in subverting gendered expectations about the body. In *A darker shade of light* (Figures 9, 10 and 11) the title suggests a reading of the body as bound by colour, yet, on closer inspection, the naming of the various body parts coloured by Searle seems to "compound the voyeurism of the viewer's experience" (Coombes 2001:11).

Reminiscent of a medical examination, the images invoke a strong sense of introspection that urges Searle's viewers to review their own subject positions. Annie Coombes[26] (2001:11) points out that the inky blue markings left by the henna outline the way the body has been marked by age, but also discolours the skin in a way resembling bruising. The photographic prints, imaging individual body parts with their bruise-like stains, are named *palms of her hands*, *small of her back*, *nape of her neck* and *under the soles of her feet*. These framed details entice the viewer while simultaneously challenging the "naturalised relations between sex, violence and death" (Coombes 2001:11) as denoted by the bruised appearance of the various parts, playing on current social issues such as sexual abuse and violence against women.

Conversing with pane 1 (Figures 14 and 15) and *Conversing with pane 2* (Figure 13) continue the act of staining and examination. These works are presented as separate triptych sequences comprising details of hands and feet pressing against glass. The glass panes press against the artist's body[27], distorting the already bruised and fragmented parts even further

[26] Annie Coombes teaches Art History and Cultural Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London, where she is Director of Graduate Studies in the School of History of Art Film and Visual Media. She is also on the Editorial Collectives of the *Feminist Review* and *The Oxford Art Journal* and on the Editorial Board of *Third Text*.

[27] Smith ([sa]:4) notes that "the distortion of her form against the flat panes of glass as represented in the image, seems to want to burst from the confines of her enclosure" and reinforces Searle's comments regarding the inherent failures of a system, such as apartheid, working on the premise of colour categorisation, and her subsequent disregard thereof.

(Smith [sa]:3-4). The title puns on the homophones pane/pain, stressing the violence inherent in acts of oppression. The occasional reflection of Searle's body in the glass provides a multi-layered view of identity and also urges the viewer to engage critically with his or her own subject position, as Searle does (Smith [sa]:4).

Figure 13: Berni Searle, *Conversing with pane 2* (Detail) (2000) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Pigmented ink digital print, 913 x 3 000 mm. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:29).

By isolating, detaching and dislocating various aspects pertaining to the practice of fixed classifications, Searle manages to frame the embedded issues relating to the marginalised subject successfully. By employing similar techniques to those employed by the apartheid regime, Searle relocates the focus and control of her body within herself. This act of reclaiming the body and the self renders systems of classification and control insufficient and shows how such systems fail when they assign singular identities to individuals and groups.

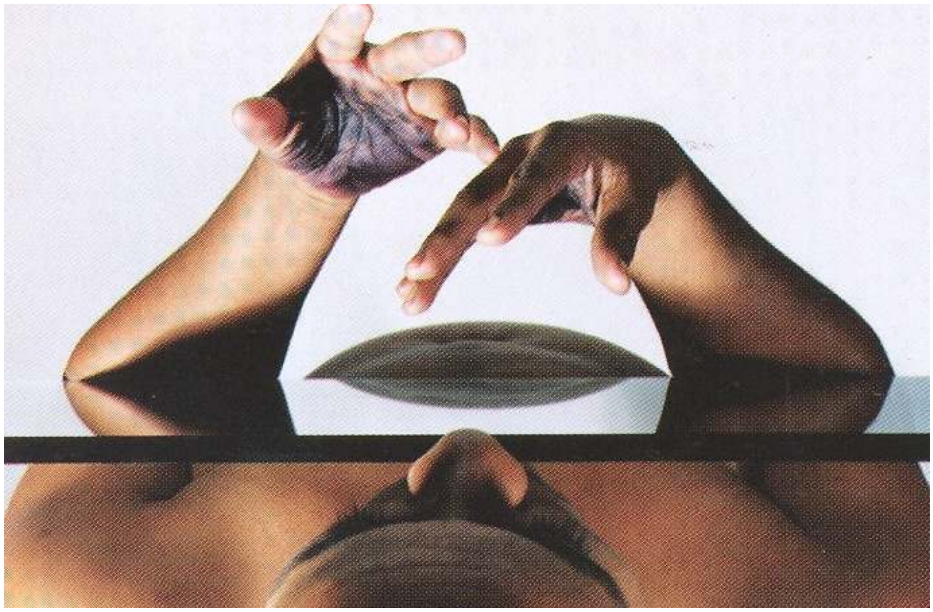

Figure 14: Berni Searle, *Conversing with pane 1* (Detail) (2000) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Pigmented ink digital print, 913 x 3 000 mm. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:28).

By setting up various instances and possibilities of the process whereby the self is inscribed, Searle engages in a post-colonial debate, which focuses on those identities that have been pushed to the periphery. Searle frames not merely the various discourses and fallacies enlightening her identity, she also frames her own body, which she sets up as a source and object of inquiry and study.

In the next chapter the simultaneous occupation of various instances and binary oppositions foreground Searle's plea for a multiple reading of identity. This quest is investigated via the constant erasure and insertion of the self in a post-colonial discourse and its various debates, as framed in this Chapter Two. The discussion of framing, has therefore laid the foundations for the next chapter, where the location of the identity of the subject is investigated.

Figure 15: Berni Searle, *Conversing with Pane 1* (Detail) (2000) from the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000). Pigmented ink digital print, 913 x 3 000 mm. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: (Bester 2003:28).

Much as in Deleuze's notion of a film, Searle sets up a multiplicity of instances and points by means of framing, in an attempt to locate herself within post-colonial debates. It is the second cinematic element, namely the shot or plan, that regulates these various fragments to produce a multiple and fluid sense of self, as discussed in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE
WEAVING A COLLAGE OF MULTIPLICITY BY ERASING AND INSERTING THE BODY

Searle's strategies of framing and staining the subject of the self establish a multiplicity of readings of the issues at stake in revising the South African consciousness. Her employment of spices, as a framing medium has illuminated a number of methods of control pertaining to previous colonial practices. The stains left by such attempts render a marked picture of the body and by implication, of identity. Stained bodies, such as Searle's, show how the imprints of the past cannot simply be wiped off one's skin, but instead become part of the intrinsic nature of the self, as they discolour and mark the skin. By highlighting the various perspectives at play, the artist presents a disorienting juxtapositioning of the aspects inscribing (her) identity.

A re-examination of modernist concepts and processes catapulted society into a postmodern paradigm, with the focus relocated to the periphery. In such a focus, a coherent view of identity requires a multiplication of its subjects to ensure a non-exclusionary view of the self. Postmodern paradigms, characterised by uncertainty, are fuelled by constant mutations which attempt to overcome inherent dichotomies such as those Searle illustrates in the *Colour me* and *Discoloured* series. Frederic Jameson (1992:10) regards the defining feature of postmodernism to be a dislocation of spatio-temporal continuities. This sense of dislocation requires a re-definition of the human environments and of people as an integral part of the tangible social structure it attempts to uphold.

The rapid succession of change and the multiplicity of contemporary subjects do not allow for practices and experiences to be interpreted as whole structures, but instead leaves one with a partial, dislocated,

schizophrenic[28] experience, as Deleuze and Guattari (1984:25) commented. It is with such a multiplicity of instances and positions that Searle presents her audience. Searle's presence sets up a binary of absence and presence as she inserts and erases herself continuously to generate a coherent sense of becoming.

Searle's juxtapositioning of binary constructs and the multiplicity of the instances and variants that she uses shape the focus of this chapter. Searle's simultaneous occupation of oppositional categories makes a multiplicity of positions available to the artist from which she can launch into the production of identity. Her insistent application of the technique of affixing disparate aspects pertaining to her identity to her reconstruction of the self is reminiscent of the process of collage[29]. It is therefore necessary to begin this chapter with a brief discussion of the process and conceptual implications of the process of collage and of its link to Deleuze's second cinematic element, namely the shot, as described by Deleuze.

Given the exploitation of the digital print and digital processes in Searle's artistic production, I extend the notion of collage to include hypertext[30] to demonstrate Searle's method of construction and the possibility of alternative figurations of the self that this contemporary phenomenon presents. *Patchwork girl* (1995) is a hypertext novel by the artist, Shelley Jackson that not only serves to illustrate the process of a collage-like

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[28] Deleuze and Guattari often refer to the experience of being poised between two opposing binaries as a state of schizophrenia. It is mainly communication and technology that are responsible for dislocated and fragmented experiences that are similar to the experience of schizophrenia as a psychological diagnosis. These philosophers take schizophrenia as a model of "desiring- production", and the notion of a "desiring machine" is set against a traditional psychoanalytic view of desire presupposing an ego-subject and constituted by a lack of something.

[29] The term collage was originally a French word, describing the sticking together of disparate elements to make up a composition. This technique became most famous during the Cubist movement in art and was used by artists such as Pablo Picasso and George Braque.

[30] A term was first used by Ted Nelson in 1965, who defined it as "non-sequential writing", intending that readers could assimilate texts by means of the process of branching. The term is interpreted as a multilayered text consisting of various index points to particular references to make the reader's experience more efficient. The World Wide Web is possibly the best example of hypertext, where every page is linked, ultimately, to every other page (Bullock & Trombley 2000:409).

construction of identity in cyberspace, but also presents an alternative view of subjectivity suited to Searle's constructed image of herself. Searle's identity as reassembled from disparate aspects appropriated from discourses of race and gender is investigated in terms of juxtaposition, assemblage, appropriation and the diffusion of borders as they pertain to aspects of collage, the shot and hypertext.

3.1 The multiplicity of collage as a process of identity

When one looks at Searle's conceptual grounding for most of her works, it seems as though the artist is literally taking apart various discourses surrounding the politics of identity construction, as well as the various aspects at play within her own conception of the self. It is as if Searle "tears off" aspects from the discourse and subject positions as they pertain to her identity and then reassembles these "pieces" in a new formation, each time adding more and more information. It is therefore possible to equate the process of assembling collage to the project undertaken by Searle, and to link it to what Deleuze (1986:23) describes as the shot in cinema.

Collage can be defined as an "abstract form of art in which photographs, pieces of paper, newspaper cuttings, string, etc., are placed in juxtaposition and glued to the pictorial surface" (Landow 1999:156). In the nineteenth century, *papiers collés* were created from papers cut out and put together to form decorative compositions. Picasso's *Still life with chair caning* (1912) extended this technique by adding fragments of objects he had found to his canvases. As an alternative to painting the caning pattern directly onto his canvas, he glued a real piece of caning to his two-dimensional surface (Atkins 1990:59). The significance of this work lies in the fact that in this act Picasso confused forever the division between that which is real and that which is merely an illusion of reality. Collage then relies strongly on a juxtapositioning of dissimilar objects to create a

cohesive two-dimensional image. This assemblage presupposes the notion of the appropriation of various images, materials and texts, which in turn blurs the distinction between reality and illusion. It is particularly this diffusion of boundaries that informs the work of Searle as she attempts to negotiate her identity through binary oppositions and parochial views.

Collage permitted Cubist painters to explore representation and signification by contrasting traditional art materials (paint and brush) to the "contents of the wastepaper basket" (Janson in Landow 1999:157). The application of the latter led to their being seen as "'outsiders' in the world of art" which suggests two contrary effects: First, these items were altered and combined, then painted upon to incorporate them into the design and add representational meaning. However, they do not lose their original identity as scraps of material, "outsiders" in the world of art. Thus their function is twofold: the images both represent (are part of an image) and present (are themselves) (Janson in Landow 1999:157). The same could be said of Searle's appropriation of an assortment of subject positions, as these positions – although they are altered so that they can be attached to Searle's reconstruction of herself – remain intact. It is these oppositional forces that inscribe Searle's identity and subsequently blur the distinctions between reality and illusion and various discourses and constructs.

Similarly, as Deleuze (1986:23) explains in *Cinema 1: the movement-image* it is within the shot or plan of the film that the various parts selected are put together in much the same fashion as a collage. For the purposes of Searle's conceptual foundation as well as her choice of media, it is necessary to explain what Deleuze had in mind with the shot as the concept pertains to film theory.

3.1.1 The use of collage and the shot in film theory

The function of the shot is to regulate "the bodies, parts, aspects, dimensions, distances, and the respective positions of the bodies that comprise a set in the image" (Deleuze 1986:23). Jean Epstein (in

Deleuze 1986:23) compares film in this regard to a Cubist painting by Ferdinand Léger, in which "all the surfaces divide, truncate, decompose, break apart, as one would imagine them in the thousand-faceted eye of an insect". Likewise, each of the fragmented frames represents its own perception of the world, often with no common denominator co-ordinating the relations and proximities between the various perspectives.

The film is then made up of multiple plans or shots, each representing its own perspective. When the notion of time is fragmented, one could view each individual shot as a slice of movement, dynamic in itself and in constant variation to the other shots, much like the scraps of materials appropriated in a collage.

As opposed to a static image or photograph, the moving image found in a film appears to be seamless. This uninterrupted process of "moulding" all the different parts together to create a set is referred to as modulation[31] (Deleuze 1986:24). Each plan is a kind of modulator which not only puts together all the variable movements within the shot, but also registers them in variation through film techniques such as framing, camera movement and montage. The plan or shot as a mobile cut is defined by Deleuze (1986:24) as a "temporal perspective or modulation". The "temporal perspectives" or "modulations" are "glued" together like the multiple facets of a Cubist collage, each mirroring a particular division of the whole that expresses the whole in its individual way.

Deleuze (1986:20) adds that the plan or shot is a temporal perspective and that as such it "acts like a consciousness". The cinematic consciousness is not the spectator or the protagonist, but a camera, which can take on human or non-human functions or qualities, but remains autonomous. Deleuze (1986:20) claims that it is this autonomy that

[31] Deleuze takes the notion of modulation from Gilbert Simondon, who in *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* contrasts fixed moulds, such as one finds in brick-making and modulators, as the control grid in a simple vacuum tube, known as a triode. Variations in the voltage of the control grid electrode regulate the flow of electrons through the triode. The control grid "shapes" the flow of electrons in a continuously varying manner (Bogue 2003:206).

makes the extraction of movement from bodies, and the presentation of movement-in-itself in the plan possible.

The film as a format provides a tangible space where different perspectives occupy multiple positions. What distinguishes these shots greatly from frames is their inherent sense of movement. Movement within the shot has a dual purpose: firstly, movement translates the various parts or frames to form a sequence or a set and, secondly, it expresses the character of the whole. It is within this concept of time and movement that the shot fulfils its true calling.

However, for the purposes of this study, the concept of the shot or plan is employed to investigate the multiplicity of instances, perspectives and images in Searle's work, and the inherent sense of movement located in the shot, as it pertains to the process of becoming.

3.1.2 Hypertext as a contemporary practice of collage and the promise of alternative figurations employed by Searle

The collage technique has had a far-reaching influence on numerous art movements. It continues to inscribe contemporary practices. George Landow[32] (1999:151) draws an interesting parallel between collage and the concept of hypertext. Loosely, the term "hypertext" refers to a multiplicity of texts (or images), that are digitally linked by various points of reference in an attempt to enhance the reading experience. Considering the importance that Searle attaches to the use of the digital image in her work, in cohesion with the various framed instances and multiple discourses identified in the previous chapter, the concept of hypertext requires some exploration in relation to her work.

[32] George Landow is a Professor of English and Art History at Brown University. Landow is internationally recognised as a theorist of hypertext application and design and has written and lectured widely on electronic literacy.

Drawing on pioneering theorists[33], Landow (1999:154) describes hypertext as "text composed of lexias (blocks or words, moving or static images, or sounds) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended web". He adds that writing of this nature forces the reader to focus not only on the main text, but also on the various texts that surround it (Landow 1999:154). Landow (1999:163) cites a "hypertext parable of writing and identity" by Shelly Jackson, namely *Patchwork girl*, to explain that hypertext collage generates both the themes and the techniques of this art form.

Jackson's digital collage, comprising both text and imagery, brings to life Frankenstein's monster's female companion by presenting an interactive text whereby the reader is required to "stitch" together "narrative, gender, and identity" (1999:163). This hypertext novel guides the "reader" through various paths of assembly points through which the monster is constructed piece by piece. Landow (1999:164) points out that the "175-year-old protagonist embodies the effects of the written, printed, and digital word" and states that the collage-type hypertext serves as an understanding of gender and identity. In Jackson's text, the female monster that never came to be animated in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* reappears. Here, the power to reconstruct this monster from the various body parts available is in the hands of the reader. Clicking on Jackson's monster is an image of a brain "partitioned by lines into a crazy quilt of women's names and enigmatic phrases" (Hayles 2000b:12). By selecting one or each of these names, the reader is transported to lexias describing the stories of other women from whose parts the monster is assembled. It is these lexias that mediate the nature of the monster's multiple subjectivities, as they rely on an appropriation of various subject positions, the juxtapositioning of these positions within a cohesive view of the self or the body and the assemblage of the various disparate parts for

[33] Ted Nelson was the first to use the term "hypertext" in 1965 and defined it as "non-sequential writing", with the idea that readers could make their own way through texts by the process of branching (Bullock & Trombley 2000:409).

the construction of identity. The monster from *Patchwork girl* says (quoted in Hayles 2000b:20):

> I am a mixed metaphor… . Metaphor, meaning something like 'bearing across', is itself a fine metaphor for my condition. Every part of me is linked with other territories alien to it but equally mine … borrowed parts, annexed territories. I cannot be reduced, my metaphors are not tautologies, yet I am equally present in both poles of a pair, each end of the wire is tethered to one of my limbs. The metaphorical principle is my true skeleton.

It is this monstrous text that Hayles (2000b:25) regards as the balance between "cohesion and fragmentation, presence and absence, lexia and link, sequence and simultaneity, coherent selfhood and multiple subjectivities".

In much the same way that Jackson inscribes and describes the reconstruction of this female monster's body, the hypertext is also seamed and ruptured, consisting of incongruent parts of information (text, image or sound) with extensive links between them. Hayles (2000b:10) points out that, from the hypertext links and metaphoric connections between these parts, a vivid picture emerges that radically alters the view of the subject. She illustrates that "for the female monster, it is mere common sense to say that multiple subjectivities inhabit the same body, for the different creatures from whose parts she is made retain their distinctive personalities, making her an assemblage rather than a unified self".

The process of (re)constructing the identity of the monster in *Patchwork girl* is a suitable analogy for Searle's act of breathing life into her own reconstructed image based on aspects of fixed notions pertaining to race and gender. It is in a similar collage-like fashion that Searle sets up her identity. Searle's framing of various instances of her identity as based on race, gender and history proposes a number of possible locations for the positioning of the self. Searle does not merely present her audience with a number of subject positions, she also makes it clear that, based on her

being a person of mixed race in South Africa, she feels free to appropriate both black and white identities. Searle's linking together of various discourses and identities forces the viewer to acknowledge her identity as containing multiple juxtaposed elements.

3.1.3 An application of collage and the shot in an attempt to position identity

Searle's process of dismantling traditional notions regarding identity and its representation is constituted within the simultaneous and tangible positioning of her own body within racial and gendered debates. Her weaving in and out various discourses of culture, history, race and gender requires an alternative view of figuration – a figuration that, as Braidotti (2002:3) envisions it, "is a living map, a transformative account of the self" to compute for the temporary occupation of subject positions. Searle compiles such a "living map" by bringing together disparate slices of identity ripped from the debate by means of framing and staining.

Following on from the extraction of dissimilar ideas and perspectives, Searle employs artworks such as the video *Snow white* (Figures 16, 18 and 21) as maps of her identity. This nine-minute video is installed using two mural-sized screens to display the image of Searle's naked body kneeling in a bright spotlight, in the midst of darkness.

This simultaneous double projection provides the audience with a multiple view of Searle's performance, filmed from two different vantage points: the one captures Searle's actions from above her body for a more abstract reading of the events, the other was taken from directly in front of Searle and portrays a head-on confrontation with the image. Gradually Searle's body appears from the surrounding darkness as off-white pea flour descends from above and tints the artist's skin colour lighter and lighter. This is followed by a stream of water, poured onto the unflinching body of the artist, which prompts Searle to begin the process of ritualistically kneading the flour and water into dough, associated with making bread.

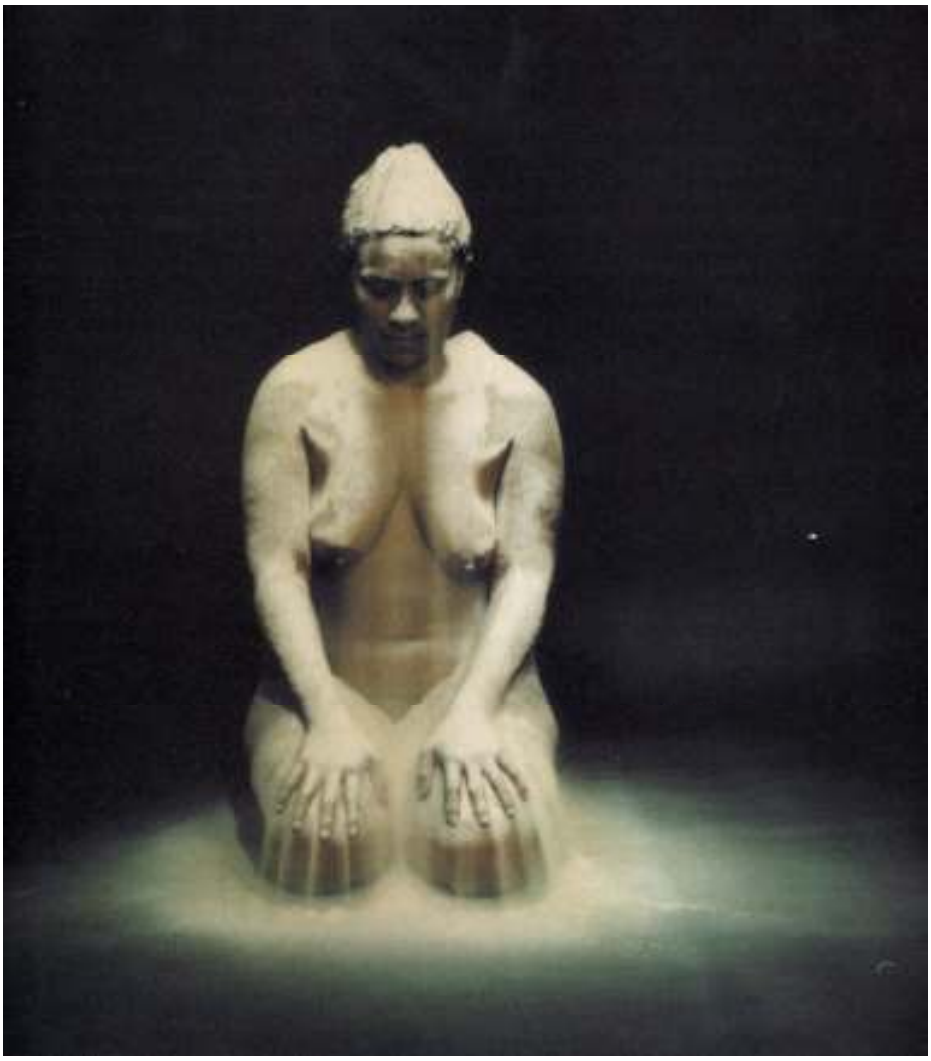

Figure 16: Berni Searle, *Snow white* (Detail) (1999). Video still. Source: Cantz (2004:102).

For Searle, this process of (re)construction involves a conscious tactic of continuous insertion and erasure of her body and herself. This course of action leaves the spectator with a collage-like image of identity representative of both the positive and negative spaces pertaining to the process whereby identity is constructed. It is important to note that Searle places an equal amount of emphasis on both the positive (that which is present) and the negative (that which is absent) as representative of her identity.

Moments of absence and presence compile this carefully constructed map of identity, where both the erasure and the insertion of the body are

equally important in the construction of identity. By means of this continuous weaving of the body, Searle creates a location between these instances. This forms part of the second part of her project of multiplicity, and could be viewed as the "glue" used to (re)construct the multiple shreds of paper present in the collage.

3.1.4 The application of collage and the shot in Searle's choice of media

The use of film as Searle's primary medium to convey ideas of multiplicity and a sense of movement seems particularly suited to juxtaposing the various issues as framed by the artist. Film provides an unbroken sense of continuity between disparate perspectives and positions of the body and the self. Apart from the obvious use of collage and the shot or plan, as described by Deleuze (1986:23), in putting together these various parts to create a sequence, Searle also employs this medium at a more conceptual level.

Snow white and most of Searle's later video productions use two simultaneous projections, with inherent conceptual implications. Searle disrupts the continuity of the image on the screen by presenting the audience with two screens, usually facing each other, which posits the audience between the two projections. The members of the audience are then not only presented with two opposing points of view or perspectives, but are also challenged to assess the construction of their own identities from Searle's location of the liminal.

The choice of film also allows Searle to exercise control over the final image she presents her audience with. This confirms her reclaiming of her body and her identity, previously governed by colonialism. Searle is now empowered to alter the image, to add or to take away from it in order to represent herself in exactly the way she sees fit. This process of editing corresponds to the function Deleuze attributes to the shot, as it puts

together disparate positions, changed and altered to suit Searle's desires, in an attempt to represent a composite view of her identity.

Given the close correlation between the practices of collage, hypertext and the shot, the next section demonstrates Searle's insistence upon juxtaposition, appropriation, assemblage, concatenation and the blurring of limits and edges in her representations. These are considered both as physical acts visible in Searle's works, and as entrenched conceptual references made to colonial and post-colonial discourses.

3.2 Insertion and erasure of the body within current discourses for a multiple reading of identity

By inserting and/or erasing her body within discourses, Searle sets up a multiplicity of debates surrounding representations of her identity. Searle strings aspects of race, gender, tradition and culture together to constitute an image sculpted in much the same way as Shelly Jackson's *Patchwork girl*. It is the utilisation of collage techniques that renders Searle's image as transient and incomplete:

> I'm very aware of not wanting to represent myself in a way that is static. I think that the work itself exists as a result of a creative process, and often my processes attempt to convey something about … a flexibility and a state of flux, which is central to my view of occupying multiple identities that are constantly changing … . When you talk about colour and South Africa as a context, you're generally talking about race. But when I use my body I am a particular, gendered individual, and in that sense there is a multiplicity of identities that's being explored within the work. My work speaks in layers of both fantasy and reality (Searle as quoted by Murinik 2000: 77-8).

The sewing together of dissimilar elements that pertain to the various subject positions Searle occupies creates a kind of dotted line, foregrounding the notion of appearance and disappearance, of presence and absence, and of life and death. It is this interrupted and temporary pattern of Searle's embodiment that sets up her identity as an assemblage rather than as a cohesive, unified structure of sorts.

The first set of binary oppositions juxtaposed by Searle, namely visibility and invisibility, relates mostly to the artist's racial identity as it has been and is being shaped by various subject positions and discourses.

3.2.1 Positioning the body within a cycle of visibility and invisibility

Works such as the *Colour me* series, discussed in the previous chapter, highlight some of the inherent problems with the institution of fixed categories of classification – specifically those with colour as the organising principle. It is here that the aspect of juxtaposition, as it pertains to collage and the shot, becomes important. Searle continues to explore the binaries of race in *Snow white*, but, instead of merely pointing out the limitations of apartheid's system of colour classification, she attempts to occupy all the positions provided for within such a system simultaneously. It is as the flour descends on her body from above that one realises the gradual (dis)colouration of Searle's brown skin from dark to light. Instead of accepting a fixed category, the artist colours her identity with a palette tinted with various gradations of skin-colour found between the static categories of black and white:

> White flour falls from above – quietly, like the first snow – and gradually brings her body into focus, defining it and then enlarging and elaborating on that form. Eventually Searle claims her bodily form back by wiping the flour off, onto the floor… (Van der Watt 2003:27).

Bester (2003:31) notes that by literally changing the colour of her skin, Searle disrupts the audience's "ingrained reactions" to the racialised and gendered subject. Searle's exploration of the incredible weightiness of colour[34] in *Snow white* in particular, "metaphorically takes the audience through a cycle of visibility and erasure, reminiscent of apartheid" (Hassan & Oguibe 2001:75).

In addition to the vitiation of fixed beliefs of identity, Searle's act of "whitening" her skin strongly recalls ritualistic practices found in a number of South African cultures, such as the Zulu and Xhosa, where the body is whitened to mark transition or initiation (Jacobson 2003:3). This transition from black to white could also be interpreted as the change from a white to a mostly black government, which came about with the 1994 elections in South Africa.

Figure 17: Berni Searle, *Snow white* (2001). Installation view at the Liverpool Biennale in 2002. Produced and presented by the Public Art Development Trust, London. Source: Bester (2003:34).

[34] Phrase was used by Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe in the "Authentic/Ex-Centric at the Venice Biennale: African Conceptualism in Global Contexts" to refer to the system of racial classification based on colour employed during the apartheid era in South Africa, as well as Searle's identification as being "coloured", based on her mixed ancestry.

As the flour renders Searle's body "into existence", the visual impact of the interplay between the continuous erasure and the insertion of her body forces the viewer to recognise the possibility of a multiple reading of identity. The flour therefore serves a dual purpose, as it both renders the body into existence and erases it. This strategy of disappearing and reappearing endorses Searle's efforts to establish her identity by "being never completely anywhere" (Van der Watt 2003:27).

Oguibe (in Pollack 2001a:2) refers to Searle's literal erasure of her body in *Snow white* by covering it with pea flour as being "whited-out", and reminds readers of the official policy of "erasing" indigenous populations in some countries with a colonial history, such as Australia and Tasmania. Similarly, the apartheid regime excluded non-white citizens from many social spheres in an attempt to "erase" them from society. The gradual change of Searle's skin colour from dark to light not only disrupts the artist's racial classification of "coloured", but also evokes notions of the desirability of whiteness mentioned earlier. This desire leads to an appropriation of white identity that Searle includes in her reconstruction of identity, but also juxtaposes to the construct of black consciousness.

The representation of various positions of race and ethnicity articulate a multiple view of identity and the discourses of race and racial classification by means of colour. The appropriation of the identity of the coloniser by the colonised destabilises the fixed category of whiteness and overturns monolithic representations of the self to promote the project of multiplicity towards a process of becoming. Searle creates a collage of racial identity by linking various located identities in juxtaposition and blurs the distinction between black and white to shades of brown.

3.2.2 Negotiating the gender divide

As mentioned earlier, the occupation of both positive (visible) and negative (invisible) spaces in the assembly of identity is equally important. In

Searle's work, the notion of the invisible could also be read as a source of power: Liese van der Watt[35] (2003:27) points out that for Searle "invisibility becomes a politics of sorts" in that she remains "unmarked". Peggy Phelan[36] (1993:2) explains that through visible representation "contemporary culture finds a way to name and thus to arrest and fix the image of that other". Phelan continually questions the traditional rule of the visible and visibility politics.

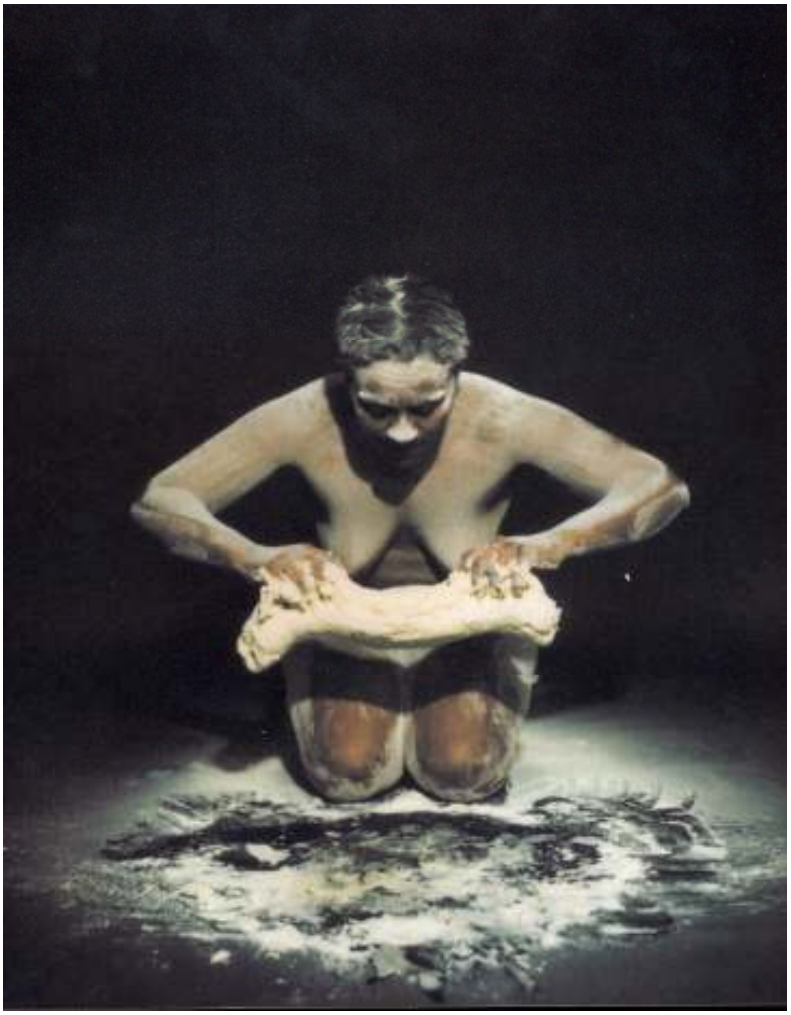

Figure 18: Berni Searle, *Snow white* (Detail) (2001). Video still. Source: Cantz (2004:105).

[35] Liese van der Watt lectures in Art History and Popular Culture at the University of Cape Town. She holds a PhD from SUNY Stony Brook where she was a Fulbright Scholar from 1999 to 2001. Recent articles by her have explored issues of identity and representation in contemporary South African art.

[36] Peggy Phelan is a Professor of Performance Studies at New York University. She has published many books and articles dealing with the politics of performance and performance art.

Van der Watt (2003:27) adds that Searle possibly questions and aims to sabotage this idea of the visible being more powerful than the invisible in works that toy with the notion of the body, both in its presence and its absence.

In *Snow white* (as in many earlier works), Searle employs her own body as a locus of an investigation that operates at a number of levels. It appears that Searle is preparing *roti* – a flat bread usually eaten with curry in Indian cuisine. The piece critiques the tradition of women in South Africa, which references "the action of kneeling and recalls the specifically gendered women's labour of grinding" (Coombes 2001:194). Gurney (2004:1) concurs that gendered expectations are conjured up through Searle's "subservient kneeling posture …, which echoes the actions of generations of women forebears". Pollack (2001a:2) adds that Searle's act of making bread could further be read as an ironic comment on the current process of reconciliation in South Africa, which asks its people to "build a new future out of the ashes of apartheid".

Figure 19: Berni Searle, *Profile* (Detail) (2002). Duraclear Lambda prints on transparent paper, 1 200 x 1 200 mm each. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003:10)

Profile (2002) (Figures 19 and 23) confronts the viewer with an almost genderless representation of Searle's image. These larger-than-life, side-view portraits of Searle are layered images, created by pressing various objects into her cheeks so as to leave an embossed image, such as a British souvenir spoon, the image of a windmill, an Arabic prayer and a Zulu love letter. As these close-up images are devoid of female representation, Searle critiques the ideologies underpinning gender identity as her gender remains unmarked. This counteracts the process whereby the image of the other is named and fixed (Phelan 1993:2).

Schmahmann (2004:45) acknowledges that many female South African artists challenge "stereotypical concepts of physiognomic perfection" through their self-representations. She continues that, in addition to this, Searle's portraits intend to resist a "western tradition of representing female nudes as objects of heterosexual male desire". It is exactly this inherent double appropriation that Searle aims to defy. Although Searle[37] gives no clear indication of an intentional reference, one cannot help but recall the story of Saartjie Baartman[38] and the controversy around her bodily shape. Considering claims made by some Baartman scholars, such as Sander Gilman[39] (1985a:235), who asserted that her "genitalia and buttocks summarised her essence for the nineteenth century observer", it comes as no surprise that Searle attempts to avoid such easy essentialisms[40]. Smith ([sa]:5) points out that it is part of being human to

[37] Smith ([sa]:4) writes that Searle disregards the "often reductive association made between herself and Baartman" and that such an interpretation often reads as a "superficial" one, but, at the same time, it would seem "like an act of historical amnesia" to avoid it completely. For this purpose I look at the inherent associations made between the artist and Baartman.

[38] Saartjie Baartman was born in 1789 into the Griqua tribe of the eastern Cape, a subgroup of the Khoisan people who are thought to be the first aboriginal inhabitants of the southern tip of Africa. An English surgeon, Wiliam Dunlop, took her to Europe under false pretences of fame and fortune. Instead, Baartman became a subject of medical and anthropological research. Due to her unusual anatomy, Baartman was later exhibited before the general public and displayed in a "grotesque parody of the birth of Venus" (Hawthorne 2002:36).

[39] Sander Gilman is a Professor of the Liberal Arts and Sciences and of Medicine at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

[40] Gilman (1985b:17-8) refers to embedded stereotypes which form the underlying focus of Searle's work. He describes stereotypes as a "crude set of mental representations of the world" and it is exactly these representations that Searle is trying to undermine and avoid.

want to install neatly fixed categories of organisation and therefore Searle avoids setting up herself in such a manner. Instead, she presents herself as genderless, and so leaves no room for colonialist imaginations tempted to objectify, name and fix her body.

Despite ethical criticism aimed at Gilman's project, he did manage to focus attention on the violence done to women of "African descent" for which Baartman became an icon during the late twentieth century (Strother 1999:37). It is this inherent sense of violence that Bester (2003: 26) refers to when he remarks that the suggestion made of bruising in *A darker shade of light* (Figures 9, 11 and12) introduces a "sense of trauma" which is further reinforced by Searle's use of close-up shots, somewhat reminiscent of the pictures taken for police forensics. The immobility inherent to these images draws heavily on ethnographic studies and scientific "evidence" as the dark colour of their skins literally stained these colonised bodies.

In some of the installations in the *Colour me* series, such as *Girl* (1998), Searle includes the film's exposure number along the edge of the prints, drawing attention to the role of photography in ethnography to clinically identify and thereby justify perceived differences between individuals, specifically pertaining to the racialised and gendered body (Jacobson 2003:2). Visible differences found between people of colour and whites are usually offset against the norm (which is white), which shifts and maintains such identities to the periphery.

The employment of references to typically gendered practices in cohesion with Searle's steadfast posture and refusal to become the objectified other undermine traditional views regarding gender stereotyping and the notion of the exotic.

3.2.3 A multiple reading of history, culture and tradition

The reference to food finds its origin in the conceptual grounding of Searle's earlier works from the *Colour me* series. The use of spices and other substances not only attempts to destroy racial classification based on colour, but also to conjure up notions of death as a colonial discourse, where fixed notions of subjectivity suffocate a view of identity comprising mixed heritage. In *Snow white* Searle does not merely build on previous assumptions made about her identity, but she extends the already complicated debate, to continue a multiple reading of the body and the subject.

Figure 20: Berni Searle, *Julle moet nou trek (You have to move away)* (1999) from the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000). Clay powder, oil, water, glass, dimensions unknown. Installation at the Klein Karoo Kunstefees, Oudtshoorn. Source: Coombes (2003:16).

Julle moet nou trek (You must move away) (1999) is an installation work originally created for the exhibition *Bloedlyn*, curated by Lien Botha for the 1999 Klein Karoo Kunstefees. Here Searle worked with the poet Anoeschka Von Meck to produce a "kind of treatise on language, visibility and power" (Coombes 2003:14). The installation comprised demarcated white areas carrying the evidence of once present female bodies buried in red clay, reminiscent of much South African soil. Von Meck's poem *Trekslet* employs rich, picturesque Afrikaans to conjure up the image of a licentious woman, portrayed as both powerful and vulnerable, abused and abusive, and finally "insinuating herself between man and land", although she is "damaged and ultimately transformed by those (men) with power over that same land" (Coombes 2003:14).

The work is accompanied by Von Meck's poem in the form of text in solidarity with a recording of a story being told in what sounds like a Khoisan language. Searle employs a double perspective that confronts the audience with two texts simultaneously: "While our eyes read the Afrikaans our ears hear the distinctive sounds of a Khoisan language" (Coombes 2003:14). Searle parallels the disappearance of her body with the nearly lost history of the Khoisan as their language disappears and their people die out, resulting from successive emissions of colonisation and displacement.

Julle moet nou trek speaks of the implicit violence evident in acts such as forceful removals – not only at a physical level, but also in the metaphorical implications of erasing history, tradition and people. Searle negotiates notions of cultural and political exchange which are not always easy to anticipate (Coombes 2003:14). Searle's juxtapositioning of aspects of Khoisan history and Afrikaans culture in cohesion with previous references to the East and Europe presents a multiple identity in the shape of Jackson's hypertext monster as it is assembled from bodies of information or lexias. The simultaneous presentation of these texts (written, visual and auditory) allows the viewer to negotiate his/her way

through the work in no chronological order, much as he/she would interpret a hypertext reading.

Such a reading posits all histories and cultures as dispersed within Searle's identity on an equal spectrum presupposing the absence of hierarchical organisation. Therefore, the appropriation of aspects of cultural and historical identity implies that the juxtaposed parts, although they are (re)-assembled to form part of Searle's assemblage, still maintain their individual subjectivities. It is then this image of Searle's identity in line with what Jackson (as quoted in Hayles 2000b:12) describes as "a hybrid thing and thought… . Its public image, its face is a collage of stories, borrowed images, superstitions, fantasies…".

As one visually constructs the image presented by Searle, comprising disparate parts to make up the whole, the intricate play between reality and imagination requires some investigation. The exploration of this juxtaposed relationship in the pages to follow reveals a number of aspects inscribing Searle's identity in an attempt to promote the project of alternative figurations.

3.2.4 Weaving in and out of reality and fantasy

Continuing this sense of weaving, Searle locates the insertion and erasure of herself in a space between reality and fantasy. *Snow white* (Figures 16, 17, 18 and 21) presents the audience with a multiple view of Searle's performance as it is filmed and projected from two different positions. The inherent confrontation Searle achieves with the use of this double-angled view evokes the notion of a multitude of perspectives and stances on issues of both race and gender and perhaps comments on the traditional dualistic view of the subject (Gurney 2004:1). Furthermore, the split screen can be interpreted as the tangibility of both a reality and an identity that shift and alter constantly. As discussed earlier, the appropriation of various aspects pertaining to Searle's identity diffuses borders.

By fusing parts of history, culture and tradition to Searle's assemblage, the distinction between that which is real and that, which is merely an illusion of reality disperses. Taking into account the arena of the digital, the eradication of the categories of illusion and reality directly translates to the categories of reality and virtual reality, where the possibilities in terms of redrafting the self seem boundless. Given our time and space, it would be an incomplete reading of identity if one chooses to ignore the impact of the age of information on conceptions of identity inscribed by race and gender.

The title, *Snow white*, with its echoes of a fairy tale character, immediately foregrounds aspects of fantasy that promote the possibility of alternative processes of computing the experience of the self and particularly of the other. Digital projections of Searle are read as an illusion of reality, but this concept is disrupted when one realises that the issues Searle is dealing with are very real and urgent indeed. Moreover, the digital projections provide a virtual space where identities can be played out without any constraints.

In the enactment of *Snow white* (Figures 16, 17, 18 and 21), Searle presses and folds the dough. Her hands form a pattern that looks like wings on the ground, resembling the snow angels often made by children (Jacobson 2003:3).

The ritualistic slapping sounds of Searle's hands against the floor simultaneously has a rhythmic effect and creates an "aural jolt, perhaps punishing the viewer for staring at the naked body positioned in front of them" (Jacobson 2003:3). Perhaps the sharp clapping sounds were intended to disrupt the viewer's train of thought and remind him/her that *Snow white* (Figures 16, 17, 18 and 21) is no fairy tale – this is an urgent call to abandon essentialist impressions of identity and marginalised subjects.

By establishing various gradations of location, Searle attempts to morph these disparate positions in order to create an alternative view of identity suitable for a subject comprising an amalgamation of history, tradition and race. As outlined in the beginning of this chapter, this process of morphing, or to use Deleuze's term (1986:28), "moulding" aspects of the self, opens up new possibilities for alternative figurations, whilst maintaining the integrity of each individual part.

Figure 21: Berni Searle, *Snow white* (Detail) (2001). Video stills. Source: Cantz (2004:104).

According to Deleuze, traditional thinking practices are restrictive and do not allow thinking to occur unless there is something with which it can be compared. Pisters (2003:6) explains that such practices make thinking of real difference, "the way things differ from themselves", impossible, because of the inherently hierarchical structures of such systems. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari (1988:6) propose a much more open and multiple way of thinking, namely rhizomatics.

Searle's multiple, open-ended representations of identity, located within the spaces between oppositions and debates as well as appropriated discourses and identities, corresponds closely with the thinking proposed by Deleuze. Braidotti (2002:7) interprets such a sense of self as the "effect of the constant flows or in-between interconnections". Such a transient view of subjectivity requires the "actualisation of multiple differences" to engage in an "open-ended series of complexities" (Braidotti 2002:265). The following section focuses on these alternative locations that are made possible by the rhizomatic thinking practices that Searle proposes within her work. It is here, amidst various discourses and constructs, that Searle places her identity and opens up possibilities of alternative figurations of the South African subject.

3.3 Liminal locations and multiple becomings

As explained earlier, the notion of rhizomatics is theorised by Deleuze and Guattari (1988:6) as having no end and no beginning, but as always in the middle and between things. These interstitial spaces correspond closely to the spaces between the disparate parts of a collage painting. Searle's setting up of various debates rooted in the simultaneous occupation of positions of race, gender, history and culture promote a view of identity that fluctuates between the visible and the invisible, between the past and the present, between the real and the virtual. In such collage-like renderings of identity, it is not merely that distinct images are glued

together to compose a work of art, but in fact also the glue and the spaces in-between play an equally important role.

Braidotti (2002:2) claims that the definition of one's identity finds a resolution in the interstice of binary oppositions, "the spaces that flow and connect in between". These interstitial spaces could furthermore be viewed as the shot or plan mediating the various frames and promoting the project of the whole within a film. These spaces could also be read as material representations of Homi Bhabha's[41] (1994:38) proposed "third" or "in-between space", which he identified as functioning as an ongoing project to articulate culture's hybridity: for Bhabha (1994:38), it is "the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture".

It is this liminal location that shapes the focus of this section in an attempt to extend the works of Searle beyond their obvious dimensions. The analysis commences with a brief discussion of the subject located within discourses and constructs on which it depends and how these identities extend themselves to the location of the interstitial. It is shown, furthermore, how the past is translated into the present within such a hybrid space. Next, the notion of the abject, as defined by Julia Kristeva in the *Power of horror* (1982), is considered as a product of hybridisation. It is then these alternative locations that regulate the various aspects of identity just as the shot regulate various images that comprise a set.

3.3.1 Multiple becomings of imprinting the transformation of the self

In *Profile* (Figures 19 and 23), the culmination of polarised states of absence and presence, invisibility and visibility becomes even more profound. The larger-than-life portraits literally imprint Searle's subjective experiences and influences, rendering a multifaceted, transparent representation of the self. This method of inscribing identity reinforces the

[41] Homi Bhabha teaches at the Sussex University and has been a visiting Professor at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania.

inability of a single object or identity to comprehensively comprise meaning and an adequate representation identity.

Figure 22: Berni Searle, *Profile* (2002). Installation view. Duraclear Lambda prints on transparent paper, 1 200 x 1 200 mm each. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Source: Schmahmann (2004:45).

On an even more profound level, the translucent quality of the prints, suspended in the centre of the gallery space, requires interaction from the audience. The images are visible from both sides of the prints and, because the prints are transparent, the gallery visitors are seen moving in and out of these images as they walk around. Searle's weaving of the threads of erasure and insertion further complicates the multi-layered aspect of this work by establishing a "knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers and levels of the self" (Braidotti 1994:168).

In a Deleuzian/Guattarian rhizomatic reading, Searle's images present themselves with a completely different image of the subject. To fully comprehend the extent of these alternative identities, it is necessary to

consider Deleuze's view of the subject (Pisters 2003:18). As opposed to a psychoanalytic view[42], Deleuze maintains that desire is never related to an object, but is rather a fundamental wish to live and to preserve life by connecting with and relating to those things that increase the power to act. Deleuze's positive approach to the subject is rooted in a Spinozistic view of the self (Pisters 2003:18). The subject presented here is not so much challenged by external forces, but rather by time and memory. Genevieve Lloyd (1996:96-7) explains in her work on Spinoza how this influences the idea of the subject or the self:

The Spinozistic self is both the idea of an actually existing body, moving into a future, and the idea of all that has been retained of that body's past. The mind struggles to make itself a unity – a well-functioning temporal as well as spatial whole. In the context of this view of the self as a constant effort to articulate itself, and to maintain itself in being amidst the wider wholes on which it depends, borders become unstable.

This description demonstrates how the subject changes over time and that it is not a fixed and controlled entity, but a subject whose borders of selfhood are challenged in time and by time. The notion of time is considered in the last chapter, but for the purposes of this discussion, the idea that connecting and relating itself to "wider wholes" maintains the self, suggests that the subject is located in a space between borders and margins. It is here that identity challenges fixed ideals and proposes an alternative view of the self in a constant process of becoming.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988:383) describes a process, such as that whereby Searle transforms notions of the self as a continuous succession of experiential layers (the images of imprints on an image of her face in *Profile* (Figures 19 and 23), on tracing paper) as thinking not about the polarities offered by traditional stereotypes, but about the space between

[42] According to Freud and Lacan, desire is based on a lack, the absence of an original and imaginary wholeness, which is lost as soon as the subject enters society. The subject then merely desires an object to find its original wholeness, which is always impossible (Pisters 2003:18).

these binary constructs. The images in *Profile* (Figures 19 and 23) communicate the impact of heritage, religion, colonialism and apartheid in a very direct way. In some images, the trace of the previous pressing is still visible and hints at the successive layering of experience and difference (Jacobson 2003:2).

3.3.2 The interstitial space of Homi Bhabha's hybrid image

Whether she uses carefully sifted spices or strategically placed henna or ink stains, the intense play between absence and presence, erasure and insertion forms a bridging mechanism that aims to negotiate the liminal space in-between these various positions Searle occupies.

According to Bhabha (1990:210), this space is put in place by an extensive process of "translation", which displaces meaning and representations, but also imitates the original. Similarly, for Deleuze, the subject is not a substance, but rather a process of negotiation between material and semiotic conditions that affect a person's embodied, situated self. From this perspective, subjectivity names the process that consists in stringing together "different forms of active and reactive interaction with and resistance to these conditions" (Braidotti 2002:75). The subject is thus a process characterised by constant shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, constantly shifting between wilful choice and subconscious drives.

Bhabha (1990:210) maintains that imitation of an original does not necessarily reinforce the "priority of the original", but implies that the original is never complete in itself because of the possibility that it could be "simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum". Since the "original" is always receptive to translation (which denies its essentialising core) cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to themselves which makes them "decentred structures". Bhabha (1990:211) explains that through displacement the possibility of alternative cultural practices opens up. These practices deny

the essentialism of a prior original culture and appear therefore in a "continual process of hybridity". Tracing two original moments of cultural practices does not subjugate the "third space". Instead, hybridity is the "third space" which enables other positions and practices to emerge (Bhabha 1990:211). Bhabha (1990:211) explains:

> This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom …The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of meaning and representation.

Here, hybridity proposes an alternative space where the possibilities of multiple identities and alternative figurations are required and possible. Bhabha (1990:211) explains how hybridity tolerates traces of the "feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation", which reinstates a new, multi-faceted sense of identity, without losing sight of the histories and traditions that inscribed it, or, as Johannesburg artist Tracy Rose explained to Pollack (2001b:129): "You can't let go of it, you carry where you are from…".

3.3.3 The translation of the past to the present

Searle's act of framing experiences and issues relating to her past (history, ancestry and personal experiences) renders an incomplete image of her identity. By means of moulding, described by Deleuze (1986:22) as the process whereby different parts are put together to translate their inherent sense of movement, the artist brings a new identity into existence. Searle does not merely address the fluidity and tangibility of subjectivity, but also the radical insufficiency of identity as a category, implying the need for alternative figurations.

Figure 23: Berni Searle, *Relative* (Detail) (2002). Digital prints on transparent paper, framed with plaques, size unknown. Detail of plaques below. Photo-credit: Pam Warne. Source: Coombes (2003:20)

Searle manages to visualise that which escapes all categories and finds herself located in Bhabha's "third space" in-between clearly defined binaries and dichotomies. Bhabha (1990:314) defines hybridity as the "perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life" and affirms that this instance opens up all forms of cultural meaning to translation, because they resist totalisation.

Van der Watt (2003:28) explains that throughout Searle's exploration of her complex ancestry, her work "seeks not origins but networks, not purity but crossings, not endings but processes". Continuing in this vein, Searle traces her identity back to her family relations as well as the complex histories surrounding these individuals. The representation of histories and identities as fading and sometimes fragmented or even absent translate the multiplicity of differences comprising Searle's identity.

Figure 24: Berni Searle, *Relative* (Detail) (2002). Digital prints on transparent paper, framed with plaques, size unknown. Detail of plaques below. Photo-credit: Pam Warne. Source: Coombes (2003:21).

In *Relative* (Figures 23 and 24) the title at once implies the importance of relativity between various aspects of figuration. The project, which Searle describes as a "work in progress" (in Coombes 2003:19), meditates on the artist's cultural and racial inscriptions on personal identity. Searle portrays her family tree by means of eight cheap plastic frames of equal size with a "printed hessian effect surface" and a gold rim on the inner frame (Coombes 2003:22). The portraits in the frames range from full colour and black and white photographs, to empty frames. Beneath each portrait Searle has placed a brass plaque displaying the name of the individual in bold, followed by a bracketed word or phrase supplying the audience with superficial information relating to the portrait. The portraits are displayed

in two rows, each frame spaced equally, with the texture of the wall behind these frames visible through the transparent photographs.

Coombes (2003:23) explains the absence of some of Searle's family members as those "who have been 'lost'" during Searle's mother's marriage to her Catholic father. Searle was subsequently disowned by her family, and has had little or no contact with those family members. The notion of absence or erasure could also be linked to the earlier forced removals of "coloured" farmers in the Constantia area to a euphemistically named location, Grassy Park, in the Cape Flats (Coombes 2003:22). Seale's maternal grandmother was amongst the dispossessed. Here, as a result of so many family being "lost", identity is represented as incomplete and will therefore remain always in the process of being re-written and redefined. Searle therefore translates the past (an incomplete, open-ended memory) to the present as incomplete, open-ended experiences that inscribe identity and reinstate a hybrid sense of the self, located in the in-between.

Bhabha (1994:7) has situated his endorsement of hybridity under the sign of a double negative, "neither the one, nor the other". It is exactly here that Searle's project comes into play as the artist pleads for the revision of current conceptions based on fixed ideas and ideals of identity. Searle requests a new process that would allow the inclusion of identities located in the periphery. Bhabha (1994:7) pleads for a new art that may emerge from working through contradictions, provided that it "demands an encounter [with] the 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present". Bhabha (1994:7) adds:

> It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living.

It is in the midst of this in-between space that Searle sets up her "new" artistic project, consisting of fragments of the past-present, double-consciousness Bhabha referred to. Bhabha (1994:7) sees the creation of multiple, hybrid identities, forged from memory and experience, but not dependent on them. In *Relative*, Searle has transformed the "old" bits and pieces of photographs to "new" through the process of digitisation. This subversion of the notion of nostalgia (which is usually dependent on the concept of "old"), together with Searle's choice of inexpensive plastic frames recalls notions of kitsch that render issues relating to authenticity opaque.

Salah Hassan[43] and Olu Oguibe[44] (2001:65) explain that authenticity refer to the politics of representation and the "paradigms of discourse that objectify African and other cultures". They add that it plays on "cultural determinism" and the demand for authenticity and the exotic by the West, which "continues to frame the acknowledgement and reception of African contemporaneity". Defacing these portraits once again transgresses the stereotypical figurations set in place by hegemonic practices regarding Africa and opens up new spaces and locations of inquiry. Searle brings such a new kind of identity into existence, not by denying the past, but instead, by incorporating it in the process whereby her hybrid identity is created.

3.3.4 Abject notions in hybrid figurations

Talking about hybrid identities and fragmented subjectivity clearly recalls the Shelly Jackson image presented in the start of this chapter, *Patchwork girl*. Imag(in)ing this girl as stitched together from various body parts and stories, and the obvious link with Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein*,

[43] Salah Hassan is a Sudanese art historian, curator and associate Professor of Africana Studies at Cornell University and is the editor for the *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art*.
[44] Olu Oguibe is a Nigerian artist, curator, art historian and poet. He is a co-editor of the *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art* and assistant Professor of History of the Department of Architecture and Art at the University of Illinois.

one cannot help but envision a monster. It is this sense of monstrosity that the image of the hybrid arouses. Pisters (2003:142) argues that it is the incapability of "the traditional subject to think in terms of the in-between status [that] has evoked a feeling of those monsters' abjection".

Searle's reproduction of her incomplete and insufficient family tree relates to Julia Kristeva's[45] (1982:4) image of the abject, and so the artist defamiliarises the family album she attempts to recreate with the work, *Relative* (Figures 23 and 24). This sense of defamiliarisation corresponds to Kristeva's (1982:2) definition of the abject that "disturbs identity, system, order…it does not respect borders, positions, rules". In an effort to reinstate a comprehensive view of identity Searle then proposes this hybrid mix as a multiple reading of the self in the work.

A work such as *Profile* (Figures 19 and 23) brings to mind the impressions left by various objects on Searle's face. The larger-than-life prints shows clearly how the flesh of Searle's cheeks were shaped and altered, forcefully, by the various objects used to make the imprints. Pisters (2003:47) notes that flesh is "the most obvious sign of the physical body" and that it is the materiality thereof that threatens life. Kristeva (1982:4) presents this concept as an ambiguous one: the abject both threatens and disrupts life (the flesh could relate to "meat" which indicates death) and at the same time makes life possible (the flesh of the living body). It is the multiplicity of traditions and heritages (represented by the imprints on her cheeks) that threatens Searle's identity, as she is unable to locate herself within a fixed category. It is also this sense of multiplicity that provides the scope for alternative figurations of identity with endless possibilities.

Searle's "journeying" of her mixed ancestry, as representative of her identity, does not endeavour to establish either origins or endings. Instead, the artist engages with her identity to uncover networks and

[45] Julia Kristeva is a psychoanalyst and linguist working in the tradition of Feminism.

processes in an attempt to sustain the subject as a dynamic, forever-changing entity. The constant erasure and insertion of her body constitutes a collage-like image of the self. In *Cinema 1: the movement-image*, Deleuze (1986:64-5) concludes that each of us is nothing but an assemblage of images. By extracting relevant aspects from debates on gender, race and ethnicity, Searle raises an alternative image of identity that corresponds closely with what Deleuze had in mind when he described the shot or plan in cinema. This creation presupposes a multiple reading of various instances and positions and therefore sets into motion an entire series of possible locations. It is this series of differences and similarities that Searle morphs together to postulate a new location where alternative figurations of identity are possible.

Locating her identity in a liminal space between binary oppositions and banal categories renders her image free from the rhetoric of race and gender, and from formulaic inscriptions based on gender and race. It is these interjacent spaces that project the discussion in the next chapter, which investigates these alternative locations and how identity operates without constraint within such geographies. The following chapter furthermore develops the concept of movement and applies the notion of montage (the third cinematic element defined by Deleuze (1986:30) to investigate the free-flowing motion of alternative figurations between conventional readings of identity.

CHAPTER FOUR
FLUID IDENTITIES IN NOMADIC LOCATIONS

Searle's works, as discussed in the previous chapters, speak clearly of a search for an unfixed notion of identity and serve as the foundation from which she launches into acts of recording, re-writing and intervening in historical stereotyping. The artist sets up her work within a minefield of post-colonial politics: the construction of a mixed, hybrid, identity (Searle's "coloured" racial classification and mixed ancestry) that operates within ambiguous spaces with the intention of undermining predetermined power-relations. However, it is important to note that the artist does not intend to use her art as a "weapon of the struggle"[46] although interpretations of a political nature are implicit and unavoidable. For Searle, the focus lies in the representation of a process of coming to terms with one's lived experiences and bodily figurations as they inform identity.

The concept of the nomad, with its primary concerns of a temporary and transitory occupation of locations and subject positions which create a constant flow or movement, seems apt as an analogy to account Searle's continuous movement towards a process of becoming. Searle's insistence on continuous erasure and insertion of her body into various contentious debates creates a path of instances – of multiple subject positions. This "path" creates a kind of liminal space found between binary oppositions. These locations originate from the differences inherent to these oppositions, which Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380) define as a nomadic space – a place where identities become blurred and therefore demand new formations. Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380) aim to affirm difference in terms of a multiplicity of possible differences. This in turn leads them to redefine consciousness in terms of a multiplicity of layers of experience that demand continuous change and transformation.

[46] Albie Sachs (1990) used this controversial phrase in a presentation in 1988 to the African National Congress. He warned artists against the "impoverishment of art" that springs from such an application. This paper was published in *Art from South Africa* in 1990, edited by David Elliot.

It is within these interstitial spaces that the artist moves freely and effortlessly in an attempt to represent identity. Works such as *A matter of time* (2003) and *Home and away* (2003) engenders notions of fluidity and multiplicity, as identity seems to be floating freely between univocal discourses. This chapter attempts to define nomadic locations as an alternative space and investigate the nomad's inherent sense of movement and displacement, ensuring a continuous process of becoming.

4.1 The practice of montage and the hybrid image of identity

Loosely, the term, montage, refers to any type of compilation made up of disparate elements, particularly where there is a mechanical quality about the work. In *1227: Treatise on nomodology – the war machine* (1988)[47] Deleuze and Guattari argue that "all of thought is a becoming, a double becoming, rather than the attribute of a Subject and the representation of the Whole" (1988:380). In much the same way, Braidotti (2002:8) describes the compilation of identity from disparate perspectives and locations as a process of becoming which relies strongly on repetition, memory, affinity and the ability to engender and sustain interconnectedness and multiplicity.

Another example of such a nomadic subjectivity is the cyborgian myth of Donna Haraway[48], clearly outlined in *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature* (1991). The cyborgian figure operates as "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" in much the same way as the nomad (Haraway 1991:163). Haraway employs the cyborg[49] as a metaphor or a tool which enables an

[47] In *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (1988).
[48] Donna Haraway is a Professor of Feminist Theory and Technoscience at theEuropean Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland. She has made significant contributions to cyberfeminism and identity.
[49] Haraway (1991:149) defines a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction". The image of

understanding of identities as hybrids of nature and culture. This multiple positioning helps to overcome the dichotomy of parts and the whole, as the Harawayian cyborg is a kind of chimera, composed of different origins, and always incomplete, in a constant state of becoming.

Although Haraway does not philosophise the body (or desire) as such, and looks from a scientific and feminist perspective at the human body in contemporary culture, her ideas and the image of the hybrid cyborg she proposes is close to Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs"[50] in its denial of traditional borders of the subject. Therefore the cyborg operates as a deterritorialising force that breaks down boundaries and flows within interjacent spaces. Working from an inclusive and multi-faceted premise, Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380) developed the notion of the nomad as representative of an alternative view of identity. In much the same way as Deleuze's cinematic motives and narratives that appear in the flows of information, the nomad's montage-like process of becoming is inferior to the experience of time and, consequently, movement.

The term "nomad" or "nomadism" is an anthropological term used to describe the lifestyle in which some human groups follow a "wandering life" (Bullock & Trombley 2000:591). Nomadism is usually restricted to livestock-keeping groups whose movements are directly related to a search for grazing. Okwui Enwezor[51] (1999:382) states that, with regard to people of colour, apartheid schemes demand a repression of the presence of the Other by means of objectification. This marks out the divide that separates the Other's "polluting presence from the stable

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the cyborg corresponds closely to Jackson's *Patchwork girl* discussed in Chapter Three in that the monster is an amalgamation of human and machine.

[50] In *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (1988), Deleuze and Guattari presented the notion of a body that does not want to depend on the functions and places that the organs traditionally have. This is not literally a body with no organs, but instead the concept proposes a body or a subject with many possibilities of change and associations.

[51] Okwui Enwezor is a Nigerian curator, art critic and poet. He was the founding editor of *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art* (1994), curated Documenta 11 and has published many important texts relating to contemporary African art and identity.

environment of whiteness". It is in that location where the Other will always remain a stranger, "a visitor"[52].

This temporary state of being ties in with the notion of the nomad, as an individual who temporarily inhabits a certain location, only to move once the resources of the location have been depleted. Searle's continuous appearance and disappearance, her fluctuating existence between moments of erasure and insertion imply an inherent sense of movement and fluidity that disrupt traditional boundaries like a cyborg does. Movement here negates a permanently transient view of identity, which can only be traced through multiple and simultaneous positions of location and assertion:

> It is precisely this aspect of identity as being incomplete, still in formation or somehow 'not yet' that finally speaks loudest in all these works (Van der Watt 2003:28).

Most importantly, continuous movement suggests that identity as a concept is insufficient and requires subjects to engage in the process of becoming which is always in process. Appropriately, *Relative* – a work in progress – negotiates the "the spaces that flow and connect in between" in an attempt to render a multi-layered and decentred image of figuration. Due to the constant play between erasure and insertion, Searle interrupts what Bhabha (1990:314) refers to as the "fullness of life" and successfully undermines and dislocates hegemonic practices and essentialising stereotypes.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380) the nomad has a "territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.)". Deleuze and Guattari (1988:381) explain that although points establish paths, the points are inferior to the paths as these points are only reached

[52] The strongest form of persecution of the nomad is arguably the incarceration and execution of gypsies in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

in order to be left behind again. What matters is the interstitial space created between the two points which expresses an "autonomy and a direction of its own". Deleuze (1986:58-61) refers to this multitude of points as a plane of immanence:

> This infinite set of images constitutes a kind of plane of immanence. The image exists in itself, on this plane. This in-itself of the image is matter: not something behind the image, but on the contrary the absolute identity of the image and movement. … All consciousness is something, it is indistinguishable from the thing, that if from the image of light.

It is by means of these planes of immanence that "the life of the nomad is the intermezzo" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:380). It is this inherent sense of fluidity and partiality that corresponds closely to the filmic practice of montage as the third element of film outlined by Deleuze in *Cinema 1: The movement-image* (1986).

4.1.1 The process of montage in film as a format for identity construction

In cinema, montage usually refers to the process of editing – the placing of one shot or scene next to another to make a narrative or thematic point[53]. The process of montage characterises the intentions of this chapter, as it aims to combine the various ideas and intentions in the construction of identity as accumulated at this point. The montage of various theories and critique is intended to propose a cohesive theory of hybridised identity based on the notion of the nomad.

[53] The early Soviet film-makers, influenced by DW Griffith's development of *parallel montage* (the simultaneous development of two or more narrative themes), gradually developed complex intellectual theories of montage, starting with the experiments by Kuleshov from 1917 until Eisenstein, elaborating his theory of the montage of attractions (the juxtapositioning of seemingly disparate shots to produce a shock or "attraction"), not only gave montage pride of place in the art of film-making, but raised it into what was to prove a "cumbersome mystique" (Bullock & Trombley 2000:546).

Deleuze (1986:30) explains the process of montage in film as the "composition, the assemblage [*agencement*] of movement-images as constituting an indirect image of time". As explained earlier, the plan or shot is the fundamental unit of movement in each film, varying in its extent according to the number of elements it combines in a multi-faceted multiplicity. In the plan we see movement's dual nature as a translation of parts and the expression of the whole. As an expression of the whole, the plan is a mobile cut of *dureé*, each mobile cut functioning as a temporal perspective, or continuous modulation of time, and a camera consciousness.

The plan as movement-image is the intermediary between the frame and montage, between the closed set of elements demarcated by the frame and the open whole implicit in montage. The three elements are only relatively distinct, since every plan is always framed and the montage is often already "in" the plan.

If the plan or shot is then "the determination of movement that is established in the closed system" (Deleuze 1986:18), montage is "the determination of the Whole" (Deleuze 1986:29). Therefore one could look at the whole as the unifying concept of the film (plot, theme or thesis), montage as the splicing of shots in accordance with that concept, and individual shots as the actual manifestations of the unifying concept, which itself can only be presented in an indirect fashion, not in any one shot, but between the shots and in the organising scheme of all the shots as a totality. Montage then, is the process whereby the movement-images "release the whole from them" and reinstates the notion of time (Deleuze 1986:29).

Deleuze (1986:29) explains that the notion of time is an indirect image as it is translated from the movement-images and their relationships. It is important to realise that montage is not a process that takes place at the end of the filming process, but should be conducted throughout the process of integrating the film as the montage carries the project of the

whole. Therefore, the film's unifying concept is secondary to its form of time. Narrative, motives or discursive discontinuities issue from the matter-flows of the open whole of *dureé*, which can take on a number of configurations[54].

4.1.2 Searle's use of montage as formulated by her choice of media and subject matter

Searle's deliberate choice of film as a format for exploring her hybridised identity speaks clearly of the "third space" theorised by Bhabha (1990:210), as the projection disrupts the viewer's conception of time and space. The projection speaks of Searle's performance, but, although it is filmed in real time, it is removed from the here and now.

As mentioned earlier, film as a medium gives the artist some control over her performances, as she can edit and alter various effects to enhance her performance. In addition to this, Searle can control the environments where these performances take place, adding atmosphere and other details. Searle's theatrical choice of lighting in *A matter of time* not only enhances her already unnerving performance, but also renders a richer interpretation created by the intense play of colour and reflection.

Searle represents these conflicting aspects as part of her hybridity by locating them in a new space which lends itself to alternative figuration. To represent these in-between spaces Searle selects two mediums in which she can dispense herself namely olive oil and water. These mediums pertain to the works, *A Matter of Time* and *Home and Away* respectively. It is then, by positioning herself amidst these in-between spaces, that Searle undertakes the eternal journey of the process of becoming.

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[54] In the montage practices of some earlier filmmakers Deleuze found four tendencies that represent four basic ways of relating movement-images of the whole of *dureé*. Deleuze names these tendencies organic, dialectic, quantitive and intensive. For detailed descriptions of these processes see *Cinema 1: the movement-image* (1986).

4.2 Oil as a medium of transposition

Searle's repeated movements of insertion and erasure of the self render the process of becoming an incomplete and continuous process. For her, the process whereby identity is constructed is an eternal project.

Here it is not merely the issues regarding identity that are in constant flux, but also the context where processes of becoming occur at any time. An identity of this nature possesses the ability to transgress boundaries and dualisms in the process of becoming, to form a political coalescence that counteracts the intersecting dominations and traditional representations of race, gender class and sexuality.

Braidotti (2002:2) explains that we live in "permanent processes of transition" which she illustrates as a nomadic subjectivity. Braidotti's position on the process of becoming, which is never complete and forever changing, is characterised by the subject's multiple positioning of a hybrid identity. Braidotti (2002:3) does not apply the term only as a metaphor for identity, but suggests that nomadism expresses different socio-economic and symbolic locations. The image of the nomad is intended to abolish any form of fixed classification or inscription based on race, gender or class. Braidotti (2002:3) adds that the past does not merely inform identity at a symbolic level as it manifests itself physically (like the impressions left by objects on Searle's cheeks), it also becomes part of the subject's conception of the self:

> A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self – it is no metaphor. Being nomadic, homeless, an exile, a refugee, a Bosnian rape-in-war victim, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant, is no metaphor. Having no passport or having too many of them is neither equivalent nor is it merely metaphorical…These are highly specific geo-political and historical locations – history tattooed on your body (Braidotti 2002:3).

Tattooing her history on her body is not an alien concept to Searle, as symbolic imprints and stained body parts form part of the artist's repertoire. Braidotti (2002:3) would probably agree that the racial exclusion and attempted erasure exercised by the apartheid regime and other hegemonic practices is not merely a metaphor, but in fact a reality with which many South Africans need to come to terms. Therefore, nomadic subjectivity serves not only as a theoretical tool by which to analyse Searle's *oeuvre*, but as a possible practical application to generate a sense of understanding and acceptance amongst the diverse people of South Africa.

Figure 25: Berni Searle, *A matter of time* (Detail) (2003). Video stills. Source: Bester (2003:38).

A matter of time (Figures 25 and 28), a work originally produced for the Berkeley University Art Museum, is a DVD projection of Searle, engaged in a balancing act, questioning and challenging the perception of space. For this project, Searle suspended a glass box in the air eight metres above the ground, filming from below the glass from a stationary position, against a vast black space (Jacobson 2003:3). The glass is covered with olive oil that appears to be sliding down from the ceiling to the floor as Searle projected the DVD vertically onto a narrow freestanding wall.

Bester (2003:37) agrees that by "turning the single projector on its side, Searle creates the impression of an impossible movement against gravity". As Searle emerges at the bottom of the screen, the olive oil slithers over the glass pane and creates shapes around her feet. She seems to attempts to walk up the slippery surface, but falls back repeatedly, breaking the tense silence with a shrieking sound, only to start the process again, each time with the camera zoomed in a little closer (Bester 2003:37). The DVD finally ends where the viewer is almost completely subsumed into the artist's space, focusing on her feet, leaving "her face hovering almost disjointedly above" (Van der Watt 2003:28).

Searle's choice of olive oil as a medium of transposition provides an ideal liminal space where identity can mutate and change at will. The texture of the oil (the smooth, glistening reflections it produces) continues Searle's earlier attempts at subverting the confines of race, classified by means of colour, by encouraging multiplicity and plurality. On the other hand, the fluid quality of the oil is representative of Searle's seamless journey in the interstitial space towards nomadic subjectivity.

4.2.1 Multiple refractions of colour classification

In addition to the smooth, sliding quality of the oil, the intense play of colour and obscured forms and images adds to the impact of this work. Jacobson (2003:3) describes Searle's downward/upward movement as "highly abstracted as her form mutates and refracts in the oil". These obscure, hybridised images of Searle's body overturn all unified conceptions of identity (particularly those based on race) as the almost artificial colour of her body is reflected in the changing shapes created by the olive oil. These colours, enhanced by the theatrical lighting, are furthermore altered to where she is standing, commenting on the various subject positions occupied by an individual and the transitory nature of such locations. It is as if Searle negotiates her way between the extremes of time and space, as would be the case during the process of montage as found in film.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380) describe the function of the nomadic "trajectory" or route as dispersing people in "an open space" which is "indefinite". Here the millions of glistening bubbles reflecting Searle's image enhance the focus of the indeterminate. Similarly, Searle negotiates her way, although it appears to be fixed between two points, into an alternative space, which allows the sliding and flowing of identity, constituting the process of becoming. Therefore, just as Searle slides up and down the glass pane, so does nomadic subjectivity negotiates itself, free of constraint and prescription in an attempt to reinstate an alternative unfixed vision of the self.

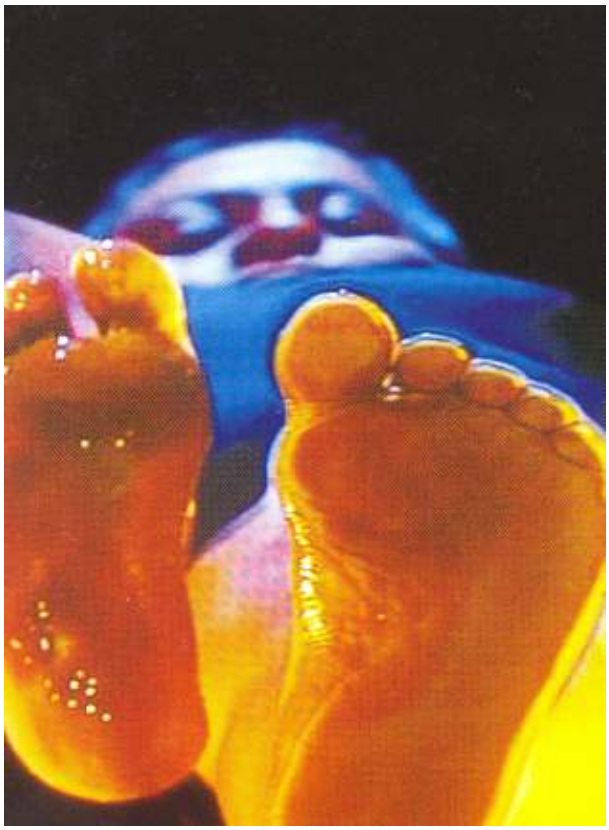

Figure 26: Berni Searle, *A matter of time* (Detail) (2003). Video still. Source: Bester (2003:40).

The moments between Searle's movements leave the projected image black, interrupted by splashes of colour that appear in the small bubbles in the oil, catching the light. These reflections yield subtle variations of

shade and hues. Jacobson (2003:4) compares these "black fields of colour" to the "black" paintings of Ad Reinhardt, where the painting only comes into full focus upon close inspection. Searle's work continually demands closer inspection by her audience, in an attempt to expose essentialist notions based on skin colour. Searle's "black fields of colour" then serve to undo such fixed systems of classification, as they become metaphors for "the inherent failings in assigning one colour or identity to any individual or group" (Jacobson 2003:4).

The use of olive oil as a medium ties in with Searle's subversion of colour-based racial classificatory systems and instead proposes a mutable identity as literalised by the fluid quality of the oil. The title, *A matter of time*, makes a personal reference to her grandmother's describing her as having "olive skin" and could also be linked to Searle's earlier employment of foodstuffs to indicate her mixed ancestry with which she relates to through cooking (Van der Watt 2003:28). Jacobson (2003:4) explains that Searle's grandmother told her as a child that it was merely a matter of time before "she would travel to places where people would appreciate the olive colour of her skin".

This comment suggests that there are places other than South Africa where the colour of one's skin does not matter, not only referencing to countries that have disqualified colonial practices, but perhaps even to Deleuze's nomadic space and Bhabha's third space, where alternative figurations do not accept monolithic views. *A matter of time* ultimately negotiates the barriers of identity whilst, as Bester (2003:40) puts it, hinting that it is only "a matter of time before breaking free of the limitations of identity, or becoming utterly re-inscribed by it".

4.2.2 Sliding through the seamless space of the nomad

Searle's negotiation of her body on the slippery surface of oil resonates with the concept of the Deleuzian nomad as she carefully goes from one point to the next. The oil does not merely suggest the fluidity of identity,

but also uncertainty and an idea of its never being complete and fixed (Bester 2003:27). Searle concurs that her choice of olive oil as a medium yielded a number of unexpected experiences and interpretations:

> There are physical sensations that I encounter[ed] in the process of making the work. For example, nothing could have prepared me for what it feels like to walk on oil. I've made a choice of materials that, when combined with the movement of the body, produces a sensuous experience, if not a daunting one. The material or substance used in *A matter of time* produces a smooth, sliding quality which does things to the way my body engages space – things that I don't necessarily expect (Searle in Bester 2003:37).

Figure 27: Berni Searle, *Resting # 3* (Detail) (2003) from the *A matter of time* series (2003). Digital print on Photo Lustre photographic paper, 990 x 1 200 mm. Photo-credit: Jean Brundrit. Source: Bester (2003: 43).

Identity[55] as a concept is "never fixed, always fluid", as Judith Butler[56] states in *Gender trouble* (1990:5), which implies that identity is always floating between disparate constructs in an attempt to re-evaluate, re-construct and re-formulate itself. It seems, then, that the nomadic subject serves as a "myth or a political fiction", that allows for "thinking through and moving across established categories and levels of experience" (Braidotti 1998:8).

Searle's movement across the glass pane appears to be seamless, as the artist continually flows between points of exit and entry. Nomads find their relation to the earth through a deterritorialisation where "the land ceases to be land, tending to become simply ground (*sol*) or support" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:381). Such nomadic spaces do not rely on hierarchical relations between its parts, but rather on a sense of interconnectedness in a web-like formation, rendering everything equal and resulting in what Deleuze refers to as a "smooth space". Nomads are present wherever a "smooth space" develops that grows in all directions. Since the nomads develop, grow and ultimately inhabit the spaces they move through, Deleuze and Guattari (1988:382) refer to nomads as "vectors of deterritorialisation" who link up different locations and bring them together:

> They add desert to desert, steppe to steppe, by a series of local operations whose orientation and direction endlessly vary. The sand desert has not only oases which are like fixed points, but also rhizomatic vegetation that is temporary and shifts location according to local rains, bringing changes in the direction of the crossings. The same terms are used to describe ice deserts as sand deserts: there is no line separating earth and sky; there is no intermediate distance, no

[55] Identity is a term used to convey the sense that a person has of himself. The subjective experience is drawn from cultural resources in immediate social networks and from society as a whole, which ultimately aids the construction of identity. The process of identity construction is therefore one upon which the contradictions and dispositions of the surrounding socio-cultural environment have a powerful impact (Bullock & Trombley 2000:413).

[56] Judith Butler is a Professor of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, and is well known as a theorist of power, gender, sexuality and identity.

> perspective or contour; visibility is limited; and yet there is an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on haecceities[57], on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking or ice, the tactile qualities of both). It is a tactile space…more than a visual space (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:382).

The nomadic space could then be defined by the "polyvocality" of directions that are localised but not delimited (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:382). The glass pane used in Searle's DVD projection also denies the viewer a clear sense of space, defined by its boundaries and a sense of perspective. The transparency of the glass combined with the distorted views caused by both the reflections of the glass and the oil presents Searle with a smooth space, with no separations, points or instances. Deleuze and Guattari (1988:382) refer to the nomad as a *local absolute* manifests himself/herself locally. Searle locates herself in a multiplicity of positions and locations that directly undermine univocal interpretations of her body and her identity.

A matter of time (Figures 25 and 27) perfectly captures the mutability of identity and the fluidity of the nomadic space. Searle carefully compiles disparate elements ranging from her choice of medium to a documentary style performance to generate a work that "lubricates the staid limitations of identity" (Bester 2003:40). It is here, in the space created between gravity and weightlessness, visibility and invisibility, oil and air, that Searle negotiates the boundaries and limitations of identity. As she slides between various hegemonic practices and beliefs, it is only a matter of time before the sharp edges of colonialism will be removed.

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[57] *Haecceity* is the term Deleuze and Guattari borrow from the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus to indicate a type of non-personal individuation: "A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are *haecceities* in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:261).

4.3 Water as a medium for the process of becoming

Whether it takes the form of the various subject positions occupied by Searle or direct references to the politics of visibility and invisibility, location has become a primary concern in the artist's work. Location does not refer to geographical interpretations only, but also encapsulates impressions of home and family and all that is familiar. Taking into account the history of South Africa, crammed with narratives of forced removals and dislocation, issues surrounding location seem to be unavoidable.

As many traditional points of reference and customs are being recomposed, the project of the nomad pleads for a different way of thinking with regard to processes of transformation. It is a quest for alternative figurations to express the social and symbolic locations we inhabit creatively (Braidotti 2002:3).

For the nomad, the concept of location is extremely relevant. The nomad journeys from one point to another, searching for grazing and food. For the nomad, locations are both temporary and permanent, here and there, home and away.

4.3.1 Displacement and liquefied nomadic spaces

The NMAC Montemedia Arte Contemporaneo Foundation, located in Spain near Gibraltar, with Morocco visible in the distance across a narrow stretch of tepid ocean, served as the location for Searle's project entitled *Home and away.* It was exhibited at the 2003 Grahamstown festival. Early that year Searle was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist award for 2003, and she was attracted to this location due to its rich historical and geopolitical references (Van der Watt 2003:24).

Connecting Africa and Europe, the strait of Gibraltar became a very important location, as it ensured trade not only between Africa and Europe, but also access from the East to the West. Bester (2003:45) notes that many undocumented migrants from Morocco travel in overloaded boats during the night to Spain in the hope of a better life. These journeys often end in tragedy as many of these boats were of inferior quality. Van der Watt (2003:25) comments:

> This locale immediately appealed to Searle for its allusions to contact and exchange, to insertion and dispersal, displacement and diaspora – in short, a contact zone crammed with both poetry and pain (Van der Watt 2003:25).

Figure 28: Berni Searle, *Waiting # 3 & 4* (2003) from the *Home and Away* series (2003). Lithograph on BFK Rives watercolour paper, 660 x 505 mm each. Photo-credit: Gaëtane Hermans. Source: (Bester 2003:29).

Home and away (Figure 29), is the first video Searle produced outside South Africa. This series includes along with a set of lithographs entitled *Waiting #1 to #6* (Figure 28). While it might be devoid of many of the local influences that have become the trait of Searle's work, it engages content that is not alien to local audiences (Bester 2003:45). During this six-minute video projection the audience witnesses the body of Searle, dressed in a long red satin skirt covered with a diaphanous white overlay,

the hem piped with polystyrene to make it float, floating calmly with the ebb and flow of the ocean[58] (Van der Watt 2003:25).

The projection comprises two facing screens, both screening Searle's body floating in the turquoise ocean. These projections aim to place the viewer somewhere interjacent the Moroccan and Spanish coastlines, showing the two coastlines in the background. The footage was recorded with a camera suspended from a crane attached to a boat. Like Searle's rocking body, the boat moves with the ocean and creates its own sense of movement, which ultimately adds to the unsteady shots. At beginning of the projection the viewer has little information as to where this body is located, as the camera crops the top view of Searle's body.

The body appears to be at total ease as it gently rolls of each wave and creates an almost hypnotic rocking motion. Van der Watt (2003:25) points out that the body appears to become a "sculpture of sorts" as its materiality is enlarged and morphed by the "billowing mass of fabric, wet and animated with a life of its own".

Figure 29: Berni Searle, *Home and away* (Detail) (2003). Video still. Source: Van der Watt (2003:24).

[58] There are contrasting allusions to Ophelia (the beloved of Hamlet, in *Hamlet*( ), a play by William Shakespeare), who goes insane and drowns after falling into a stream while she is picking flowers. The well-known Millais painting, *Ophelia* (1851 – 1852) shows her clothed in rich fabrics that float on the water before dragging her down.

The single continuous shot projects views of Searle and the dark, calm water as the body floats in and out of the picture frame. Then, the boat to which the camera is attached jerks away and speeds off, leaving the audience with what is now a panoramic view of the ocean with Searle's drifting body, hinting at the Spanish coastline in the distance.

Now, for the first time, the audience is able to position the floating body in relation to "the comforting presence of land" (Van der Watt 2003:25). Then, as the shot fades, so does Searle's body. The second projection commences with a wide shot showing the sky, then settling on the blue mass of water, framed by the line of the Moroccan coast (Bester 2003:45). The camera then moves away from the coast, returning to the vast ocean, leaving the viewer with a feeling of loss and dislocation. This projection does not feature Searle's body at all.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988:381) distinguish between the "sedentary" or immobile space, enclosed by walls and linked with roads as opposed to the nomadic space, which is "smooth, marked only by 'traits' that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory." This nomadic space could be illustrated by the vast open ocean in which Searle's body is floating aimlessly – it is an endless space devoid of points of reference and borders.

It is this "smooth space" that the nomad occupies, inhabits and holds. This, Deleuze and Guattari (1988:381) claim, is the nomad's "territorial principle". As the nomad then distributes himself/herself in a "smooth space", it is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari (1988:381) do not define the nomad by movement in the full sense of the word:

> Whereas the migrant leaves behind a milieu that has become amorphous or hostile, the nomad is one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances and who

> invents nomadism as a response to this challenge (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:381).

Deleuze and Guattari (1988:381) declare that the nomad does, in fact, move, as this is primary to his/her existence, but the process is "seated", as a nomad travels not on foot, but on a saddle[59]. He continues that the nomad has "infinite patience" and draws a distinction between speed and movement:

> A movement may be very fast, but that does not give it speed; a speed may be very slow, or even immobile, yet it is still speed. Movement is extensive; speed is intensive. Movement designates the relative character of a body considered as 'one', and which goes from point to point; speed, on the contrary, constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex, with the possibility of springing up at any point (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:381).

Nomads are then described as having "absolute movement" or speed, which make it possible for nomads not to have points or paths although "they do by all appearances" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:381).

Similarly, Searle does not employ any points or markers in the space she inhabits – this space is endless and therefore leaves the viewer with a feeling of loss and confusion. In addition to the captivating visual imagery, the English verbs "to love", "to fear" and "to leave" are whispered in cohesion with the rhythmic tide. Van der Watt (2003:25) comments:

> While these happen to be the first three verbs Searle learnt to conjugate in a Spanish lesson, the slow staccato whisper that tries out the different subject positions "I love, you love, s/he loves, we love, you love, I fear…I leave…"

[59] Deleuze and Guattari are thinking of North African nomads such as the Bedouins or Tharegs. This does not apply to the Masai and other nomads. Pasture is also not always the focus of all nomads – groups such as the San follows migratory herds to hunt them, ad do not keep domestic livestock.

> enacts a haunting review of movement and gradual estrangement.

As Searle whispers the words "I fear…", a dark inky substance appears from beneath Searle's dress, which seems to subsume her (Bester 2003:45). Both Bester (2003:55) and Van der Watt (2003:27) allow for the interpretation of the black substance as a reference to a squid's ink, usually released when the squid is faced with danger. Squid's ink is also seen as a delicacy and is used in Spanish cuisine. The black ink continues to disrupt the form and colour of the body, making the viewer aware of the fragility of that coherent form. Van der Watt (2003:27) states that "we are witnessing the foreign within the known". As the boat speeds off, the viewer is left with a small body adrift in the vastness of the ocean, and the foreignness increases, leaving us alienated from that body. Here the audience is confronted with the "away" part of home, which disrupts all notions of comfort (Van der Watt 2003:27). This alienation makes the audience acutely aware that identity is not fixed and secure in its location.

4.3.2 The disoriented concept of the familiar

For Braidotti (2002:8), the process of becoming should comprise neither "reproduction nor imitation", but should instead bridge binary oppositions and constructs through "proximity" and "interconnectedness". In Bhabha's (1990:314) process of "cultural translation", hybridity opens up new locations for the construction of meaning, where the "repetition of the sign is […] both different and differential". Here, cultural difference emerges "in its proximity" based on the interconnectedness between different aspects, based on the difference between these, as well as their referential characteristics. *Home and away* explores proximities and relationships between borders, journeys, displacement and home. Bester (2003:45) notes that this work launches into an inquiry focused on landscape and location. Searle sets up a relationship between the two land masses, but since they are basically indistinguishable, this relationship is disoriented:

> The land masses are the beginning and end of the migrant's journey, something to which they cannot return but also something which seems distant and unobtainable. They represent both home and the spaces away from home. Searle juxtaposes the views of these seamless coastlines with over references to the sea. The water becomes the barrier between the landmasses, so calm and beguiling, so tempting to cross. It is this tension between land and sea that brings an overwhelming sense of foreboding to *Home and away* (Bester 2003:48).

The concept of "home" is a continuous reference used by Searle. Coombes (2003:15) notes that Searle engages with the nature of "home" and its embedded relations to "family" by using photography or video projections to "foreground the gap between evidence and representation in ways which expose the slim distance Freud signalled between *heimlich* (familiar) and that alienated space of unrecoverable distance (*unheimlich*)"[60]. In *Home and away* Searle's referencing of squid's ink as a visual manifestation of fear aptly represents the sense of anxiety provoked by what Freud calls *unheimlich*, as a result of alienation and dislocation. This sense of unfamiliarity and estrangement is also explored in works such as *Relative*, where the absence of certain family portraits, coupled with the fragmentary appearance that the prints present, represents the desire for "home" as an "uncomplicated site of wholeness" (Coombes 2003:15).

Red pool, blue mark, black stain (2000) – a much earlier video piece – produced as part of a larger installation resulting from a residency on Robben Island with six other artists in 1998, initiated a number of aspects explored in *Home and away*. This work involves a projection showing a wide shot of a still pool, bearing the reflections of the surrounding white cliffs. The camera focuses our attention on an indeterminate object as the camera moves in and the unidentified object absorbs all attention. This

[60] Freud's notion of what is *unheimlich* would translate into English literally as "unhomelike" (it is usually translated as "eerie" or "ghostly"). For Freud, the home is associated with the womb. The adjective *unheimlich* therefore suggests estrangement and the human sensation of being a subject in a foreign land (Freud [1919] 2001:245).

object confronts the viewer as it disturbs the calmness of the image represented.

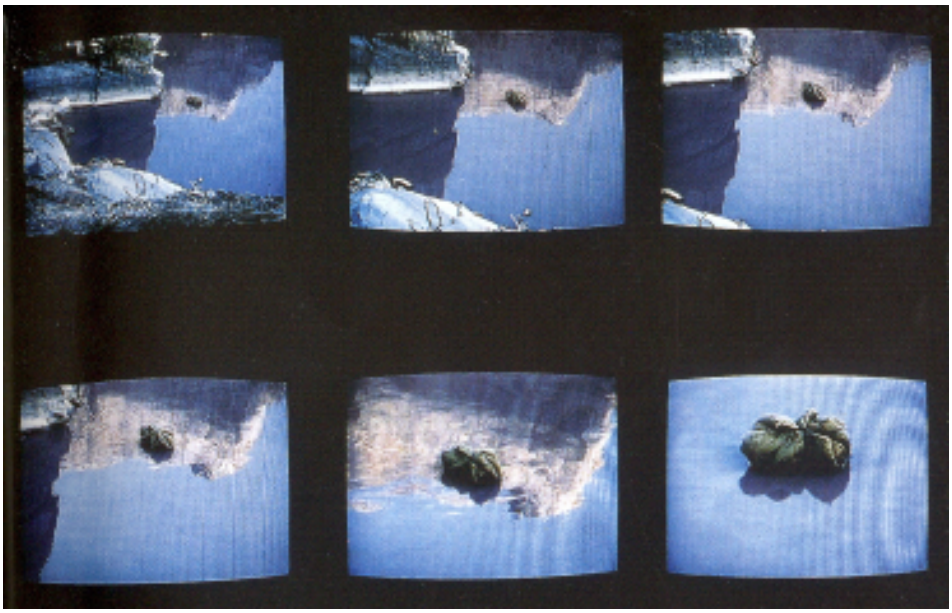

Figure 30: Berni Searle, *Poolshoot* (Detail) (1998). Working stills from video for exhibition *Isintu: Ceremony, identity and community*, Robben Island. Source: Coombes (2003:9).

Finally, the object, described by Coombes (2003:8) as "both sinister and poignant, alien and familiar", occupies the final frame. Soon the viewer realises that this object is in fact a bundle containing unidentified personal belongings. Coombes comments that this is both an "object of desire and an object of loss". Just as Searle's choice of location in *Home and away* (Figure 29) recalled the history of many tragic journeys from Morocco to Spain, this package hints at the hopes and prospects of a journey begun and subsequently abandoned. The unidentified parcel is nothing more than a trace of this attempted crossing, further complicated by the history surrounding Robben Island, where the images for *Poolshoot* (1998) (Figure 30) originated. Coombes (2003:10) concurs that Searle explores the relationships between borders, location, journeys and the notions of "home":

> In many ways it encapsulates the themes and processes which characterise Searle's work; the defamiliarising of otherwise prosaic

> substances and objects, the sense of the uncanny provoked by the tension between absence and presence and a concern with 'location' which spans both the geographic and psychic registers of that concept.

Searle's location between the sea and the land in *Home and away* (Figure 29) is reminiscent of the difficulties experienced in the migrant's journey from what he/she calls home to the unfamiliar. Bester (2003:48) notes that Searle's repetitive murmuring of the verbs "to love…to fear…to leave…" embodies much of the migrant's experience and possible thought process, as he/she finds himself/herself located somewhere between home and away.

In much the same way, the nomad is required to leave his/her location in search for sustenance. The employment of strategic photographic imagery combined with Searle's ideally chosen location negotiates the fluidity of identity. This uninhabited space, linking the coastlines of Spain (Europe) and Morocco (Africa), serves as an ideal space where identity can flow freely with the rhythmic current of the vast ocean. Searle engenders the notion of identity as always being in process, becoming, not yet, floating freely and thereby challenging fixed ideals of identity, both in terms of race and gender.

Drawing on the inherent qualities of oil and water respectively, Searle explains the free flowing aspects of an alternative, liminal space located between traditional debates of gender and race. It is within this space that Searle's constructed sense of self finds resolution and meaning. As outlined in this chapter, given colonialist enterprises such as the forced removal of people from designated white areas and their subsequent relocation to other sites, the concept of location is of primary concern in a re-evaluation of the identities of coloured and black individuals in South Africa.

This chapter has furthermore described a site as a dislocated and disoriented concept, which, for the nomad, is both temporary and permanent. Although the concept of a locale appears transient and forever changing, Schmahmann (2004:31) reminds us that place inscribes our conceptions of identity and ourselves. In the case of the individuals subjected to a relocation of their families and their homes for political reasons, location is often only tied to memories of previous lives connected to previous homes and the places inhabited.

The next chapter focuses on the importance of the recollection of the past – memories of places once occupied and homes once loved – in the process of establishing new, nomadic subjectivities and new possibilities for identity.

CHAPTER FIVE
MEMORY OF TIME FOR THE NOMADIC SUBJECT

John Coleman (2000:158) claims that we all exist within an intuitive world where we are enveloped by the simultaneity of corporeal experience ranging from perceptions of our senses, responses and expressions, to our memories and recollections of these occurrences. For Coleman (2000:158), these experiences are set in the specificity of a particular site or location, which he describes as "a woven container of associations … a fluid mix of the physical, emotional, personal, social, and political". Much like the nomadic understanding described in the previous chapter, these embedded experiences are non-linear and extend both inward and outward, in all directions. It seems then that our identities are made up not only of the various locations and positions we may inhabit, but also our particularly mediated experiences of this world. It is the purpose of this chapter to investigate mediated experiences and the influence of these recollections on the nomadic image of the self.

The preceding chapters focused on three of Deleuze's cinematic elements, namely the frame, the shot or plan and montage, as detailed in *Cinema 1: the movement-image* (1986). In this first volume of the notorious pair of cinema books, Deleuze dealt with images related to movement of the classical cinema, whereas in *Cinema 2: the time-image* (1989), the forms of the direct time-image of modern cinema are investigated. In its simplest form, a memory could be seen a recollection of an event or experience from the past. Deleuze's concepts regarding time and the time-image in film is employed here to elucidate certain ideas and functions of memory as they inscribe a nomadic sense of identity. Since the concept of memory correlates closely with the experience of a film (the recollection of images and experiences in the mind) and film is Searle's primary means of expression, the investigation embarks on an explanation of Deleuze's image of time and its implications for cinema.

5.1 The concept of time in film as an agent for memory

Deleuze's film theory (in much the same way as the theory of nomadic subjectivity) relies primarily on time and space. It is important to note that Deleuze's conception of time and space relies heavily on the theories of the French philosopher Henri Bergson. In *Bergsonism* (1966), Deleuze explains how space and time are merely extremes of the contradiction of a single duration. For Bergson (according to Bogue 2003:43), the universe is an "open vibrational whole, a flow of matter-movement that contracts to form the fixed and discrete entities of the spatial world and dilates to form the temporal dimension of a universal past, surging through the present and into the future". This notion of duration (*dureé*) as the time-space flux of a vibrational whole informs Deleuze's entire conception of cinema (Bogue 2003:48).

The notion of time, as a non-spatial continuum in which events occur in a successive fashion, is inextricably linked to the idea of a film. In the previous chapter, the plane of immanence, a Deleuzian concept, was expressed as the movement that is established between the instances within a system and movement between various systems. This sense of motion between disparate occurrences illustrates the process of becoming that Searle transmitted in *Home and away* (Figure 29): aspects such as race, gender, culture and tradition inscribes identity and allows for multiple becomings. Therefore a montage of various aspects or instances of the becoming of an individual allows one to view identity as a tableau, not only of the countless movements between the assorted instances that comprises a particular idea, scene or film, but also the movements and connections between various films that amount to what Deleuze (1986:59) refers to as metacinema:

> The material universe, the plane of immanence, is the *machine assemblage of movement-images*. Here Bergson is

> startlingly ahead of his time: it is the universe as cinema in itself, a metacinema.

Deleuze (1986:3) argues in *Cinema 1: the movement-image* that the essence of cinema lies in the mobility of the camera and in the emancipation of the viewpoint whereby the camera stops being spatial and becomes temporal. According to Deleuze, following Bergson, it is through the camera that we have come to live in a universe that is metacinematic. In it, all kinds of virtual images (past and future images) are "stored", and actual images (present images) are constantly generated, and both types of image exercise a mutual influence one over another. In this sense, we come to understand our past, present and future through a new "camera consciousness" that has entered our perception (Deleuze 1986:3).

Michael Shapiro (1999:23) argues in *Cinematic political thought: narrating race, nation and gender* that the possibility of experiencing the present critically is made possible not "by the exercise of a faculty of judgement that can integrate the domains controlled by disparate cognitive functions, but by a cinematographic apparatus". It therefore seems necessary to develop a camera consciousness that enables one to "jump between layers of time and the actual and the virtual", to grasp contemporary culture and alternative figurations of identity comprehensively in our attempts to make sense of the past and the future whilst being in the present.

Memory in its functionality then serves as the camera apparatus required to understand nomadic subjectivity, as it is able to transcend the layers of time. It is therefore necessary to consider just how Deleuze views time within film as he explains in *Cinema 2: the time-image*.

5.1.1 The notion of time in film as a format for the inscription of memory

By their very nature, memories are rooted in the past, but they can only be experienced in the present. It is because of this sense of displacement that time informs implicitly these recollections. In Chapter Three the process of filmic montage was explained as a release of the whole from movement-images and the reinstitution of the notion of time. For the purposes of this chapter, memory is explored as a product of time, and therefore requires a brief exploration of the image of time that Deleuze had in mind.

As cited earlier, filmic images are arranged on a plane of immanence where the past, present and future coexist and can be arranged in a variety of ways. Images are there; they do not represent any other-worldliness, but constantly shape the world and its subjects (Deleuze 1986:59). Deleuze (1989:68) elucidates the image in terms of virtual and actual. They are not opposed to each other as both are "real", but only the actual is in the (physical) present. Deleuze (1989:68) puts as follows in *Cinema 2: the time-image*:

> In Bergsonian terms, the real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is a 'coalescence' between the two. There is a formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture.

It is through the continuous play between virtual and actual images that the images exchange their specific qualities, much like the many facets of a diamond or a crystal. The crystal image reveals a direct time-image, as opposed to time derived from movement, which is an indirect image of

time. Deleuze (1989:98) adds that this reveals time's "differentiation into two flows, that of presents which pass and that of pasts which are preserved" and corresponds closely to our experience of memory.

In Deleuze's cinema books, he distinguishes two ways of expressing time: indirectly as a representation through the movement-image, and directly as a presentation through the time-image. Chronos and Aion is another way to define these two concepts of time. The movement-image constitutes time in the course of time: "A successive present in an extrinsic relation of before and after, so that the past is a former present, and the future a present to come" (Deleuze 1986:271). Chronos is therefore an expression of time as interlocking presents of the past, present and future. Alternatively, in Aion, the present is constantly invaded and obscured by other layers of time, the past or the future. This is a time of becoming, which has a profound connection with thought, rather than with empiric reality, and it is this sense of time that informs both Searle's project and the concept of memory.

Uitsug (2000) (Figure 32) and *Vapour* (2004) (Figure 31), two video productions created by Searle, forms the basis of critical inquiry in this chapter and it is therefore necessary to consider the implications of film as a format chosen by Searle to set up her project of alternative figurations of the self. The artist exploits the properties of film in various ways in an attempt to represent memories and how they shape our processes of becoming.

5.1.2 Video clips as memory in Searle's search for alternative identities

Inspired by a photo published in a local newspaper, Searle designed a display entitled *Vapour*, comprising a single DVD projection (with the same title) and a number of colour photographs. The news picture depicted an array of 107 pots of food cooking on open fires for an Eid feeding project, which Searle re-enacted for the DVD production

(Stevenson 2004:2). *Vapour* depicts an almost completely dark Athlone landscape (this was the original location for the Eid Feeding project) with a "regiment" of 50 large copper pots, gleaning on open fires, with only a few black silhouettes suggesting a human presence. But, instead of food, Searle's pots are filled with water, which soon turns into steam.

Figure 31: Berni Searle, *Half light* (2004) from the *Vapour* series (2004). Lambda print on paper, size unknown. Source: Stevenson (2004:i-ii).

Due to the process of editing and the discontinuous method of recording involved in film-making practices, Searle's video works present what Deleuze (1989:265) would refer to as chaotic spatial relations. as the filmic images appear (and disappear) without beginning or end, and follow in no particular direction. Although Searle's video productions are performative in nature, the digital processes allow the artist more control. She presents the viewer with an image that often *seems* logical, embracing dislocated and fragmented images.

Chrissie Illes (2000:252) explains that "the moving image always transforms the space it occupies" and creates a three-dimensional virtual space – "a kind of communal dream space, or metaphor of expanded consciousness" where alternative forms of exploration (so important for the project of the nomad) are available (Iles 2000:253). Viola (1995:13) agrees that large picture projection does not merely function as a set of inflated pictures, but, more importantly, as sequences of images,

envisaged on a large scale, that are ultimately aimed at the body of the viewer.

In addition to Searle's creation of a communal space by means of her video projections and installations and the large format of these images, the artist draws the audience into her world by means of the low definition video image flickering on the screen. Illes (2000:257) explains that these images – especially when enlarged – are mere fractions of an image (much like the dots used in a pointillist painting) and spectators are therefore required to complete the picture for themselves, and this produces an intense involvement with the screen. It is this intimate link between the human consciousness and technological apparatus that establishes a link between film media and the human capacity for remembrance and recollection.

Memories, in much the same way as contemporary digital images and video productions, map time into a single linear path or a "memory lane" (Viola 1995:93) and therefore represent partial representations of the past, rearranged in the present to relay a chaotic spatio-temporal experience. I would like to compare the experience of a film to that of memory as both are dispersed in time and are therefore often located between reality and fantasy as a reel of disparate images, strung together to recreate a moment in time. The visualisation of a dream or a memory is often associated with "the mind's eye" (just like the "surrogate eye" of the camera) that allows for a detached, third point of view (Viola 1995:93).

The distinction between real and virtual time is blurred in these videos, which make memories not merely recollections of past experience, but rather reconstructions – informed by the past, but shaped by the future, as Schmahmann (2004:22) explains:

> Memories are partial. They do not actually reconstruct events that happened, but rather construct them. What we think we remember

> about our pasts is shaped by our present needs and present concerns.

Vapour (Figure 31) testifies to Searle's performative re-enactments of the traditional feeding project and functions as memory pieces that record the past (the original Eid event, as depicted in the newspaper image) for the purposes of being recalled in the present (Searle's performative re-enactment of the event and the video projection seen at the exhibition). As in *Vapour*, the video piece serves as a recreation of an already past experience and could therefore be seen as a memory of a memory. Most of Searle's works are deeply inscribed with personal recollections and experiences and the audience then shares her constructed memories, as the works operate like home videos or animated family albums.

Pisters (2003:42) points out that identities can "become very unstable" upon the experience of someone else's memory and she promotes the Deleuzian wish to make multiple connections with the self and other bodies. The video camera also questions the viewers' presence in a particular space (virtual or actual) and promotes a sense of ambiguity and fragmentation (Illes 2000:258). The employment of video and film in this manner promotes the project of nomadism, and that of Searle, as it forces subjects (who cannot necessarily confirm their identities by identifying with the subject on screen) to negotiate between the images presented and themselves (Pisters 2003:43).

Although film productions often leave the audience with a sense of dislocation, it is important to note that video is a present time medium. The space and time experienced in film and memory, are continuous, unbroken and congruent to real time, shared by the audience and their individual and collective real environments (Illes 2000:258). In *Vapour* (Figure 31), Searle sets up a spatial and temporal juxtaposition.

A Deleuzian reading of Searle's video pieces suggests that a constant process of crystallisation is taking place between the actual images

(Searle's performance in front of the camera) and the virtual images (the video projection of the recorded performance) and explains this process as follows:

> It is clearly necessary for it to pass on for the new present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on. The past does not follow the present that it is no longer, it coexists with the present it was. The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror (Deleuze 1989:79).

Deleuze (1989:79) reveals that every moment of our lives contains the two aspects: Perception, which is actual and virtual, and recollection. In line with Bergson, Deleuze (1989:79) points out that there is a "recollection of the present"[61] which runs parallel to the present itself, much like the performance of an actor. Existence duplicates itself along with a virtual existence, a mirror image.

Both the virtual and actual images are contained in a plane of immanence so as to contain not merely filmic images, but all collective images relating to the presented idea: video pieces present aspects of Searle's memory which are transferred to the audience and therefore become part of our personal recollections and collective experience, but also enter into a world already decorated with pre-experiences. Works such as *Vapour* and *Uitsug*, as well as most of Searle's other video productions, appear hybridised and operate like nomadic experiences.

Although I have noted distinct similarities between the experience of cinema and that of memory for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note that there are also many differences. Viola (1995:221) warns that

[61] Bergson (in Deleuze 1989:79) explains that *paramnesia* (the illusion of *déjà-vu* or already having been there) makes the notion of recollection of the present obvious.

"artificial images do not portray reality accurately" and explain that these images merely attempt to represent the image and not the object – "visual perception and not to the experiential field".

> They [cinematic images] do not, for example, show all sides of an object that we know from our experience to exist. The camera only sees three faces of a cube, for example, yet our hands can tell us that the other three simultaneously exist (Viola 1995:221).

I do not intend to suggest that real, lived experience can be replaced with mediated video images, but merely to exploit the attributes of film in my investigation of memory in Searle's video pieces.

5.2 The concept of memory in the work of Searle

Recollections of the past become most evident through sensory experience and are often rooted in particular experiences and thoughts suspended in time. For Searle it is the combination of the aromatic smells (and by association, the taste) of the spices used in *Traces*, the foreign sounds audible in *Bloedlyn*, the sense of touch in *Profile* and the visual simulation in *Home and away* and *A matter of time*, that inform the process whereby these works recall aspects of the past – both for Searle and her audience. Viola (1995:151) believes in the simultaneity of all the senses, as they are "interwoven into one system that includes sensory data, neural processing, memory, imagination, and all the mental events of the moment". All these work together to comprise experience (Viola 1995:152).

Although Küchler and Melion (1991:3) agree that memory is "a process precipitated and shaped by the relaying of visual information", the possibility of a nomadic subject resides in the incorporation of all the senses in the sculpting of memories. This section attempts to demonstrate the ways in which Searle constructs memory within her work,

how these edifices are engendered visually and how memory contributes to the process of becoming.

It is memory then that informs the concept of time for Searle, as she explores nomadic figurations. Memory is explored within this section in terms of the incomplete renderings of time that nostalgia offers as subject of contemplation. Memory is shown to inform the processes of displacement and relocation as they rewrite the concept of the self through a process operating at both a personal and a collective level of South African history. Finally, through the continuous play of virtuality and actuality, memory submits itself as an active agent in the performance of one's identity. It is through the Deleuzian conceptions of time and film that the process of memory not only becomes clear, but also informs the nomadic subjectivity Searle is in search of through her video productions.

5.2.1 The partiality of nostalgia

Human existence – from the day of our birth to the last hour of death – seems to be continuous. Viola (1995:98) claims that existence is, in fact, an "unbroken thread" and that "we have been living the same moment ever since we were conceived". Yet, it is because of memory that we experience "a life of discrete parts". Memory then functions as a kind of a filter, installed to regulate the amount of information and experiences we process (Viola 1995:98). Similarly, video productions and films are edited to present the audience with merely a slice of reality and not all of reality, in an attempt to carve out an image.

Sturken (2000:290) points out that memory is the "fabric through which time is rendered continuous, through which the present and past are interwoven and interdependent" and this links up with the image of the nomad set out in the previous chapter as a collage comprising various parts and aspects. This section investigates the concept of time and memory as curtailed experiences that comprise identity.

Figure 32: Berni Searle, *Uitsug* (Detail) (2002). Five video stills, 1 min 38 secs looped video on mini DVD. Commissioned for the Tropen Museum. Source: (Coombes 2003a:16).

Uitsug (Figure 32), a short film loop (1 min 38 secs) commissioned for the Tropen Museum in 2002, illustrates the partiality and insufficiency of memory and how this in turn illuminates the subject. This video reel is only visible to an audience looking through a small viewfinder. It starts with an image of a megaphone and the sound of the call to prayer from a mosque, invisible to the spectator. Next, the camera pans across a terrain of bland housing and playing fields and the scene becomes "bleached of colour", using a soft-focus close-up of a house (Coombes 2003a:16). This is followed by Muslim women "moving their palms in unison over their faces in prayer" and then shifts to another vague image – this time of a child. Following this is the final scene – the coastline of Simonstown, which is accompanied by the soothing sounds of the wind and the ocean, but then interrupted by the scream of a siren as the scene dissolves into darkness upon repetition of the call to prayer (Coombes 2003a:16).

Arnold, commenting on one of her own works, *Portrait of a woman from Africa* (2003) explains to Schmahmann (2004:36) how different forms that appear in a work of art become "a time-map of different lives live[d] in different spaces and ages". She adds that her recollection of her memories is not sequential and "thrusts the remembered against the observed as collisions of past and present". Similarly, the images and impressions presented in *Uitsug* (Figure 32) and most of Searle's works[62] render themselves as fragments of memories and particles of recollections of past experiences. These are the splinters of past experiences – in their

[62] It is the use of spices in *Traces* and *Looking back* that recalls aspects of Searle's lineage, and the olive oil in *A matter of time* that traces back to something her grandmother told her relating to the olive colour of her skin. A sense of remembrance is also invoked by Searle's partially assembled family tree consisting of portraits (and the lack thereof) in *Relative*. Her memories of growing up in South Africa are endorsed by the objects used to imprint her cheeks in *Profile*.

attempt to shape memories – that render such recollections incomplete and partial.

The use of the viewfinder in this work is very significant. The term suggests that the viewer in fact has to attempt to find a view – something worthy of admiration. Coombes (2003a:16) claims that the effect is similar to "the experience of gazing in pleasurable anticipation through the lenses of panoramic binoculars found on seaside piers". But instead of a picturesque sight, what is found upon looking through the viewfinder is everything but a view. Apart from the obvious connotations of voyeurism and the gaze associated with looking through the telescope, the viewfinder also serves as a means of ensuring a more intimate experience for the spectator and allowing Searle's memories and recollections to be transferred intimately between herself and the spectator.

Coombes (2003a:18) suggests that there is the possibility of "recognition or resignation" as you are not always guaranteed of finding what you are looking for. In the same fashion as the camera detaches and isolates aspects of a view, the panoramic binoculars foreground the process of recollection where aspects of experience are disjointed and removed from the realm of the past to serve the present in the required fashion, therefore rendering memory incomplete.

Coupling the disruption of the past present continuum is the transitory nature of memory, decorated by emotion. Memory, as an individuated process, does not recall history in its entirety, but merely partially as individuals remember particular experiences. Siopis (in Schmahmann 2004:26-7) explains:

> The idiosyncratic mechanisms of selective memory – how certain details emerge and others are suppressed – tell a story. And, in such story-telling, distinctions between fictions and fact seem to obey a truth sometimes different from, or in a sense below, the 'official record' so to speak. Affect, ambivalence,

> fleeting experience, unanchored but dense images are all part of this story.

It is because of the renditions of subjectivity and the methods of story-telling that Searle capitalises on the implications of the viewfinder: by focusing the spectator's attention on the projected image, the viewer experiences Searle's recollections in a highly individuated way – literally how *she* recalls the past and not necessarily history or fact.

Another important aspect of memories is that they are designed to fade away as time passes. In *Vapour*, the title, as a noun, suggests the transient, ethereal and momentary and "as an adjective, 'vaporous' it refers to something that is imaginary" (Searle in Stevenson 2004:4). Furthermore, it suggests "an alchemic process of the combination of water and heat creating another substance, steam" (Stevenson 2004:4) that evaporates and disappears over time just like the once clear images of the past. Coombes (2003a:16) describes the images of Ocean View and the little girl in *Uitsug* "as if viewed through Vaseline and the distance of nostalgia". These unclear, but visually seductive similes draw the audience closer to the images and so the divide between their memories and Searle's memories becomes blurred and indistinguishable. Identities then become fluid and interchangeable and become part of *her* identity, *her* experiences and *her* memories.

Another important aspect of these transitions is rendered in *Vapour*: Stevenson (2004:4) points out that the combination of water and fire also foregrounds notions of cleansing, and presents the fading of memories as the time that must pass to enable the wounds of the past to heal.

For Bhabha (1994:256) this sense of transposition and exchange is most important for the postcolonial project:

> What is crucial to such a vision of the future is the belief that we must not merely change the narratives of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other

> times and different spaces, both human and historical.

It seems then that memories become frozen moments in time, disrupting the continuity of life. These disparate experiences could be seen as artefacts from the past and are therefore a crucial aspect of nomadic identity – not only as a process affixing partial and fragmented experiences and aspects of the self to identity, but also as making alternative figurations in other times and places possible for the individual and history to render a non-essentialised being.

5.2.2 Displacement of the subject and a remembrance of home

The collage-like character of the process of making a film, discussed in Chapter Two, reflects the partiality of memory. It is by means of Searle's video production that this incomplete aspect of remembering is investigated against the background of a nomadic identity. Often, this sense of fragmentation presents identity not only as partial and incomplete, but as dislocated. Attempts to overcome monolithic conceptions of identity, ideas of memory in terms of place and (dis)location are most useful. In an endeavour to challenge such limiting notions of identity, Searle creates a passage between the present and the past to return to a place and a sense of self which only exists through memory and in her video production.

Betterton (1996:177) postulates that identities are contoured through "histories of place and displacement" and that these shifts in space and time return through memory. In *Vapour* the silhouette-landscape does not give us any geographical clues, whereas in *Uitsug*, the ambiguity suggested by the title disorients the audience. Coombes (2003a:18) explains "the proximity and easy slippage between *uitsig* (outlook or view), *uit* (out) and *sug* (to sigh)". The location of the housing area visible through the viewfinder is Ocean View – a spot named as the new and desolate location for coloured people when they were forcefully removed from Simonstown in 1973 (Coombes 2003a:18). There is a sense of irony

embedded in the interplay between the idyllic title and the bleak image (Ocean View does not have a view of the sea, as the view is blocked by buildings and a high dune) that leaves the spectator with a bitter sense of nostalgia. These memories appear as curtailed recollections of a past, ripped out of place by the spatial disruption of forced removals and the ensuing relocation.

The cyclical nature reiterated by the looping of the video and by the round lens of the viewfinder in *Uitsug* and the round shapes of the pots in *Vapour* invokes a sense of loss and return: these ritualistic successions demonstrate the ambivalent character of memories and the elusive nature of belonging. In 1969 the South African Institute of Race Relations published a *Guide to Cape Town for coloured people* containing an extensive section on prohibitions and access to beaches in the proximity of Cape Town (Coombes 2003a:19). The guide presents a more oblique representation of the area than *Uitsug's* panoramic view suggests[63]. Here, just as in other sites of forced removals, memory is put out of joint and appears ambivalent: these sites are simultaneously areas of poverty and disadvantages *and* vibrant cultural and political exchange (Coombes 2003a:19). Coombes (2003a:19) states that "the force of 'belonging' represented by Simonstown to those communities ousted by the Group Areas Act, can never be recalled by location alone, just as its loss can never adequately be called up by the juxtaposition of beauty with the bleakness of Ocean View".

In Coombes (2003b:125), Svetlana Boym distinguishes between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia: The latter "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity", nor does it follow a single path, but instead "explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones". This is the sense of nostalgia apparent in Searle's

[63] The guide suggests that "…the beach at Simonstown which has been allocated to Coloured people is a stretch which is divided into two by the rocky outcrops and the Naval Battery… . The water is polluted by waste products from a nearby marine factory" (in Coombes 2003b:18).

work, clearly underlined by the present ambiguities and multiplicities. In *Uitsug* it is the omnipresence of the Imam's call to prayer that "stamps its mark" on a scene which otherwise might simply invite unfavourable comparison with that vista of sea, sand and fynbos that was part of the external reality of that other time and place that was Simonstown. This single gesture complicates any nostalgic return by signalling the resilient capacity for human communion (Coombes 2003a:19).

In an account of the function of memory within the District Six Museum in Cape Town, Coombes (2003b:133) explains that such monuments do not "replace the lost subject it celebrates", they restore and reshape memory. Both *Vapour* (Figure 31) and *Uitsug* (Figure 32) serve as monuments of remembrance and prevent cultural amnesia. This fear of forgetting plays a very important role in the recognition of the self, as it presupposes a sense of control. Sturken (2000:287) explains that computer memory functions on the premise of intention – much like human memory – that stores and retrieves information both consciously and subconsciously. Sturken (2000:288) ascribes the interest in the concept of memory in "computer consumer culture" as a reaction to the methods by which we "experience our memory as so unlike the supposedly all-knowable database".

Monuments of remembrance are built up from fragments of memories of individuated experience. It is this collage of recollections that builds the database of information – not only to recall our past and but to contour our future as a nation.

5.2.3 Personal memory and collective history

In *Women and art in South Africa*, Arnold (1996:129) suggests that "events embedded in memory" often connect with qualities such as "dislocation, temporal illogicality, fusions of art and life, and quotation". *Vapour* and most of Searle's works (although often in an indirect and nondescript way) are enriched by personal remembrance and experience:

> Yes, personal recollections were evoked, not in terms of my childhood, but from a later stage in my life, when I first met my broader family, from whom my immediate family had been estranged. It was in my teens, when I was first invited for Eid by our extended family, that I saw men cooking in big pots in the backyard. It intrigued me, perhaps because of my realisation of what my childhood might have been… (Searle in Stevenson 2004:1).

Coombes (2003b:7) explains that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1996, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, served to "raise questions about the nature of personal or 'collective' memory as a tool for the production of historical narratives, particularly where traumatic abuses of human rights have been involved". The function of this commission was to voice the prevailing stories and confessions of both victims and aggressors of the apartheid era in South Africa. The commission was given the power to grant amnesty to individuals admitting to their politically inspired crimes against humanity[64]. By means of the same process of story-telling, Searle's personal encounters contribute to the history of the collective and inscribe her personal sense of being.

The non-linear succession of events and scenes within this video loop allow for a disjointed sense of time. The deficient recollection of images and fragmented narratives permit moments of recollection to surface and then to disappear again. *Uitsug* (Figure 32) presents what Schmahmann (2004:26) expresses as an act of "unravelling the past through memory and the feelings elicited by examining traces of family histories (whether these are visual images, texts or sounds) [which] yield their own form of knowledge and insight". In other words, by allowing personal experience to guide the construction of these works, Searle has represented a different kind of "truth" to that in official histories.

[64] The underlying objective of the TRC was to recreate reconciliation in an attempt to establish a national identity. The commission was heavily criticised "for the compromises made in the name of national unity and reconciliation that allowed so many to walk free while the conditions they had perpetrated under apartheid and that had reduced so many to poverty and powerlessness remained intact" (Coombes 2003b:8).

Within postmodern parameters and the re-writing of the past, historical consciousness continuously re-creates its content with the changing of times. This is not to say that such past events are literally altered, but that the interpretation thereof is amended in an endeavour to satisfy the desires of the present. Memory could therefore be seen as a constant negotiation between the past and the present and thus fulfil the Deleuzian desire of the becoming subject, shaping and altering itself continuously to ascribe to current demands.

Haraway (1987:73) describes bodies as "time slices through the fabric of social lives" and claims that these bodies "tell a contested political history". As individuals suspended within particular spatial and temporal arenas, it seems reasonable to accept that our personal memories of those spaces and times are deeply embedded in the sociality of culture and history. Betterton (1996:180) explains that "remembering becomes a form of power which not only recalls events but gives to them shape and meaning". She adds that self-critical recollections and representations are decisive in the process of transformation of any oppressed or marginal individual in "the process of becoming subjects in history" (Betterton 1996:180).

It is important to note, that, although the practices of memory and history correspond closely, they are not the same. Pierre Nora (in Roberts & Roberts 1996:30) differentiates memory from history in ways important to Searle's visual production:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically retrieved. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic, incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a

> bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic… . History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again… . Memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative… . History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.

The *Uitsug* (Figure 32) video repeats itself continuously and presents Searle's memories as live experiences – in constant motion and "permanent evolution". Although the work draws heavily on particular historical moments and events, the work provides a far more exquisite and moving rendering of the past: The dissolving of some images into others and the out-of-focus visuals construct a sense of nostalgia and the sacred which is at once exceptionally personal, and collective. It is the multiplicity and plurality embedded in memory that makes it more powerful than mere historical recollection. Betterton (1996:173) says that within feminist practice the past is often investigated to "uncover clues to the present" by means of autobiographical journeys. These oblique explorations merely inform an identity that is still in process and so undermines the dominant narrative of history "as an uninterrupted linear progress". It seems then, that by reshaping the past, the presence becomes clearer as "history always represents the present as much as the past".

In this sense, *Vapour* (Figure 31) and *Uitsug* (Figure 32) interrogate the self as a subject in history and the interactions between coloured genealogy and memory. The sense of dialogue with the past is a powerful

theme running through all of Searle's installations and video productions. The special power of places to call up the past is central to these pieces. Searle therefore undertakes a journey that maps out her process of becoming in time through significant spaces and events. In *Uitsug*, Searle uncovers layers of personal memory, which "like archaeological remains, lie embedded in individual psychic history" (Betterton 1996:175).

The call to prayer in the video, the housing area visible through the viewfinder, the view of the coastline and the image of the child, all serve as triggers for recollections (signs and physical traces of places where she once lived) which trace her own past, an "archaeology of the self" (Betterton 1996:175).

5.2.4 Performing memory in the actual and the virtual

Betterton (1996:173) reminds us "the stories we tell ourselves about who we are – the half-remembered events and places which shape our lives "underpin our identities.

The scene in *Vapour* unfolds upon a twilight sky and evokes a time located somewhere between day and night. The soft darkness that sets in devoid the landscape and the individuals, only visible as dark outlines, of any recognisable features and turns this into a scene that could have taken place anywhere. The vague image suggests coalescence between the present moment, which is half-way between sunlight and darkness (actual) and the day that has passed and the evening that lies ahead (virtual).

The dream-like images of Searle's reconstructed twilight landscape with its ghost-like profiles wandering between the steaming pots in *Vapour* draws the audience into an almost surreal space with endless possibilities. Stevenson (2004:4) points out that the exploration of "altered or transient states of consciousness" in *A matter of time*, *Home and away* and *Vapour* denotes an interesting shift where bodies float and drift through ephemeral

landscapes. It is within this nomadic space that one is able to realise the importance of a camera-consciousness that makes mental connections in time, rather that with empirical reality:

> …the camera is no longer content sometimes to follow the characters' movement, sometimes itself to undertake movements of which they are merely the object, but in every case it subordinates description of a space to the functions of thought. This is not a simple distinction between the subjective and the objective, the real and the imaginary, it is on the contrary their indiscernibility which will endow the camera with a rich array of functions, and entail a new conception of the frame and reframings…a camera-consciousness which would no longer be defined by the movements it is able to follow or make, but by the mental connections it is able to enter into (Deleuze 1989:23).

At the start of the four-minute video production *Vapour*, the audience is confronted with the almost unrecognisable figure of Searle as she slowly walks barefoot between the fires with sparks blowing about in the wind. This mirage-like image of Searle relates to what Pisters (2003:37) refers to as a wanderer – the capacity to become a visionary, "capable of seeing the crystals of time". The notion of the wanderer closely relates to that of the nomad that embarks on a lifetime of journeys – forever located within liminal spaces between opposing viewpoints and binaries, never occupying any one fully.

Betterton (1996:162) suggests that the employment of space and location has always been a novel characteristic of postcolonial art and criticism. She adds that the "reconceptualisation of history in spatial terms" is inextricably part of the "particular postcolonial experience of diaspora as both an identity and an experience". Searle's artworks not only simultaneously represent time and space, but are also located temporally and spatially, and therefore these experiences become most evident.

Markiewicz (in Betterton 1996:162) concurs that installation art "exists in this dual reality" as it disrupts the time-space gamut and therefore "map[s] out a territory which, although largely consistent of familiar elements, signifies neither their usual function nor their usual habitat". Similarly, Coleman (2000:163) explains that the medium of installation exist within "physical and psychic spaces" that are tangible and malleable to the requirements of the artist. Through the practice of installation art, the artist is able to isolate a new location for the marginalised subject, whilst themes of forced removals, dislocation and relocation provide alternatives in the search of fluid identity. Identity reconfigures itself repeatedly within a spatio-temporal paradigm as memory jumps between the layers of time and articulations of loss and desire (Betterton 1996:162).

However, memory, as an active and ongoing operation, is not simply an archive from which moments of time can be retrieved, but a "dynamic social process of recuperation, reconfiguration and outright invention that is often engendered, provoked and promoted by visual images (Roberts & Roberts 1996:17).

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Magdalena Kröner[65] (2004:88) suggests that after ten years of democracy in South Africa, art serves as an "instrument and reflector of change in society" and therefore Albie Sachs's (Elliot 1990:10) desire for artists not to use "art as a weapon against the struggle" is fulfilled. It is mainly by reflecting on issues of race, gender and ethnicity that Searle achieves a more powerful rendering of, not only the past, but also the present and the future.

Bedford (2004:5) argues that the "language of art has opened new meanings and new ways of understanding" for post-apartheid South Africa and it is in this sense that Searle's works should be understood. The careful scrutiny of the artist's work over the past few years has transported me on a journey, enriched by many stages, of coming to terms with both personal and collective identity – both locally and globally.

In Chapter Two the discussion focused on methods of framing the body and the self, in much the same way that apartheid strategies attempted to categorise and package individuals on the basis of the colour of their skin. In this chapter the notion of framing was compared to the Deleuzian concept of framing and discussed as the first cinematic element highlighted by this philosopher. In Searle's oeuvre the act of framing mimicked colonialist practices and, by employing this strategy in her own work, she disrupted this essentialist system by regaining power. For this purpose, Searle literally framed her body with a variety of spices and measuring tapes, and finally stained various body parts with Egyptian henna.

Earlier works, like the *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000) and the *Discoloured* series (1999 – 2000), as discussed in Chapter Two, aimed to

[65] Magdalena Kröner lives in Dusseldorf and works as a freelance art critic and author.

undo the act of framing of people of colour employed by colonialism, as the so-called other and these works attempt to abolish fixed groupings based on a racialised or gendered reading. In each case, Searle presented a palette that did not consist only of the binaries of black and white, but also included various shades and hues that were not always representative of the colour of one's skin. Thus, much like the frame of a camera, Searle's works detached instances from the world and the frame temporarily juxtaposed these heterogeneous aspects pertaining to identity. This presented a destabilising force, and one realised that Searle has taken back control over her own body. The digital editing that often took place on these images, where the artist is able to represent her body in the way that she sees fit, further reinforced such ideas.

Chapter Three presented these dislocated facets of Searle's identity as a collage-like image, by comparing it to the shot as it pertains to film. Searle compiled such a map of her sense of self by bringing together disparate slices of identity as torn from the debate by means of framing and staining. The knotting together of dissimilar elements as it pertains to the various subject positions Searle occupies, created a kind of dotted line foregrounding the notion of appearance and disappearance, presence and absence and life and death. It is this interrupted and temporary pattern of Searle's embodiment that constructed her identity as an assemblage rather than as a cohesive, unified structure of sorts, and presented identity in much of its multiplicity and plurality.

The incomplete illustration of Searle's identity rendered an image comprised of many open interstitial spaces located between these binary oppositions, inhabited by her simultaneously. These undefined sections related to what Homi Bhabha theorises as the "third space". Here subjects became hybrids, composed of the disparate aspects of their identities, moulded into one. Bhabha (1994:38) explained that it is in fact these spaces that render meaning and shape identity.

It is by means of this continuous process of insertion and erasure that Chapter Three concluded that identity ultimately became an amalgamation of interrelated facets that simultaneously played on different levels of the self. These positions and levels were furthermore in a state of continuous transformation and therefore rendered identity as always being incomplete and in a process of becoming. Van der Watt (2004:120) suggested that although the apartheid era posited identity as a "site of exclusion" it also showed it as a "site of effective mobilisation against oppression" and lay bare the fallacies of identity politics. She suggests that Searle's artworks strategically expose the insufficiency of identity as a concept and that for Searle, "identity is never enough" (Van der Watt 2004:124).

It is exactly this insufficiency of identity in computing the post-apartheid subject in South Africa that formed the focus of Chapter Four. It is in this chapter that nomadic subjectivity, as philosophised by Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380), was illustrated as an appropriate theory of identity to account for the postmodern subject. Searle represented these conflicting aspects as part of her hybrid identity by locating them in a new space – the nomadic space – that lends itself to alternative figuration. This process corresponded closely to what Deleuze had in mind with the third cinematic element, namely montage. To represent these interjacent spaces Searle selects two media in which she can dispense herself namely, olive oil and water. These media pertained to the video works, *A matter of time* and *Home and away* respectively. It is then, by positioning herself amidst these liminal spaces, that Searle undertook the eternal journey of the process of becoming.

Braidotti (2002:8) sees this process of becoming as a bridge between binary oppositions and constructs, achieved through "proximity" and "interconnectedness". Drawing on the inherent qualities of oil and water respectively, Searle's works explained the free flowing aspects of the alternative spaces located in the interstice between traditional debates of gender and race. It is within this space that Searle's constructed sense of self found resolution and meaning.

Chapter Four investigated colonialist aspirations such as the forced removal of people from designated white areas and their subsequent relocation to other sites and the concept of location as a primary concern in the re-evaluation of identity of coloured and black individuals in South Africa. It suggested that a site is seen as a dislocated and disoriented concept, which, for the nomad, is both temporary and permanent. Although the concept of the locale appeared transient and forever changing, it is firmly located in and subsequently inscribes our conceptions of, identity and ourselves.

Deleuze's notions regarding time and the time-image in film, as theorised in *Cinema 2: the time-image* (1989), was employed in Chapter Five to elucidate ideas and functions of memory as it inscribed a nomadic sense of identity. Since the concept of memory correlated closely with the experience of a film (the recollection of images and experiences in the mind) and film was Searle's primary means of expression, the investigation embarked on an explanation of Deleuze's image of time and its implications for cinema.

Recollections of the past became most evident through sensory experience, as they were often rooted in particular experiences and thoughts suspended in time. For Searle it was the combination of the aromatic smells (and by association, the taste) of the spices used in *Traces*, the foreign sounds audible in *Bloedlyn*, the sense of touch in *Profile* and the visual simulation in *Home and away* and *A matter of time*, that informed the process whereby these works recalled aspects of the past – both for Searle and her audience. Viola (1995:151) believes in the simultaneity of all the senses, as they are "interwoven into one system that includes sensory data, neural processing, memory, imagination, and all the mental events of the moment". All these works together therefore comprised experience (Viola 1995:152).

Although Küchler and Melion (1991:3) agree that memory is "a process precipitated and shaped by the relaying of visual information", the possibility of a nomadic subject resided in the incorporation of all the senses in the sculpting of memories. This section attempted to demonstrate the ways in which Searle constructed memory within her work, how these edifices were engendered visually and how memory contributed to the process of becoming.

It is memory then that informed the concept of time for Searle as she explores nomadic figurations. Memory was explored in this section in terms of the incomplete renderings of time that nostalgia offered for subjectivity. Memory was shown to inform the processes of displacement and relocation as they rewrote the concept of the self through a process operating at both a personal and collective level of South African history. Finally, through the continuous play of virtuality and actuality, memory submited itself as an active agent in the performance of one's identity. It is through the Deleuzian conceptions of time and film that the process of memory not only became clear, but also informed the nomadic subjectivity Searle searched for through her video productions. Ultimately it reinforced the notion that identity is insufficient as a category.

It is through Searle's works that one becomes aware that there could be no uniformity in terms of identity in our multicultural society and that we should look towards alternative methods of computing ourselves and our society. Although it could be argued that Searle did not have a choice in opting for such a hybridised notion of identity, or that based on her mixed heritage, it should merely serve as a possibility for all South Africans to look at each other in a more equally and respectful manner.

I believe that this dissertation has provided me with insight into the complex issues pertaining to identity and the fact that these are complicated even further by the cultural variety present in South Africa and its histories. This dissertation attempted to provide an alternative

view of comprehending identity and to representing ourselves within our postmodern society.

In addition to this, the study provided a comprehensive overview of the works produced by Berni Searle during the past decade. I believe that these works should be seen as important elements of our continuous process of striving for democracy, equality and peace, as they mirror the intricate aspects shaping identity – both at a personal and at a collective level.