

**THE PRINCESS IN THE VELD:
CURATING LIMINALITY IN CONTEMPORARY
SOUTH AFRICAN FEMALE ART PRODUCTION**

by

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DECLARATION

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I declare that

The princess in the veld: Curating liminality in contemporary South African female art production

is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Delaida Adéle Adendorff

6 February 2017

ABSTRACT

I aim to showcase post-African female identity through the exhibition, *The princess in the veld*. The exhibition displays selected works produced by South African women artists, underpinned by the proposed curatorial framework. This curatorial approach is feminist, and may allow for a liminal reading of local female identity. I premise my theorised curatorial framework liminally, in-between binary oppositions. This position allows for a feminist position and/or reading of female identities that simultaneously allude to, and reject a so-called local (essentialised) women's art production within the ambit of global, Western dominated feminism. I argue that, for such a display to be successful, an alternative curatorial space is needed. For this purpose, I introduce the notion of heterotopia, a counter-space, to renegotiate binaries and to render identity formations temporarily in-between prevailing norms. This heterotopic counter-curatorial space is realised through an exhibition that employs the medium of video, rather than conventional exhibition media installed in real space.

An exploration of specified key local and international survey exhibitions foregrounding women's concerns from the 1980s onwards, serves to inform my theorised curatorial framework. The research embarks on an investigation of a recent large-scale exhibition hosted in France, to gain an understanding of the pitfalls prevalent in curating an exhibition of artwork produced by women. From a feminist standpoint, I critically analyse this display to suggest more inclusive alternative curatorial strategies to shift the conventionally Western approach followed by this curator.

The revisionist, feminist, re-reading of certain South African curated exhibitions from both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods proposes a feminist trajectory that follows the shaping of local women's identities, which remain deeply inscribed in this country's politics and histories. This section of the survey underlines local post-African female identity as liminal and in flux, through the investigation of seminal exhibitions and artworks produced by South African women. I argue that this liminal account allows for an inclusive and extended understanding of women, while explicating the South African multicultural dispensation wherein the post-African woman operates.

KEY TERMS

South African feminist trajectory

curatorship

liminality

heterotopia

curated film

counter-curatorial spaces

post-African identity

revisionist art history

South African women artists

feminist curating

fairy tale

video exhibitions

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My interest in curatorial practice was sparked in 2009 by the opportunity to found Magpie Gallery in Irene, Centurion. The focus of the gallery was to showcase the work of young and established contemporary South African artists. The gallery closed in 2009, and during this three-year period, I was privileged to gain first-hand curatorial experience, which provided insight into the concepts, practicalities, and methodological dimensions underpinning curatorial practice in the context of the multicultural, democratic South Africa.

The main focus of this study is to explore post-African¹ female identity through the exhibition *The princess in the veld*. It was curated by me as part of this project with the specific aim of investigating certain questions and concerns raised during research. It features works produced by South African women artists with these issues in mind.

A watershed experience in 2009 was my encounter with the exhibition, *elles@centrepompidou – women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de creation industrielle*,² curated by Camille Morineau at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (May 2009 to February 2011), which raised pertinent questions about curatorial practice and its ways of creating meaning and exposing social, political, historical and cultural ideologies. This exhibition was seminal in instigating much of the motivation to undertake this study, entitled *The princess³ in the veld: curating liminality in contemporary South African female art production*. The principal aim of this research was to survey the creative contributions of local women

¹ The term post-African is employed throughout this research and selected for the sense of transformation and reinvention it holds for subject positions rendered impossible or obsolete by postcolonialism. The term is unpacked in detail later in this chapter (cf. section 1.1.10).

² Hereafter referred to as '*elles@centrepompidou*'.

³ It should be noted that, within the context of this thesis and the practical component of this research, the lack of quotation marks framing the word *princess* indicates female acts of defiance against restrictive orders. This challenges the use of the word *princess* in quotation marks which signifies a local derogatory or demeaning form of slang to refer to women. As such, the employment of the term without quotation marks implies the liminality of South African female identity theorised throughout this research. Although this term may be considered an adjunct to the male term *prince*, here the notion of princess evolves into a sovereign power in her own right, namely a woman as ruler not bound by male hegemony. Also, the suffix 'ess' need not necessarily imply only the female form of a term, but instead may act as an abstract noun denoting other positive qualities such as *largess* (Shorter Oxford Dictionary 2007). My insistence in retaining the word *princess* is deliberate, as it does not exclude individual women's personal interpretation of femininity.

artists, in relation to both global feminist discourse and Western-dominated feminist trajectories.

The *elles@centrepompidou* exhibition featured 500 works by women artists from the museum's collection. Morineau (2009b:16) stated that her intention was to document the "transformation of the condition of women" through art, as well as the impact it had on the production of art by women artists during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Morineau 2009b:16).⁴ Morineau's curatorial resolve was based on specific themes rather than being presented as an historical timeline, to "unhinge preconceptions of women's art" by demonstrating these artists' multiple perspectives and different techniques. In this way, her exhibition investigated ways that women artists could "define the history of twentieth-century art every bit as much as men" (Morineau 2009b:18). However, since she was restricted to using works just in the museum's collection, Morineau could achieve only some degree of comment around a revisionist⁵ representation of seminal feminist artworks. Due to her limits, ultimately the show became purely representative of a slice of the Western art world, with little inclusion of non-Western women artists. Despite Morineau's (2009b:16) observations around the significant absence of women's art in museum collections and the lack of attention given it within the discipline of history of art, one crucial shortcoming of the exhibition, in my opinion, was its non-representation of a more extended category of women artists.⁶ From my perspective and for the purposes of this study, the non-presence of African artists is key.

Many non-Western and post-feminist theorists have strongly condemned what they consider to be a general, universal categorisation of 'women' by first and second wave feminism,⁷ and the resulting interpretation of women from the Third World as

⁴ Morineau (2009b:15-18) argues that the choice of an exhibition solely dedicated to the work of female artists should not be seen to be exclusionary, but instead represents only an aspect of historical investigation.

⁵ The term *revisionist* is employed throughout this research as a means of revisiting and reinterpreting seminal exhibitions which foregrounded local women and their identities. The revisionist reading is premised on a feminist inquiry that favours inclusivity of gender and race, and aims to offer an alternative reading of recent art history. It must be noted that I had not had the opportunity to view these exhibitions first-hand, and all information and research regarding them has been gathered from catalogues and other documentation such as reviews and articles by other authors.

⁶ Perhaps a chapter discussing the lack of representation of non-Western women in the museum's collection could have been explored in the extensive catalogue.

⁷ The history of Western feminism commences with the first wave, also known as the suffragette movement (1860 – 1930), with its campaign for female suffrage launched from a political stance and extended to sexual and economic rights of women. The second wave followed thirty years later and continued the women's liberation movement by canvassing for equal rights in the workplace, in society at large, and both economically and sexually (Bullock & Trombley 1999:314-5).

different.⁸ The universalising application of the label 'woman' as part of feminist discourse is criticised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990:141) as a failure to account sufficiently for the lives and experiences of colonial subjects. This universalisation constitutes what Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988:65-66) terms "discursive colonisation" – namely, the construction of an essentialist category of 'Third World Woman' as a homogeneous entity, entrenching the unvarying misrepresentation of non-Western women as monolithic and victim (Mohanty 1988:84).⁹ Despite efforts from both Western and non-Western camps to dismiss this type of misrepresentation of African women, it remains a complex task that demands ongoing critical engagement.

My understanding of such essentialism and exclusion¹⁰ of non-Western women from feminist discourse prompted aspects of this research. This study attempts to investigate the representation and creative output of contemporary South African women, with the view to propose an expansion of Morineau's project. However, theorising the designation 'women' within a contemporary multicultural South African context demands a multi-faceted approach, as this country's historically, politically and culturally inscribed *milieu* provides ample opportunity for the kind of misrepresentation noted by Spivak and Mohanty. And equally, the mere addition of the artworks suggested by this researcher to have been 'excluded' from Morineau's exhibition could never comprehensively account for the complex nature of South African female identity.

Returning to the exhibition *The princess in the veld*, the underpinning for the selection of works is based on a feminist curatorial framework which allows for a liminal¹¹ reading of the self. According to John Sykes (1976:629), the concept of the liminal refers to identities that are often found between binaries. My curatorial

⁸ Despite radical black protests raging at the same time, there was little recognition of race amongst the 'sisterhood', and it is the perception of feminism's ignorance of women of colour globally that came under scrutiny during the third wave (1990s – present) (Bullock & Trombley 1999:315). Also known as post-feminism, the third wave extends earlier concerns, tackles micro-politics of gender, and allows for a multiplicity of feminisms.

⁹ Essentialising feminist strategies of this nature abolishes the narratives of those who resist oppression, and the uniform 'Third World Woman' is thus presented as a victim as well as the beneficiary of Western concern (Radcliffe 1994:26).

¹⁰ Exclusion of non-Western women from mainstream feminist discourse reinforces oppression, as they must constantly address their exclusion, heightening their difference, rather than being able to fully participate in feminist discourse (Radcliffe 1994:27).

¹¹ The liminal space, derived from the Latin, *limen*, meaning "a threshold", represents a portal or doorway. Liminality is foregrounded throughout this thesis as a reference to interstitial positioning of post-African women. Similarly, the study employs binaries as dividing lines drawn by patriarchal and colonial inscriptions, which contain, delimit and constrict female identity. It is argued that these boundaries yield a liminal space, occupied by women, as they negotiate their identities through continually straddling these divides, as a means of reconciling their own desires with the fixed delineation imposed on them. Liminality is further fleshed out later in this chapter (cf. section 1.1.9).

approach is premised in-between binaries, to provoke a simultaneous allusion to and rejection of (South) Africa and the West. This foundation calls for the generation of an alternative exhibition space. The practical curated outcome of this research resulted in the presentation of around 200 works by contemporary South African women artists, curated into four themes that will be discussed later. For this exhibition, these works are retained solely via four videos and are accompanied by four catalogues. The entire exhibition exists within a box.

This exhibition runs parallel to Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia,¹² that is, I have set up a heterotopic curatorial space that takes the form of purely video and narrative rather than presenting a conventional exhibition of installed in a traditional exhibition space. This may be seen to create an opening that allows for the presence of such aspects of the liminal as the re-negotiation of binary oppositions and the rendering of identity formations in-between prevailing norms. In the following sections, the key concepts that inform the exhibition's curatorial focus, are expanded on.

1.1 The curated exhibition: *The princess in the veld*

1.1.1 Curatorial methodology

In the present South African environment, the provocative nature of dialogue around contradictions and similarities calls for a more evocative and espousing curatorial framework than is currently practiced. My curatorial process follows the reciprocal approach between theory – research – and practice, as one necessarily informs and guides the other. For clarity, I examine these separately, although it should be noted that both inquiries run simultaneously, and inform the curatorial process in a fluid manner.

My curatorial methodology is premised, firstly, on a feminist inquiry. To fully comprehend and present the inherent pitfalls in curating an exhibition of work by women artists from this perspective, I analyse Morineau's exhibition to offer possible alternatives to her more conventional Western approach.

¹² The term 'heterotopia' is derived from the Greek *heteros* (other) and *topos* (place) and literally implies an "other place" as theorised by Foucault (Johnson 2006:77). This term is significant within my argument, and will be examined later in this chapter (cf. section 1.1.6).

This is followed by an in-depth survey of selected Southern African exhibitions from 1980 to the present. In my opinion, these exhibitions highlight certain outputs and influences of local women artists, thereby contributing to my understanding of the concept of post-African female identity, and offering the opportunity to explore a revisionist, feminist, re-reading of these key exhibitions.

This survey of the curatorship of these exhibitions emphasises South African post-African female identity as liminal – in the process of *becoming*¹³ – so revealing a local feminist trajectory that both alludes to, and resists, mainstream feminist histories. I argue that a liminal view of this region's women artists and their work, along with an examination of post-African female identity, may validate my extended interpretation of the category 'women', while explaining the South African multicultural environment in which the post-African woman artist functions.

As mentioned before, *The princess in the veld* exhibition exists in the form of four videos and four catalogues in a single box; and thematically, they explore four shifting feminist concerns that are unique, but not exclusive, to the South African *milieu*. The themes do not merely follow those of conventional Western feminism, but are informed, in an exploratory way, by extended and localised fairy tale narratives of both African and European origin. In the videos, the woman-based concerns examined – with their related video titles – are: between the past and the present (*Once upon a time to happily ever after*), the public and the private (*From cinder to the castle*), voyeurism and performance (*Of sleeping beauties and thorny 'pricks'*), and passive concepts of docile female beauty and abject notions of subversive women (*A terrible beauty and the beauty of terror*). This thematic organisation adjusts archetypal feminist concerns towards examining questions around the local post-African self.

The heterotopic nature of this exhibition format offers the opportunity to explore spatial alternatives as an intrinsic facet of the curatorial gesture. Yet this intermediate exhibiting space, by defying any fixed traditional categorisation itself, may also yield conceptual possibilities for reinterpreting a liminal post-African female identity by assigning to the state of *becoming* both fluid and constant qualities. This in turn may allow for different and unorthodox readings around post-African identity.

¹³ The notion of *becoming* is employed deliberately throughout this thesis as an antithesis to *being*, as the latter implies a fixed notion of 'being in the world'. By contrast, *becoming* suggests transformation and progression. The amelioration of the lives of women remains at the forefront of local feminist concerns, as this research will advocate. As such, continual (re)negotiation of local female identity remains at the forefront of the arguments proffered by this study.

In addition, within the exhibition, the medium of video itself allows for the sense of *in-between* – or the liminal – to be generated in the presentation of the artworks. The organised and sanitised aesthetic of the traditional museum or gallery is challenged here by a chaotic mix of the real and the imagined, since the filmed and graded footage interrupts the organised progression of the display of artworks. These temporary spaces of display – or heterotopias – may allow for a more impermanent reading of the artworks thus installed. The fluidity and the virtuality,¹⁴ the disruption of time, and the constant movement that video as a mode of expression holds, serves in this study to provide an alternative solution to both account for, and contribute to, a liminal reading of post-African women.

My intention here is that the medium of video will reiterate the notion of *becoming* by displaying these artworks – or post-African female identities – as in flux through the performative and liminal characteristics of the medium; while simultaneously referencing, contesting, and transgressing utopian desires of equality and emancipation. In addition, my decision to use an alternative curatorial space, grounded in the medium of video, is intended to enhance the understanding of the interstitial nature of the curatorial stance.

The video exhibitions are accompanied by a series of catalogues that position the selected artists and artworks within the curatorial ambit of the project, and aim to open a discursive interpretation of these within the framework of the exhibition.

1.1.2 Background to curatorial practice

To expand on traditional and contemporary tendencies towards curating, this study proposes, in theoretical and practical ways, a curatorial model that accounts both for the above concerns around constructions of female South African identity, and for the radical changes in the nature of art production that have redefined the role of the global curator considerably. This study contemplates curatorship within a local context, and primarily assumes an African curatorial stance. However, the discipline

¹⁴ The terms *virtual* and *virtuality* should be understood to describe elements that do not physically exist but are made by alternative means, such as with software or through the refraction of light, so to appear to be real from the point of view of the viewer through her/his senses. These terms are understood as an antithesis to the real or reality. It is not the intention of this study to elaborate on debates relating to these terms and their relationship to video, other than that clarified above.

of contemporary curatorship is still evolving, especially in Africa, and local discourse requires significant expansion.¹⁵

In addition to this, I suggest a curatorial position that is not only better suited to an African context, but could also offer an alternative exhibiting perspective to a global art arena. As such, curatorial discourse originating in the Western world is drawn upon, to provide a mediation between the curatorial position laid out in this research, and my perceptions around aspects of Western practice that appear essentialist or exclusionary.

Until recently, the curator has been viewed exclusively as a “caregiver” (Kuoni 2001:11), derived from the Latin, *curare* (to care) (Graham & Cook 2010:10). As such and within this definition of the role, the main emphasis is caring for a collection, usually within a museum context. In this sense, the traditional role of the curator has been focused on the administration and management of art objects, and almost without exclusion, has remained an invisible act.

During the late 1960s, an alternative form of curating developed, namely the shift from the role of the caretaking and administration, to the producer of a far more tangible and creative act of mediation. This new way of curating became a form of artistic practice – almost performance – and gave rise to the concept of the “curator-as-artist” (O’Neill 2012:87). The dissolution of the boundaries that govern artistic and curatorial practice does not imply simply a merging of the roles of artist and curator, but also raises questions regarding authorship, as well as the relationship between the artist and curator. Below, I clarify my own role as curator.

1.1.3 The curator-as-artist approach

In the context of this research, the curator is interpreted as a mediator between the artist, her artwork and the audience; and as an active producer of new ideas and/or meaning. The curator exercises various exhibition strategies including, but not limited to, concept development, the selection and display of artworks, and formulating

¹⁵ Whereas curatorship – a recently configured category of scholarly interest – has yielded much research on exhibition practice during the last three decades in the West, a more purposeful (South) African interest arose only recently, despite the historical existence of exhibition making. Added to this, international feminist curatorial theories have arisen in the last decade, in an attempt to extend its inclusive and transformative agenda to curated practice. To this end, I aim to address certain gaps in knowledge in overall curatorial discourse.

research and dialogue. All these facets offer the opportunity to initiate new meanings. Also, once the artworks are fully encompassed within the curatorial theme or framework, further unexpected connections and interrelationships may build up. I took this the approach of curator-as-artist with *The princess in the veld*; and it has become the medium for the reconstruction of meaning, making tangible my curatorial ideas.

This position does not imply any authority over the artists' intentions with their work, or even the centrality of the curator's voice. Instead, it relies both on my collaboration with the creative voices of the artists and my own interpretations of the research of other writers, to open up alternative responses in the viewer towards the individual artworks. While both the curator and artist are creative producers in this kind of project, the relationship is viewed as collaboration.

In this way, I ascribe my curatorial role as liminal, functioning in-between other voices – including those of the artists, critics and viewers – namely, as a mediator creating interstitial layers of artworks to provoke new discourse. My intention is to disconnect from any curatorial strategy that may be centred exclusively on the authority of the curator; and I adopt the notion of the kind of “mediator who aims to transmit the energy emanating from art”, as theorised by Bart de Baere (2001:24). Using the term “collective curating”, Magali Arriola (2010:26) similarly argues for a democratic approach when conceiving an exhibition, where the curator will “yield [...] curatorial authority by giving the last word to the viewer”. Influenced by this approach, I attempt to open up the creation of other meaning, described by Arriola (2010:26) as a fluid and ongoing process of negotiation.

The insistence on collaboration and plurality also guards against the selection of artworks only to show off the curator's idea, as Anton Vidokle (2010:1) warns. He (Vidokle 2010:1) urges curators not to undermine artists by emphasising “authorial claims” over artworks, as this could cause them to become “merely actors and props for illustrating curatorial concepts.” With this in mind, I propose a curatorial stance premised on multiple viewpoints, both to engage the curatorial concept and open opportunity for dialogue and debate. Furthermore, it is not my intention here to categorise artists, their work, or their identity. The proposed themes, along with the format of the exhibition, are designed to reveal the potential for alternative readings

of the artworks, and to provoke new perceptions around artworks created by local women in relation to post-African female identity and feminism.¹⁶

From this viewpoint, my role is intended as one of a “visual anthropologist”, to borrow Carin Kuoni’s (2001:12) term. In other words, one who excavates new interpretations by her associations with artists, to add to the diverse meanings engendered by their artworks, thereby offering the audience, art critics, art historians and other sources a kind of “alternative history”.

Within the bounds of this study, as curator, I follow a conscious approach towards the selection, organisation, and display of the artworks, employing exhibition strategies that are shaped by considered investigation, interconnected with practice and discourse, and situated within a specific conceptual framework.

Okwui Enwezor (2003:59) explains that the progression of modern art “has been inextricably bound to the history of its exhibitions” and goes on to state, “no significant change in the direction of modern art occurred outside the framework of the public controversies generated by its exhibitions.” For Enwezor (2003:59), he believes the same to be true of contemporary art production, alluding to the importance of the “curator in shaping this history”; and also observing that the curatorial process unveils “the multiplicity of cultural procedures and counter-models that define contemporary art today”.

My curatorial role is informed along the lines of Enwezor’s principles, and in particular the importance of the curator in “shaping” art history, and the production of new and alternative models of meaning. This is realised also in my research, when I relook at the previously mentioned curated South African exhibitions (cf. section 1.1.1).

Amelia Jones (2016:5, original emphasis) provides a working definition for curating, which I attempt to apply within this research:

Curating involves both working with archives and constructing histories; it involves looking at works of art and making choices about which to include [...]. Curating makes arguments about feminist art histories and

¹⁶ I am aware that a number of local artists do not ascribe to a feminist sensibility, neither as individuals nor in their work. They all have their reasons, but in South Africa, certain stigmas and preconceptions around feminism exist in some circles which may add to their reluctance in this matter (cf. section 3.1). It must be noted that, in the selection of artists and their work, I was aware of their individual stances on feminism; and works were selected for their allusion to the curatorial theme, and the open endedness of their artworks’ readings, making possible a consideration of their work from a feminist position.

strategies concrete; curating constructs certain kinds of historical narratives, or in some cases intervenes in existing narratives. As such, while scholarly histories and theories of feminist art and culture are crucial to the feminist projects of expanding histories as well as interrogating the structures through which art is made and historicized, *curatorial practice* is one of the most important sites for the construction of both historical narratives about feminist art (the histories of feminist art) and feminist theories of curating and writing histories (the feminist histories and theories of art).

In this context, the practice of curating is used in a provocative way. It encourages a sense of inclusivity by providing multiple platforms to produce alternative meanings, while maintaining differences without perpetuating the notion of homogenised or marginalised subjects. This type of practice may allow for the “translating and transvaluing [of] cultural differences” (Bhabha 1994:252). Here, the releasing of identity dialogues contributes both to the construction of new historical narratives, and to the interrogation of existing narratives and the processes that shaped these.

1.1.4 *The exhibition as medium and the role of video*

As part of the active curator-as-artist approach, the exhibition itself as medium must be considered, and here I use the term exhibition-making. My intention is that the curated exhibition should explore the concept of spatiality in order to examine the rendering of a post-African female identity from the perspective of liminality. Spatiality here indicates both an intrinsic facet of the curatorial gesture, and the transformative theoretical possibilities yielded by alternative spaces. A critical stance and a deliberated strategy towards exhibition-making becomes necessary to extend beyond the traditional notions of curating, so as to deliver alternative interpretations. This offers the opportunity for dialogue between the artworks organised within the exhibition complex, as well as around the nature of the exhibition practice itself. This reveals my conscious participation with a sense of ‘the curatorial’, as described by Maria Lind (2015:321).

In her publication, Lind (2015:321) explains the distinction between the term ‘curating’, which she relegates to “the technical side of things”, and the methodological impetus of ‘the curatorial’. For Lind (2015:321, original emphasis), “working curatorially” implies performing with a sensibility as to why all details related

to the exhibition are being dealt with “*precisely* this way, *precisely* right now in relation to *this* art, and addressing the questions this raises or proposes.”

With *The princess in the veld*, the exhibition as a medium is significant. Here I chose an exhibition format comprising videos and catalogues contained in a box, which translates into an alternative, liminal, viewing space. My awareness was that, to install the exhibition in a conventional museum or gallery space would allow only for chronological engagement, which would create an unspoken hierarchy.

In addition, as curator, I argue that a tangible, conventional installation within a gallery or museum would be inappropriate, since that may be considered as an adjunct to the traditional gallery’s associations with patriarchal containment and grand narratives, an artistic canon which feminism specifically aims to interrogate. The understanding of liminality, as intended within this curatorial act, is best delivered in the medium of video.

Video allows the curator to present works in an exhibiting environment that mimics the typical blank space inherent in the ‘white cube’ gallery, while simultaneously offering an antithesis to the pristine, ‘invisible’ gallery space by projection, thereby dissolving scenes into a mix of fantasy and reality. The selected artworks become suspended in-between different spaces or existing narratives as “an accumulation of passages, a collection of moments [and] temporal lapses” (Enwezor 2002:42). As such, the medium of video enables the curator to design an exhibition space where a “simultaneous mythic and real contestation of space” can take place to “juxtapose in a single real place several spaces” (Foucault 1986:24-25)¹⁷ (cf. section 1.1.6).

Also video, as a medium, contributes to the creation of an alternative exhibition space, in keeping with the concept of heterotopia. According to Kevin Hetherington (1997:53), this state may be evoked only once utopian ideals become manifest in society – such as with the amelioration of the lives of women. The resulting heterotopic exhibition space enables both the presentation of artworks, and their reading around of local post-African female identity, to exist in a state of liminality, plurality and simultaneity.

¹⁷ This text, entitled *Des espaces autres*, is the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967 and was published in the French journal *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* in October 1984. Although the manuscript was never reviewed by Foucault, it was made public during an exhibition in Berlin shortly before his death, and as a result, it is not presented as part of the official corpus of his work.

This exhibiting strategy also appeals to a feminist sensibility, such as the systematic exclusion of women artists from both the Western art historical canon, as expanded upon in Linda Nochlin's article, *Why have there been no great women artists?* (1971), and from museums or exhibitions, as propagated by the subversive posters of the Guerrilla Girls since the 1980s. In line with this, I endeavour to create an alternative space to the above-described traditional Western exhibition models, which often rely on chronological arrangements of artworks or objects, to support the notion of progress). The counter-space offered by *The princess in the veld* does not simply imagine a contrasting model based on thematic installations, but rather proposes a rhizomatic¹⁸ approach, where a non-linear, simultaneous arrangement offers the potential for a liminal and open-ended reading of the selected art objects.

This curatorial stance does not denounce Western traditions, nor attempt to promote an exclusive African approach; instead, I wish to offer these artworks a fluid, liminal, and transitory exhibition space between the gaps yielded in-between Africa and the West, thereby acknowledging both, as an alternative framework for addressing issues around post-African female identity.

However, Mari Carmen Ramírez (1996:22) cautions against claims of shaping a more “democratic space” in the hope of capturing “a particular set of traits or [the] [...] specific essence” of an individual or group. Setting up an alternative space only available to women, or simply reinserting women into the art historical canon from which they had been previously excluded, are not sufficient methods of feminist curating, and risk criticism around essentialism and reductionist views.

Instead, I present a synchronous installation of objects produced by women through allegiances and affiliations between the artists and the curator. This provides a continuous allowance for new voices and narratives to be added. For this purpose, my curatorial strategy relies on fairy tale narratives to tease out themes and concerns relevant to a feminist project. Due to their non-chronological nature, serendipitous associations and alliances may develop between the exhibited artworks. Here, my curatorial approach relies on a forging of connections over disjunctures, and over

¹⁸ In botany, a rhizome is a continuously, horizontally growing underground stem or root system that sprouts lateral shoots. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari employ the rhizome as a metaphor for an “image of thought” in their philosophical book *Capitalism and schizophrenia* (1972 – 1980). This publication describes the theory of allowing for multiplicity, non-hierarchy, entry and exit points, and simultaneity. Rhizomes embody “a centred, non-hierarchical, nonsignifying system” and are related to all manner of becomings (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:21).

dislocated periods of space and time. It is intended that this curatorial method may reveal new, liminal, readings around the post-African woman.

This curatorial model aims to allow artworks to resonate with each other in synchronicity, to expose new narratives within the discourse of work by women artists within the South African arena. This approach is considered liminal in the way that it focuses on the narratives revealed in-between the existing canon of grand narratives; and allows artists to reveal “blind spots produced by vertical narratives of patriarchy [and colonialism]” (Molesworth 2010:512). These issues have a significant impact on the lives of post-African women. This approach to curating is designed to provoke meaningful engagement with past, present and future expressions of work by women artists; and simultaneously, to provoke African and Western feminist discourse through a contribution to a local feminist trajectory. These intentions underscore the primary focus of this research, namely, to theorise a curatorial framework that can represent local female identity in a way considered liminal.

1.1.5 The exhibition as form

The spatial and aesthetic form of the exhibition equally plays an important role. The formal structure of *The princess in the veld* – a group exhibition – stages spatial relationships between works from divergent practices, and the alternative exhibition space reveals a new narrative interpretation. Susan Stewart (1993:71) provides a useful rubric for analysing the form of an exhibition, based on the metaphor of the exhibition as a landscape with “three planes of interaction”, namely the background, the middle-ground and the foreground.

The background refers to the architecture of the exhibition – the exhibition space. Here, I have decided on a transitional video presentation – which most of the time exists in a box – to function in-between the confines of a Western white cube and an alternative virtual space. In other words, the formal qualities of the exhibition complex for *The princess in the veld* refer to a place of otherness, or a heterotopia, offering a liminal space for the selected works to be read.

Stewart’s (1993:71) middle-ground comprises the typical gallery’s semi-permanent fixtures such as lighting and gallery furniture. For the purposes of my exhibition the middle-ground refers to the packaging and presentation of the exhibition as a series of catalogues and films in a box, the space that contains the artworks. Due to its

associations with book presentation, the narrative quality of the exhibition is reinforced.

Lastly, the foreground refers to the selected artworks which have been chosen for their allusion to the curatorial theme of gendered spaces, extrapolated from four African and European fairy tales. The selected artworks are displayed and organised in a manner which renders an alternative narrative of local female identity.

1.1.6 The exhibition as heterotopian space

Given the emphasis on the curatorial space, along with the ongoing turmoil around South African historical, cultural and political agendas, this research has demanded an investigation of space. Here, the notion of heterotopia serves to demarcate the conceptual underpinning of this curatorial project, and my proposal of an alternative space could provoke associations with the transformation of a post-African female identity. This would be distinct from the stereotypically-inscribed, gendered spaces informed by patriarchal and colonial ideologies.

This 'space of otherness' was introduced by Foucault (1986:22-27). He (Foucault 1986:22-27) theorises that this type of place exists in relation to other existing sites, drawing on the importance of power relations, subjectivities and knowledge development. It is argued that such spaces are better suited to represent liminal subject positions of difference. Female protagonists in fairy tales¹⁹ tend to find themselves in discordant spaces, evoked and Africanised here by the incongruity between a *princess* and the *veld* in the title of this study and exhibition. It is within these 'other' spaces, or heterotopias, where identity comes of age.

Just as Ramírez (1996:22) cautions against the attempt to shape a more "democratic space" as mentioned above, so Irit Rogoff (2002:72) warns that curators should not "indulge in the multicultural management of inclusiveness", and instead should reconsider the "management" of the "prevailing perspective of the West". As this research specifies, this task that could be achieved through the application of a feminist interrogation of curatorial practice.

¹⁹It should be noted that the fixed understanding of identity evident in the selected fairy tales is not implied in this study; instead these tales are used to emphasise moments or instances in transformation, and do not discount an essentialised view of the self. This study does not intend to analyse or comment on the content or portrayal of these tales, and they should be seen merely as visual enactments of existing social norms.

It is with such perspectives in mind that here, my curatorial response was to create “a space of vulnerability” (Enwezor quoted in Brenson 1998:19), informed by post-African concerns. This allows for multiple histories, geographies, and dialogues to shift back and forth between the artworks. It is proposed that a curatorial practice that is suspended “between two extreme poles”, to expose “every real space” (Foucault 1986:27), could serve the ideology of a liminal post-African female identity emancipation. Once dialogue around the notion of liminal selves begins, a revived aggregation of colonial history may be achieved, which could also allow for the opening and accessing of creative opportunities for the future.

In the wake of South Africa’s first democratic elections, the Rainbow Nation²⁰ ideal could be considered an echo of Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, or an ‘other’ space. However, in its commitment to a mythical belief in the future, here symbolised by the rainbow as indicative of a ‘unified ray of difference’, the emphasis on colour merely reinforces the cultural divisions cast by the previous regime, and highlights dogmatic reasoning. Nonetheless, the rainbow is reflected in the South African flag, and has become a national symbol of unity in diversity or multiculturalism.

But Foucault’s (1986:24) description of utopia²¹ is closer to South Africa’s reality: a “site[s] with no real place”. A rainbow, being the result of refracted sunlight in drops of rain, also has implications with Foucault’s (1986:24) metaphor of the mirror as “a placeless place” when illustrating utopian ordering. Foucault (1986:24) states that, coincidentally, the mirror functions as a heterotopia in so far as it exists and counteracts positions occupied.

In contemplating South African female identity, the notion of heterotopia allows for a “sort of mixed, joint experience” (Foucault 1986:24), namely a point where aspects of history, culture, geography, and politics that exist in both utopian philosophies and harsh reality meet and resonate. Similarly, in-between the utopias and the real spaces they intend to reflect, Foucault (1986:24) positions counter-sites – such as the space inhabited by the exhibition of this study – as heterotopias that exist but are

²⁰ The notion of the rainbow nation is a term first coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu after the 1994 elections, to represent an image of multiculturalism and the promise of the future within the notion of democracy. Rainbow nation ideals are often seen as a myth and criticised for attempting to gloss over domestic and political issues within South Africa (Habib 1996:1).

²¹ The notion of utopia, in its original form, is derived from the Greek οὐ (not) and τόπος (place), and suggests a place that doesn’t exist. The term’s heterograph, eutopia, derived from the Greek εὖ (good) and τόπος (place) alludes to a better or ideal place. An amalgamation of these definitions was appropriated by Thomas More through the title of his 1516 novel, *Utopia*, which is built around the premise of a fictional island governed by rational thought (Graham 2012:62).

simultaneously located “outside of all places”. It is this ‘other space’, as proposed by my curatorial model, that intends to clarify the liminal accounts of identity as laid out in this research.

1.1.7 Curating fairy tale narratives

Within the scope and focus of this curatorial project, fairy tale scenarios are used only as a tool to extrapolate the normative constructs found in society, as highlighted by the predisposition of space. Here, the fairy tale – an example of the *Bildungsroman*²² genre – serves as a metaphor for the notion of utopian becoming, and as such may be extended to include the emancipation of women.²³

The popular fairy tale presents the notion of a ‘novel of formation’, in other words, it is concerned with plotting the coming-of-age of its protagonist(s). A fairy tale of European origin generally will narrate a story around a central character who either wanders or is led into a forest – a discordant space for her/him, in opposition to the usual European spaces of order. Here, the coming-of-age – a significant transformation – takes place as the result of this experience. Similar associations are made in tales of South African origin, and to this end the *veld* is used as an antithesis to the forest. The *veld* – flowing, levelled grasslands of Savannah particularly associated with the South African landscape – illustrates Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1988:381) “smooth space” of the nomad, but again, is a discordant space for a princess. This sense of ‘other’, unfamiliar space intensifies the transgressive possibilities for generating identity.

²² Friedrich von Blackenburg in *Essay on the novel* (1774) originally suggested the term, which was later coined by Karl Morgenstern, during lectures at the University of Dorpat (Estonia) during the 1820s. The theory was later popularised by Wilhelm Dilthey in *Poetry and experience* (1870). The German origin of the word outlines the importance of didactics as *Bildung* translates to ‘education’ while *roman* refers to the novel (Boes 2006:230-231). More recently, Jerome Hamilton Buckley has made numerous contributions to debates around the novel of formation – most notably the broad taxonomic definition set out in *Season of youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974). Buckley (1974:18) describes a *Bildungsroman* as a novel that exemplifies two or three of a set of characteristics, including “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy”. Departing from its German origin, Buckley contributed extensively to the British novel of formation during the 1970s but was strongly criticised by feminist critics for the phallogocentric premises promoted by his interpretation of traditional novels of formation (Boes 2006: 234).

²³ It is important to note that, within the context of this research, the association of the fairy tale with the *Bildungsroman* tradition is limited to the narrative’s accounts of formations, coming-of-age and transformation as a genre. The tradition’s modernist approach, historicism, and patriarchal approach to narrative formations are not relevant for this project and do not serve its means. As such, discussions are limited to fairy tale narratives and their link to the *Bildungsroman*’s genre of coming-of-age tales.

The fairy tale holds contemporary relevance via the following two emphases. The first emphasis embedded in the genre's intention is the way that normative constructs are revealed as prevailing boundaries in society, often through the stereotypical framing of gender. The second emphasis on the coming-of-age narrative reiterates the notion of becoming, and establishes an alternative, liminal space which comprises "fragments produced by the tensions within the contradictory space" (Hetherington 1997:23).

From a feminist perspective, in her essay, *The novel of self-discovery*, Rita Felski (1986:131) explains that fairy tale narratives set up the process of 'becoming woman' as a potentially oppositional force to male identity, contending that female identity is formed as a "potentially oppositional force to existing social and cultural values". Here, the fairy tale – or the novel of formation – clearly illustrates such categories.

In addition, for the purpose of this research, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986:19-24) application of the *Bildungsroman* genre supports the supposition of transformation, as the identity of the protagonist shifts "along with the world" and, consequently, "reflects the historical emergence of the world itself". This enables her/his identity to be no longer fixed, but instead to be "on the border or between two epochs",²⁴ or liminal in nature.

Similarly, the fairy tale protagonist mirrors the knowledge and desire that originates from within a particular space-time continuum. In most such tales, the leading figure, usually aged around puberty (which emphasises unavoidable transformation), is situated in a restrictive setting common to the prevailing social order. It is because of the reduced limits conditioning her/his space that the character transforms. I argue that Bakhtin's version of identity formation signals Foucault's concept of heterotopia, in that the subject mirrors the social discourses that ultimately will render him/her liminal.

The fairy tale narrative genre contains an embedded sense of growth which underscores the importance of evolution in this study. This relates in particular towards the way women are striving towards emancipation; towards reconsidering

²⁴Bakhtin's suggestion of characters developing "along with the world" is prevalent in discussions around fairy tales, especially when comparing various versions of the same tale. Historical references, cultural practice and social conventions are paid much attention in each revision, and so echo the assumption of identity comprising various aspects rooted in a spatiotemporal context.

the representation of South African women; and towards the transfiguration of curatorial articulation.²⁵

1.1.8 Curating in a feminist mode

Recently, much interest has developed globally around discursive exploration of curatorship. The lack of inquiry around the “context, motives, strategies and impact of feminist curatorial practice” (Dimitrakaki & Perry 2013:2) has led this research towards the proposal of an alternative, inclusionary, feminist curatorial stance that is able to present liminal renderings of the South African female self.

When advocating to a feminist method of curating, it is not enough to merely include women within the curatorial ambit. It is necessary to articulate a specific feminist agenda which aims to transgress current dominant practices, and to institute alternatives. Here, I refer to Dorothee Richter (2016: 64-67), who summarises the underpinning of a feminist curatorial project by stating that a feminist curatorial praxis engages in “re-contextualizing, historicising, localising and being aware of the political demands and alliances” as curating of this kind is political in nature. To clarify, such a project should unsettle rather than affirm conventional gender roles; and the feminist curatorial project should reflect history factually, rather than prioritising “artistic geniuses”, art movements or geographies, emphasising “transgressive practices” (Richter 2016:64). Finally, the feminist project should offer institutional critique, that is, it should question the “context of the exhibition, using curatorial methods to unsettle the curatorial authorship of an exhibition’s discourse on truth” (Richter 2016:66).

With Richter’s points in mind, I have integrated certain aspects of feminist curatorial practice with *The princess in the veld*, shifting towards a feminist sensibility regarding the deconstruction and interrogation of any analyses, historical facts, and theories around the practice of curating that are appropriate to my perspective. The translation of feminist thought to feminist curatorial practice is supported by a non-monolithic, paradoxical and revisionist stance, which should be rooted in feminism’s mission for transformation and differentiation from within.

²⁵The association with feminist discourse is not intended as part of the historical understanding of the Western feminist movement, but instead as an extension thereof – an ‘other’ space of knowledge – which simultaneously alludes to mainstream feminist criticism and opposes it, by situating itself as a separate South African discourse on feminism and art production by women.

To devise an appropriate feminist curatorial approach that could best represent my understanding of a liminal, post-African female identity, I embark on an investigation of historical and contemporary works by South African women artists. Consequently, my curatorial framework encompasses both the construction of local feminist historical narratives, and an intervention in existing narratives about South African women. Through my selection and unconventional presentation of contemporary artworks by women, I intend to unveil new connections, meanings and interpretations, and offer an alternative reading regarding the position of the post-African woman.

My proposed curatorial strategy is first and foremost feminist in nature. The simplistic question always raised is 'what is feminism?'. However, feminism cannot be reduced to a singular, conclusive definition, and the context of this question remains primary to its method of enquiry. Elke Krasny (2015:52) argues that it is exactly this critical stance towards feminism that promotes its methodologies' perpetual processes of reinvention and regeneration. Feminism's questioning nature, eternal need for re-negotiation and unsettling of conventional thinking both influences and underscores the curatorial framework of this study.

Similarly, a feminist approach to curatorship demands a theory and praxis able to advocate a variety of feminist positions, in particular, here, aspects of African feminism. For Pinkie Mekgwe (2006:21-22), the notion of "Africa(n)" stresses the need for ways of questioning the feminist position that is "neither stagnant nor parochial but crucially, relevant, not to an Africa denoted by prepositional time (postcolonial), but to present-day Africa." Correspondingly, in striving to avoid the categorisation of the institution of Africa as merely a representation of the 'other',²⁶ Mohanty (2003:2) calls for "feminism without borders"; in other words, the inclusion of non-Western women in feminist narratives, and the recognition of the "fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders present". Considering the viewpoints of Mekgwe and Mohanty, throughout my theoretical and practical investigations, my curatorial position evolved by applying feminist principles of an ever-evolving questioning nature to acknowledge the various feminisms, narratives and histories simultaneously.

²⁶ A term used in feminist and postcolonial discourse to describe a subject's condition of "non-conformity" to an established norm in which power is vested, and refers to marginalised and alienated groups (Bullock & Trombley 2004: 620). For the purposes of this study, the other will be employed to refer to both female gender and racial identity, neither of which conform to patriarchal and/or colonial metanarratives.

With *The princess in the veld*, I attempt to extend the critical space for the curating of exhibitions around South African female identity through a sustained forging of ideals. Since these often prove evident of patriarchal and colonial ideals, my curatorial stance aims to highlight women's challenges through a representation of the negotiation of the survival of self inside existing norms.

During my research, I also consider the opinions of the following four theorists around the construction of identity, which I deem relevant to my feminist curatorial framework.

Homi K. Bhabha (1996:37) considers forms of knowledge based on stereotypes to be regulated, fixed and reductionist, stating strongly that "it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder degeneracy and daemonic repetition". According to Bhabha (1986:174), when normative constructs become fluid and/or clouded, patriarchal authority and colonial practices in the reading of the self are exposed. As a reaction against the "disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority" – which unsettles the accepted dualities that exist within orthodox knowledge systems – by means of simultaneously alluding to and asserting their dominant *loci* of knowledge, conventional society institutes these alternative subject organisations as hybrids (Bhabha 1986:174).

Stuart Hall (2000:21-3) maintains that identity may be interpreted as a "production which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside, representation", and is reliant upon "deep and significant difference, which constitutes 'what we really are'."

Added to this, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997:10) argues for African female identity to be a social production, reliant upon culture and history – an aspect that disputes the notion of a universal sameness when considering multiculturalism; although some instances of commonality might be present within different cultural structures.

In addition, identity suggests a liminal understanding of the self, which Rosi Braidotti (1996:4) refers to as a form of "[non]-unitary [...], nomadic, dispersed, fragmented" subjectivity, which is "functional, coherent and accountable, mostly because it is embedded and embodied", claiming that this hybridised, polyvocal, fluid embodiment, presupposes a continual process of becoming, and promotes an open-ended derivative of the self.

I view the shaping of identity as fluid within the curatorial space, and founded on historical, social and cultural inferences. When thinking of identity as instances of overlap between difference and sameness, a multitude of positions of the self are set up, particularly concerning existing norms instituted by patriarchal and colonial organisations.

1.1.9 *In-between positions and liminal identities*

The French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep describes liminality as the ambiguous second rite of the triage of stages undertaken by individuals during rituals, in his seminal book *Rites de Passage* (1909).²⁷ The liminal stage, as originally defined by Van Gennep, was later taken up and expanded upon by Mary Douglas (1966:122), when she stated “margins are dangerous”. She viewed social transition as threatening, since an individual in such a position, being neither here nor there, is not bound by particular constraints, so her/his status is temporarily undefined. Victor W. Turner (1967:96, original emphasis) elaborates on Douglas’s view of the in-between as possessing transgressive potential. He suggests that the “liminal *persona*” highlights the “transition itself” instead of the “particular states between which it is taking place”, so as to appear “at once no longer classified and not yet classified.” Turner’s emphasis here is on alteration, and this notion includes the transformative and utopian possibilities for subjects positioned on the threshold of culture, society and knowledge systems.

I make use of the concept of liminal to describe that which is in-between, on the verge, or on the threshold, as an exemplar for considering post-African women’s identities. Significant from my perspective is the concept’s allusion to the transgression of boundaries, its imminent fluidity, temporality, and movement, the way it exposes binaries, and its inability to be categorised.

The notion of transgression is also embedded in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987:6-13) coining of the term ‘rhizome’ (cf. section 1.1.4). They attribute six organising principles to the notion of rhizome namely: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, “a signifying rupture”, cartography and decalcomania. Their explanation of a rhizome is that of an entity having no end and no beginning, but as existing always in the middle

²⁷ Van Gennep (1960:23) distinguishes between preliminal, liminal (or threshold) and post-liminal rites – or alternatively, separation, margin and aggregation – which form his famous tripartite theorisation of ritual passages.

and between things (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:6). This could equally suggest a liminal view of identity formation. Rhizomes embody “a centred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system” and are related to all manner of becomings, in other words, they open the potential for multiple subject positions in which the self can be asserted (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:21).

This rhizomatic arrangement offers my curatorial counter-space a liminal reading of the curated artworks, and of the female identities that may be deduced from them. In this way, liminality is read in conjunction with the process of becoming, as a temporary and transitory occupation of locations and subject positions. Here, liminality implies a constant flow, rather than fixed notions of ideas, and also relates to Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic theory of subjectivity.²⁸

Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic theory, Braidotti (2002:7; 265) interprets female identity as the “effect of the constant flows or in-between interconnections”. She suggests a transient view of identity, requiring the “actualisation of multiple differences” to engage in an “open-ended series of complexities”. Braidotti’s theories around female identity are embodied and corporeal, and aimed at the collapse of phallogocentric ordering through the dismissing of binary constructions. Aligning her theory with Luce Irigaray, Braidotti (2002:21) argues that the body is a “complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces”, where signs operate without “originals”. Situated in opposition to patriarchal control, Braidotti (2002:72) claims that the feminine – or ‘other’ – is “a complex, heterogeneous, non-unitary entity”, constantly in the process of becoming so as never to settle or affix itself, but rather to remain fluid through negotiating the self consistently.

Braidotti’s theories also underscore a feminist desire to depart from the fixed notions of identity promoted by dominant systems of thought, such as patriarchy, colonialism and apartheid. In this regard, they may be employed as the basis for an exploration into the creation of an alternative formation of the self, including the choosing of more transformative and transgressive modes of agency, fluidity, and an interstitial position of identity.

My curatorial framework is influenced by these theorists, in particular, Braidotti’s theory of becoming and liminality, and the positioning of the self as interstitial – within

²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari (1988:380) suggest that the nomad has a “territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points [...]”.

the interfaces between binaries. By examining the curated exhibitions of foreground women's concerns, and through selecting artworks for *The princess in the veld*, I explore the concept of identity as multiple, interstitial, fluid and heterogeneous. My choice of exhibition medium and form, as discussed before (cf. sections 1.1.4 and 1.1.5) equally relate to notions around the alternative and the fluid, and provokes an interruption of conventions.

1.1.10 Post-African female identity

I use the term post-African as it denotes transformation and reinvention, and allows for reinvigorated subject positions previously rendered impossible or obsolete by the restrictions of postcolonialism.

Anne McClintock (1992:85) views postcolonialism as a staid theory, inadequate in its reliance upon linear time and the chronology of enlightened thought it wishes to demolish, and continues that this limitation merely permits “[c]olonialism [to] return ... at the moment of its disappearance.” The “historical rupture” propounded by the prefix ‘post’, debunks the disruptions of power that have framed the history of colonial empires, and accordingly, McClintock (1992:88) questions the:

[o]rientation of the emerging discipline and its concomitant theories and curricula changes, around a singular, monolithic term, organised around a binary axis of time rather than power and, which in its premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism, runs the risk of obscuring the continuities of colonial and imperial power.

Added to this, the singular designation ‘the’ as generally applied to this kind of term – such as here, ‘the postcolonial’) reduces theorisation to that of a solitary history that “run[s] the risk of telescoping crucial geopolitical distinctions into invisibility”. The term cannot account meaningfully for the multi-ethnic, cultural and social dispensation of Africa, and specifically South Africa’s multicultural organisation (McClintock 1992:85-86).

The continuation of colonial repression embedded in the term postcolonial, contravenes the intentions set out as the basis for this research. As such, to reveal such prevailing oppressive instances and explore a refreshed view of local (female) identity, I prefer the term post-Africanism. This term was first put forward by Denis

Ekpo (1995) in an essay *Towards a post-Africanism: contemporary African thought and postmodernism*, and has been fostered both as new, productive way to think about Africa, and to offer a corollary to postcolonialism (Ekpo 2010:181):

[I]t [post-Africanism] is a post-ideological umbrella for a diversity of intellectual strategies seeking to inscribe newer, more creative moves beyond the age-old fixations, obsessions and petrifications of thinking that had crystallised in and around the racial-cultural worries not only of the Negritude generation but also the so-called postcolonial zeitgeist. [...] Post-Africanism was proposed as an attempt first to deconstruct the disaster-prone emotionalism, hubris and paranoias indwelling to most ideologies of Africanism whether in art, politics or development discourse and, second, to seek newer fresher conditions for a more performative African intellectual engagement with Africa, modernity and the West.

In keeping with this line of thinking, the term post-African is employed here because of the desire to deconstruct Africanism (both the essentialist search for a unifying African sense of self, and a panoptic glance to the past). Ekpo (2010:182) criticises postcolonialism for devoting its resources mostly towards “settling futile scores with imperialism” as opposed to developing intellectually. Instead, he demands a “total affirmation of all that colonial history has brought down upon” Africa – a strategy best claimed by the term, post-Africanism.

Ekpo (2010:179) suggests that an African reintegration with the world of modernity is possible though becoming “not what it had been but what it had never been”. He continues that Africanity does not take its origin from an empirical reality, or from a shared, homogenising culture during the pre-colonial periods. He further suggests that multiple tribal cultures is “counter-heritage” to modernity, and so the notion of a collective African culture contributing to a “common national or continental vehicle for an African path to modernisation” is a misapprehension (Ekpo 2010:180). Instead, Ekpo (2010:181) recommends that it would be advantageous “to try to redeem Africa from too much Africanism”. In this sense, the notion of post-Africanism relates to the present, where Africa is understood as multiple, yet aware and cognisant of its various histories, cultures and societies.

Post-Africanism calls for a present where Africa leaves behind its “vengeful, impotent anti-imperialism” – a “massive disburdening of mind and vision” (Ekpo 2010:183). Ekpo (1995:134) also states that a positive form of Post-Africanism requires “manipulating modernity’s tools to transform Africa”. The focus here would be not to

“invent new theories or radicalise existing ones but to propose a [...] rescue of the postcolonial subject from the bewitchments of either paranoid Africanism or mesmerised worship of Western idols” (Ekpo 2010:183-184).

In line with this thinking, Ekpo (2010:186, original emphasis) asserts that a post-African approach in the field of arts should enthuse a new African spirit:

A post-Africanist art is summoned by positive force to the role of an avant-garde to imagine and play midwife to a redeemed future. In other words, art in the post-Africanist sense is the requisite pregnancy that can deliver a *counter-future* to the current postcolonial stillbirth of modernity. [...]. Post-Africanist art can serve as the chief purveyor and promoter of Africa’s new cultural health, no longer pathologically urged to bleed from the old scars of history or perpetually to blame others, but now able to use past wounds as stimulants to faster growth. For post-Africanist art to serve as a stimulant to the new hopes of Africa, the new artist must necessarily desist from all defensive cultural protectionism and no longer adopt the victim’s mien [...].

It is this post-African “counter-future” that my research imagines as an alternative subject position and view of local women, through its consideration of contemporary and historical artistic expressions.

1.2 Preliminary outline of chapters

The study comprises two parts – a thesis and a practical component – and is devised in a manner whereby both parts should be considered simultaneously, as each informs the other. The theoretical argument of the thesis is premised on the contribution towards a liminal understanding of local female identity that could be made by mindful curation. The study relies on initial research into and then critical interpretation of key local and international exhibitions produced by curators from 1980 up to the present. To select appropriate artworks, these curators concentrated on women artists and their social concerns as revealed in their work. This research and subsequent analysis serves to strengthen the theorised curatorial method as both outlined in the thesis, and as demonstrated in my practical curatorial project.

Chapter Two commences with an interrogation of the shortfalls and successes of Morineau’s *elle@centrepompidou* the museum’s collection – with an emphasis on

the exclusion of non-Western women artists. While as a curator, one of Morineau's imposed limitations was to select only women artists from the museum's collection – predominantly white Western artists – I propose a series of local artworks that could have made provision for a more inclusive curatorial stance on her part, had she offered sufficient motivation to lessen this gap in representation. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the proposed curatorial perspective generated by this research.

In Chapter Three I offer a revision of certain key exhibitions intent on foregrounding women during the South African pre-democracy era (1980 – 1993). I consider the contributions not only of women artists, but also of women exhibition curators, art theorists, museum curators and gallerists, who all contributed to opening discourse around the complex topics underlying the many aspects of post-African female identity. This encouraged further discussion around significant concerns of the time, such as the art and craft debate, the exclusion of black women artists from the mainstream art arena, and that political rather than feminist issues were the subject of most of the artwork produced during that timeframe.

Chapter Four continues the historical revisionist reading of local women-focused exhibitions, but here throughout the post-apartheid era (1994 – the present). The transformation of the post-African female self is traced by pinpointing key exhibitions and artworks that challenged the dominant curatorial practices based on patriarchal and colonial ideals, to highlight the significant and mindset-shifting contributions made by women to the South African visual arts field. I look at the impact of the apartheid policies on the art market in both the poor opportunities available for artmaking by black women artists, and their consequent under-representation; as well as the shortage of black women curators and art theorists.

Wishing to participate in the construction of an alternative narrative of local feminist art practice, my analysis of the local exhibitions in the two preceding chapters allows for the introduction of my own exhibition, *The princess in the veld*, which forms part of this research. I describe and validate my curatorial position by referring to its capacity to account for liminal expressions of local female selves through four themes related to fairy tales. I also outline my formation of a heterotopian curatorial space to offer alternative readings of South African female identity.

Chapter Five presents a full discussion around *The princess in the veld*, defining the theories around my chosen curatorial stance. Here I explore, thematically, four

identified female-gendered situations, related to the fairy tales. In addition, I expand on the exhibition's spatial considerations, proposing that this is a place where liminal identity could be founded, and examine video as an exhibiting medium from a similar perspective. This chapter serves as the theoretical underpinning for the practical curatorial project component of this study, and outlines the feminist curatorial strategy followed to account for liminal and transformative post-African identity.

The research concludes in Chapter Six by delineating the key concerns raised within the study as a means of outlining the contribution of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

CURATING WOMEN THROUGH UPDATING PARADOXES AND HISTORY

The practice of curating actively participates in the production of ideology and identity. Considering the game-changing impact of the emergence of discursive practices of curating over the last few decades – where practice and discourse are interlaced to question the production of knowledge that emanates from art (O’Neill 2012:7) – it is necessary to investigate the feminist impulse in the realm of curatorship. It is especially important, given the early critique of women artists’ exclusion from institutional canonisation, for example, as premised in 1971 by Nochlin’s legendary essay, *Why have there been no great women artists?*

Politics in a glass case: Feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions by Dimitrakaki and Perry (2013:2) signals the period since 2007 as a “rehabilitation effort” of the story of feminism in the art world through numerous high-profile projects¹ centred on feminist concerns, including *elles@centrepompidou*. In addition, a conference hosted by Stockholm’s Moderna Museet in 2008, *Feminism, historiographies and curatorial practice*, instigated by Skrubbe and Hayden, furthered this “rehabilitation effort” through an expansive consideration of curatorial practice with a feminist political agenda. Dimitrikaki and Perry (2013:4) note that such discourse lays bare the omissions in “knowledge of feminism’s impact on past art worlds, the representation of feminist practice in art collections and exhibitions, and [the] desire to contribute to feminism’s present struggles that continue to claim today’s art world as a site of protest.”

elles@centrepompidou is positioned within this framework of interrogation – an inquiry that prompted Morineau’s reshuffling of artworks extracted from the museum’s collection, with female gender as the primary criterion for selection. In its formal layout within the museum, *elles@centrepompidou* spans the fourth and fifth levels. On level four, Morineau installs the contemporary pieces around six themes; while level five presents an arrangement of Modern artworks produced by women,

¹ Dimitrikaki and Perry (2013:2) makes particular reference to the opening of the Elizabeth Sackler Centre for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 2007; as well as the ‘Second Museum of Our Wishes programme which assisted in raising funds to expand the acquisition of women’s art for the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. 2007 also marks the launch of a series of “blockbuster” exhibitions hosted by leading museums in America and Europe: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the

curated not thematically, but in a more consciously time-linear way, and these are displayed alongside works by their male counterparts from the same periods and/or art movements.²

This chapter lays the foundation for a revised, feminist approach to curating that could showcase liminality as embedded in post-African female identity. I embark here on a critical exploration of *elles@centrepompidou* by referring to Morineau's curatorial strategy. This chapter is led by a discussion around the ramifications of an all-women exhibition, and Morineau's restricting application of the appellation of women. My critique includes examining Morineau's approach to the deconstruction of master narratives in her curation of *elles@centrepompidou*, as well as her lack of innovative revisionism which results in the exclusion of others. Although Morineau favours a thematic approach to structure her curatorial strategy, this gesture is not fully realised, and not integrated into global readings of women. This extends my discussion to an analysis of the curatorial themes of *elles@centrepompidou*, where I aim to examine these as being complicit in an existing, Western-oriented, feminist canon which excludes non-Western – and, in particular, post-African - subjects.³

My analysis also proposes alternative strategies for a more inclusive approach. It provides, by way of example, an extended reading of Morineau's curatorial themes on level four, whereby the post-African woman could be considered. I set up a theoretical co-curation by assessing an artwork by a South African woman artist which could accompany each of Morineau's themes, my objective here being to widen the scope of these themes to include post-African subjects. The mere addition of artworks by non-Western artists would dilute curatorship to just a process of selection, and dismiss the complex task of the curator as a producer of new meaning. As such, I propose the addition of post-African artists' work as a collaborative addendum to Morineau's project. My aim here is to add my own curatorial voice in-between those of others, and to stimulate further polyvocal and

² On level four, the six themes around which Morineau's exploration is arranged are *Fire at will*, *The body-slogan*, *Eccentric abstraction*, *A room of one's own*, *Words at work* and *Immaterials*. Morineau does not view the level five presentations, entitled *Pioneering women*, as part of the exhibition's thematic organisation, although there is a deliberate attempt to avoid a strict chronological approach.

³ It is understood that Morineau's project was limited to the availability of work that forms part of the museum's permanent collection. This largely comprises Northern European and American women artists' work. The critique against Morineau is not merely premised on her exclusion of artists' work that originate from non-Western centres (because of the limited selection offered by the museum's collection), but also on her formulation and subsequent interpretation of the themes from a Western feminist stance. It is this shortcoming – the exclusionary construal of knowledge and meaning – that I wish to address.

inclusive discourse around women artists' contributions to feminism, past and present.

2.1 A women-only show?

As evident in the title of *elles@centrepompidou*, one requirement for the exhibition's selection criteria stipulates a single-sex display of artwork. However, this demands a critical unpicking of the category: women – a deconstruction that must recognise both global and local feminist frameworks in its extension beyond gender difference. Despite Morineau's refraining from engaging in such discourse for fear of claims of essentialism, in my opinion her failure to successfully unpack the category, *women*, in curating the museum's collection, has caused the exhibition to lose a certain impact.

Hayden (2010:57) criticises single-sex exhibitions, and explains that “the issue of the producer's sex is still a (too dominant) – and sometimes misleading – premise for how to understand and think in strategic feminist terms.” From this viewpoint, it is also important to note that the approach to select artworks created only by women does not automatically foreclose a feminist curatorial strategy, but instead provokes the prospect for works to become essentialised as ‘women's art’, thus implying difference based merely on the artist's gender. I argue that a curatorial stance that interrogates the very structures responsible for the marginalisation of women is necessitated by an exhibition that employs gender and/or sex as one of its selection criteria.

elles@centrepompidou presents a selection of 500 artworks, and Morineau's stated aim is to “neither show[s] that female art exists, nor to produce a feminist event, but to present [...] a hanging that appears to offer a good history of twentieth-century art” (2009b:16).⁴ As mentioned earlier, the artworks in the exhibition were drawn from the museum's collection, and features predominantly American and Western European women artists most commonly associated with feminist art from the 1970s onwards.⁵

⁴ While Morineau (2009b:16) aims to steer clear from a “feminist event”, much of her exploration of the themes selected makes direct reference to the history of Western feminism, and seminal feminist texts and/or exhibitions by Linda Nochlin, Joan W. Scott and Griselda Pollock to name but a few. I argue that this tentative engagement with feminism detracts from Morineau's curatorial stance as it leaves the framework for the selection of the artworks open for critique, and this would justify a feminist reading.

⁵ Although no concrete evidence about the inclusion of non-Western women in the exhibition exists, a brief glance at the catalogue, which provides each artist's country of origin, suggests that about 10 percent of the works originate from South America, Africa and India collectively. As mentioned earlier,

Morineau (2009:17, emphasis added) qualifies her women-only exhibition as an attempt “to show that representation of women versus men is, ultimately, no longer important”, and “seeks to be universal *despite* that criterion” and undermines a curatorial focus in its feminist aims. Instead of exploring the category, *women*, in relation to the category, *men*, Morineau circumvents scrutiny of the term. Her qualifying statement, which proclaims universalism, endorses this.

While women and men do not have to be in opposition, it is naïve to imagine that such binary classifications do not exist. By omitting to explore of the category, women, in relation to the category, men, Morineau circumvents scrutiny of the term. While equality between the sexes remains at the forefront of feminist agendas, Morineau’s absolving of gender categories, and her eroding away of differences with similitude, posits her women-favoured project uncomfortably. Her lack of accounting for gender-specific experiences that emanate from biological, political, cultural and sexual realms runs the risk of producing homogenised identities, thereby reinforcing marginalisation through its strategic essentialism.

In her attempt to avoid reductive readings, Morineau (2009:16-17) opts to defend her focus on women as a mere “updating of a paradox”,⁶ but omitting some significant ways to ‘update’, such as investigating the category, women. Instead, viewers are confronted with a narrow understanding of the contradicting forces at play. Although the exhibition features artworks across a variety of genres, and aims to stimulate multiplicity of meaning, Morineau’s critical lack of engagement with the category, women, ultimately excludes her approach towards women’s relation to men from the perspectives of heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual and other queer identities. This serves, in part, to negate the sense of plurality desired by a curatorial strategy based around women, and which is integral to the politics of feminism’s agenda of inclusivity (Holland 2010:433).

In addition to Morineau’s one-dimensional exploration of gender within the exhibition, an exploration of race, which is inextricably linked to gender and at the heart of

the majority of the artworks in this exhibition are produced by American and European female artists. This imbalance is indicative of the lack of representation of art produced by non-Western women within the already slim collection of art produced by women acquired by the museum.

⁶ Morineau (2009b:16) premises the exhibition around the “updating of a paradox” – a phrase directly related to Joan W. Scott’s analysis of the contradictory situation of women: on one hand, differences between men and women were viewed as irrelevant; yet, on the other, the mere fact of acting on behalf of women reinforced the notion of difference. *Only paradoxes to offer: French feminists and the rights of man* (Scott 1996) traces the continuous occurrence of this paradox of feminism in the work of four French feminist activists, namely Olympe de Gouges, Jeanne Deroin, Hubertine Auclert and Madeleine Pelletier.

global feminist enquiries, is also avoided. I argue that, despite the limitations imposed by the museum's collection, the project could have become more influential if the history she wished to portray in an 'updated' format has been redressed in a more inclusive manner. Notwithstanding the limited scope of the collection, Morineau could have employed other curatorial strategies, such projections or other multimedia inclusions of artworks, produced by non-Western artists, to showcase the pivotal contributions these artists have made to the feminist narrative. Such an approach would also have highlighted the shortcomings of the museum's collection and perhaps cast it in a less favourable light.

In addition to this, this project would have benefitted from introducing debate around the significant lack of non-Western women artists whose work forms part of the museum's collection. This reference could have included a discursive essay in the catalogue on the ways that non-Western women artists are part of the global tale of feminism. In addition, a clarification within this context of the category, woman – beyond the subcategory of the white, Western women artists whose work is commonly acquired by the museum's collection – would have yielded new curatorial insights, and Morineau's (2009b:16) "updating of a paradox" would have been realised. The curator's lack of engagement with the subject of race within feminism leads to "reductive definitions of 'women artists' and 'women's art' as homogenous categories of alterity" (Meskimmon 2003:2). A curatorial process that considers the medium of the exhibition (cf. section 1.1.4), along with the histories of feminism it aims to expand upon, may have secured a fresh, inclusive and open-ended revision – or 'updating' – of women's histories as Meskimmon (2003:3, original emphasis) explains:

[A] shift from object to process, from an ontology of being to one of becoming, is the crucial component of thinking beyond an economy of the same, of the already-known. If we ask 'what *is* a woman artist' or 'what *is* women's art', we fall back into the logic of objectification and marginality, but if we take the lead and enquire into how women's art comes to articulate sexual difference in its material specificity and at its particular historical locus, the potential to generate new answers, ideas and concepts is endless.

It is this exploration of difference and its embodiment into social, cultural and political norms and constraints that Morineau seems to disregard. *elles@centrepompidou* homogenises gender identity and contradicts, for instance, Braidotti's (2006:43)

request for “a nomadic, non-unitary vision of the [female] subject.” I argue that a curatorial project envisioned to revise an alternative narrative of feminist concerns necessitates a liminal repositioning, where both sameness and difference are able to populate identity construction; or as Turner (1967:97) contends, a state of being in-between hegemonic categories, “betwixt and between’ all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification”.

My curatorial strategy here is to explore the category, women, beyond institutional structures, with the intention of setting up its own constellation. In other words, to create a counter-space that mirrors difference (from master narratives) and sameness (in its acknowledgement of such narratives) that, as Topinka (2006:76) argues, “reflects and contests simultaneously”. An alternative feminist narrative built upon a fluid and temporal understanding of identity with the possibility of perpetual reinvention would become a “necessary precondition for the expression of an ethics that reflects the complexities of our times” (Braidotti 2006:43).

In addition to the unravelling of the category, women, in sexualised terms, Morineau’s retrospective exhibition also lacks the exploration of ‘women’ in the broader historical, political and social sense. This, in relation to the present, globalised dispensation, results in her exclusionary readings around the contributions of non-Western women artists. In this regard, I suggest a curatorial stance that fulfills an inclusionary emphasis in its entirety, while eschewing the desire for universalism or biological determinism. This kind of feminist approach would be premised simultaneously on the employment of multiple voices and a disassembly of the very structures that produce (and maintain) marginalised subjects. Nancy Proctor (2013:51) elaborates on a curatorial gesture that rests upon the former:

[F]irst they must both include new voices in the museum’s discourses, empowering communities and previously marginalised constituencies to shape the conversation around museum collections, exhibitions and programmes as those collections and programmes are also expanded to include discursive ‘others’; secondly, they must dismantle and re-engineer the very structures that produced that marginalisation and silencing in the first place, lest the pattern simply be repeated again as new actors are cast in the role of excluded ‘others’ and eventually revolt in their own turn.

While Morineau’s aim of reinstating a feminist trajectory of art produced by women as an auxiliary to existing canonical narratives remains a valuable endeavor, for more relevance it would rely on her framing of the designation, women. Resulting from

Morineau's non-inclusive stance, another shortcoming in her curation of *elles@centrepompidou* is its lack of extension of the gender category to include the discursive other. This leads to her failure to articulate the contribution of the non-Western female artists who aided the feminist chronicle she wishes to reinsert into the museum's and art history's canon. Attention paid to the exhibition's omissions – whether due to the museum's lack of investment of artworks produced by women, which would automatically preclude such options from the selection, or the exclusive nature of Morineau's own curatorial approach to selection – would have strengthened the exhibition.

An extended reading of feminism and women artists' contribution to the history of art could also have been provided by selections from other museums (if allowed), which may have offered the opportunity to feature additional, more inclusive work. By a literary reference in the catalogue to such artworks, and discourse around their absence from the collection she would have exposed the gaps that still seem to exist in museum collections today. The latter would also have the potential to provide valuable feminist critique on both museums' acquisition policies in general, and the Centre Pompidou's while avoiding the assumption of a feminist history of art which preferences the dominant West.

Morineau's circumvention of non-Western contributions is further revealed by the random and cursory references to non-Western women artists in the accompanying catalogue. In his essay on the theme, *Fire at will*, Quentin Bajac (2009:49) explains that the Art Workers' Coalition⁷ did not merely demand the representation of women artists, but also “black and Puerto Rican minorities in museums”. Although Bajac (2009:49) reiterates that this is “a core principle at the heart of the movement”, and by implication is an integral part of the history Morineau wishes to revitalise, the exhibition themes are not fully developed since they lack works by non-Western women artists. Bajac also does not refer to these gaps in the exhibition, or comment on the museum's non-acquisition of such artworks.

However, as mentioned previously, it would still not be a satisfactory curatorial reaction just to include such obscured non-Western women artists: a curatorial perspective, reliant upon a feminist praxis, that broadens its inclusionary purpose to

⁷ The Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) was an alliance of artists, curators and academics forged in New York City in 1969 in an attempt to pressure museums, most notably the Museum of Modern Art, to revise exclusive exhibition policies, with particular emphasis on the exclusion of artists based on gender and racial classifications.

encompass discursive others on all levels of the curated exhibition, is a prerequisite in the current global art arena. In this sense, a thematic exploration, able to portray both the non-Western woman's experiences and her historical narratives with integrity, is as important as the inclusion of such artworks in the fabric of the exhibition.

In support of an elaborated sense of inclusion, Jones (2010:13-14) notes "that feminism as a discourse of oppression, empowerment, and identification is no longer viable" and marks that what was relevant in the 1970s and 1980s now needs to be intermeshed with contemporary issues relating to both globalisation, and the acknowledgement of "the coextensivity of gender identifications with those of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, age, and so on". The simplicity evident in Morineau's theorisation of women conforms to what Braidotti (2006:46) terms "a discourse about white supremacy" and "reinstates a world-view based on colonial lines of demarcation":

The dominant discourse nowadays is that 'our women' (Western, Christian, white or 'whitened' and raised in the tradition of secular Enlightenment) are already liberated and thus do not need any more social incentives or emancipatory policies. 'Their women', however (non-Western, non-Christian, mostly not white and not integrated into white society, as well as alien to the Enlightenment tradition), are still backwards and need to be targeted for special emancipatory social actions or even more belligerent forms of enforced 'liberation'.

The exclusion of a comprehensive exploration of women in the exhibition dialogue weakens the pluralistic aim. It merely "reconstructs [feminist] history" as a particularly Western institution, rather than "reconstructing the present" – the latter constituting the curatorial task (Basualdo 2009b:59). The absence of a broader definition of women weakens Morineau's project, as it does not account for the "neo-colonial present trans-nationalisation of labour, identities and cultural forms" as explained by Carlos Basualdo (2009b:59). This results in a failure to create new dimensions of feminist curatorial practice – a strategy that should be aimed continually at questioning the "veneer of 'progress'" (Proctor 2013:52).

In this study, I argue that a possible interrogation of delimiting practices (such as the Western-oriented categorisation of women that Morineau employs) could generate new meaning as a consequence of the curatorial gesture – or, as Helen Molesworth (2010:512) suggests, allowing for "skeptical engagement with the new". A curatorial

strategy of this kind would allow for a creative reimagining of the past “as part of a larger pattern of seriality and repetition, sameness and difference, annihilation and birth, that defied the logic of a teleological history” (Molesworth 2010:512).

Following Molesworth’s argument for the establishment of a critical space lodged between binaries, I similarly propose the setting-up of a curatorial space “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1984:25). Within this other space, women could be posited outside the limited view of traditional Western feminism (whereby post-African women are excluded). Here, to avoid both essentialism and universality, various feminisms and identities may be cited simultaneously to foster a position in-between difference and similitude.

2.2 Deconstructing the canon

“[T]he updating and explicating of history”, as Morineau (2009b:15) calls her praxis, is openly asserted when exhibition visitors are welcomed by Agnès Thurnauer’s *Portraits of grandeur nature (Life-size portraits)* (2007 – 2009) (Figure 1). This work comprises twelve brightly coloured, oversized badges that display the names of eleven well-known male artists whose first names have been altered to female versions of their names, such as Francine Bacon; and one woman artist, Louise Bourgeois, whose first name has been masculinised to Louis. The spirit of revision, so succinctly expressed in Thurnauer’s work, sets the tone for Morineau’s curatorial impulse. Alain Seban (2009:9, emphasis added), the president of the Centre Pompidou, explains that the “re-hanging” of the contemporary collection forms part of the museum’s policy of “revitalising the way its collections are presented”, and continues, by way of self-assuring hubris, that:

[t]hrough the works of women artists from the collection, the *entire* history of twentieth and twenty-first century art is rewritten from a female perspective, tracing an alternate image of a period during which women acquired the full status of the artist.

The museum should be commended for its efforts in investing in art produced by women, and in committing itself to the installation of such a vast display. However, it is naïve to believe that Morineau and her team (and a little over 200 female artists)



Figure 1: Agnès Thurnauer, *Portraits of grandeur nature (Life-size portraits)* (2007 – 2009). Resin and epoxy paint, Ø120 cm each. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle, Paris. (Femmes, créatrices, collaboratrices 2010:[sp]).

succeeded, with one exhibition, to redress the totality of modern and contemporary art bias; and coupled with that, the notion that, as a consequence, women suffer no more prejudice in the art world based on gender, is unfounded.⁸ Morineau (2009b:15) is confident that curatorial projects are able to “change the course of history”, and believes that the representation of history is the “primary, and highly difficult, role of museums”. But as Catherine Elwes (2007:102) warns, while various political concerns are raised in art today, few artists agree that their work will bring about actual change more than creating awareness.

Katy Deepwell (2006:65) points out that many contemporary art curators are women, and often considered “as [a] “keeper[s] of culture” (rather than a producer[s])”. Deepwell (2006:66) argues that positions of institutional power are still held by men, and suggests that the matter of who controls the exhibitions they display has feminist repercussions, “with regard to gender (im)balance in museums as institutions”, since work by women artists remains in the minority in their collections. Merely to increase

⁸ Morineau (2009b:15-16) contradicts Seban's allegations a few pages further on in the catalogue as she provides present statistics based on gender equality indicative of the vast gap that remains in economic, political and social arenas when women are compared to their male counterparts.



Figure 2: Guerrilla Girls, *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?* (1989). Poster. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou-Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris. (*elles@centrepompidou*. *Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle*. 2009:362).

of the ratio of women artists' works to those of men artists in the Centre Pompidou's collection is not an act sufficient itself to 'update' the canon of art history. This is an issue which Morineau's project could have explored with more authority.⁹ As anticipated from Morineau's confrontational placement of the Guerrilla Girls' poster *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?* (1989) (Figure 2) that follows directly from Thurnauer's work, the representation of women within traditional museum and or gallery spaces is a primary concern to any feminist project that intersects with curatorship.

Griselda Pollock (1999:3) suggests, "canons may be understood [...] as the retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity, a consolidated narrative of origin, conferring authority on the texts selected to naturalise this function." To this end, the *elles@centrepompidou* project may have

⁹ Morineau's (2009b:15) emphasis on the representation of artworks produced by women as part of major museum collections is strengthened by her reference made to the fact that 18 percent of the Centre Pompidou's collection comprises work produced by women. Germaine Greer (2010:2) notes that the Centre Pompidou consciously allocated 40 percent of the acquisitions budget to obtaining works produced by women for its collection. Added to this, Alfred Pacquement (2009:13), the director of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle, boasts (in the preface of the accompanying catalogue) about the museum's feat and describes the exhibition as an "over-representation" of work produced by women, which, at 18 percent of one of the richest collections in the world, is hardly the case. Apart from the derogatory tone this assumption imparts, Pacquement (2009:13) also implies that, the updating of history would suffice by the mere addition of 500 artworks produced by women. Having 18 percent of the work in the collection produced by women hardly denotes equality and merely diminishes the legitimacy of not only contributions made by women artists, feminists and revolutionaries, but also Morineau's very project, *elles@centrepompidou*, hosted by the museum.

benefitted from a critical investigation of the specific processes of the museum complex that instituted patriarchal control over the canon, as the exclusion applies not only to gender, but also to racial and ethnic minorities. A consideration of the *medium of the exhibition*, or by working “curatorially” as Lind (2015:321) terms her praxis, may have strengthened Morineau’s resolve to address the imbalances in the representation of women in the museum, and served to establish her curatorial contribution as a ‘producer’ rather than a ‘keeper of culture’.

Furthermore, an elaborated theorisation of feminist art history, which pays homage to systematically excluded others, could be rooted in feminism’s political agenda of redressing “pattern[s] of marginalisation” through theory and praxis (Deepwell 2006:66-67). This could have avoided the replication of institutional canonisation, specifically the modernist approach of categorising major and minor artists in the progress-narrative of art through sequencing avant-garde practices, movements and schools (Deepwell 2006:66-67). By the same token, creating a “critical historiography of the established canon of feminist art” (Skрубbe 2010:85) may have exposed the museum’s acquisition policies as incomplete, as well as “their dependence on art-historical knowledge” (Deepwell 2006:66-67). If Morineau’s *modus operandi* had veered away from a mere insertion of a (Western) feminist trajectory – which ultimately maintains and validates culture through its contravention of narratives of diversity and pluralism – she could have *produced* culture rather than just exposing prevailing hegemonic structures. I argue, therefore, that because Morineau’s feminist agenda is not convincingly integrated into her curatorial gesture, she conforms to what Skрубbe (2010:90, emphasis added) terms as “strategic canonicity”:

This *strategic canonicity*, i.e. strategically conforming to canonical values and norms whether deliberately or unintentionally, in order to make possible the inclusion of women artists and/or feminist art, merges the persuasive discourses of feminisms with the authoritative discourse of canonical art history. This has been necessary in the long term. However, it inevitably only reinforces the authoritative discourse of the Western canon of art.

I suggest that by situating *elles@centrepompidou* within the dominant art historical canon instead of *on the threshold* of numerous other historical narratives, Morineau adapts to “strategic canonicity” (Skрубbe 2010:90). By contrast, I propose a curatorial strategy that frames the notion of liminality premised on the brink of various historical narratives, and that functions as an adjunct to existing structures while

simultaneously undermining the fixity of such structures. This would be in keeping with the summary of Skrubbe and Hayden (2013:68) around the curatorial approach of not attempting to fill the “gaps” revealed in narratives, unlike that of *elles@centrepompidou* where “the principles on which the museum is presently based” are retained. Instead, I argue for a curatorial strategy that “mind[s] the gaps” as “instances of aesthetic reversals” (Skrubbe & Hayden 2013:68). In this way an account is constructed that remains unrestricted, accommodating numerous historical and contemporary narratives. Such an open-ended chronicle yields the potential to realise post-African female identity as liminal.

Added to this, a curatorial strategy, positioned within the interstices of various space-time continuums and on the threshold of art history, resurrects the political character of the feminist agenda. Jenny Sorkin (2007:460) argues that all-women shows during the 1970s functioned as episodic insertions into the history of art and argues, following Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation of nomadism, for a “deterritoriali[s]ation of traditional group-exhibition practice”. She (Sorkin 2007:460) continues that there is “no meaningful chronology of feminist exhibitions” – instead, a mere connection is implied through “their temporal proximity to each other”:

Rather, they were sporadic, disparate, and inherently local while still being a multinational phenomenon, occurring within specific communities at crucial moments within their individual developments. Transient, quickly assembled, and short-lived, they were statements without fixed meanings particular to the milieu from which they sprung. Through their frequency, extensive geography, and sizable number, feminist exhibitions constituted an indirect discourse, a low boil, passionate and itinerant, simmering throughout the 1970s.

These nomadic instances of meaning and knowledge production position female selves on the portal of numerous margins and thresholds. The evocation of such a curatorial space would favour a liminal view of the category, ‘women’, and allows for temporary subject positions that promote liminal female identity as subjects embodying multiple selves across cultural, racial and social boundaries. This serves the feminist agenda by amplifying the disruption of homogenised systems of knowledge, and the obfuscation of restrictive categorisation of ‘women’. The latter also adheres to Braidotti’s (2006:55) plea for “open-ended and contested” strategies whereby post-African identity could be realised as liminal.

2.3 Feminine themes versus master timelines

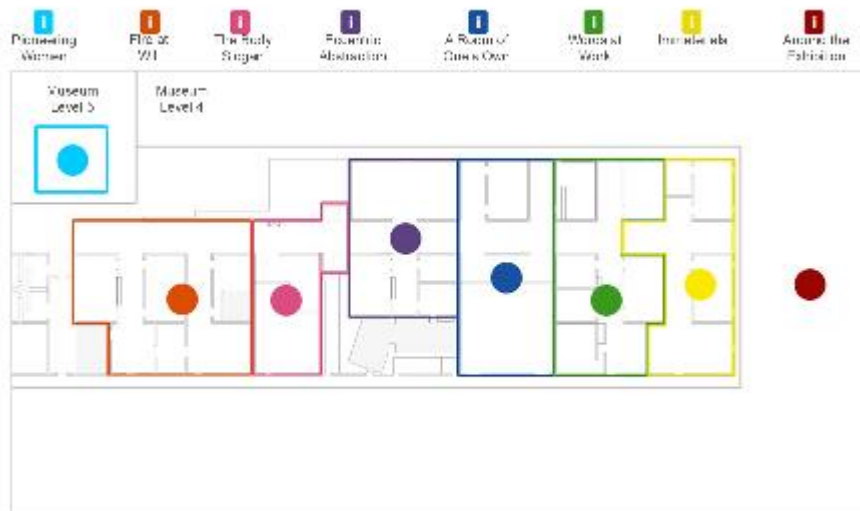


Figure 3: Floor plan for *elles@centrepompidou* – *women artists in the collection of the Musée national d’art moderne, Centre de creation industrielle* (elles@centrepompidou 2009:[sp]).

In the attempt to ‘mind the gaps’, a feminist approach to curating rebuffs a linear and chronological account of art to refute patriarchal structures of power and knowledge. Aligning herself with this notion – except for the section titled *Pioneering women* – Morineau (2009:18) curbs a chronological approach in favour of a thematic division of the exhibition (Figure 3):

Favouring themes rather than chronology was one of the strategic decisions designed to ‘ruffle’ the idea of “gender”, to ‘unhinge’ preconceptions of “women’s art”, thereby demonstrating through multiple points of view and techniques that female artists defined the history of twentieth century art every bit as much as men.

A curatorial strategy of this kind does foster “the recognition of unexpected, unfamiliar connections”, and may set up counter-narratives (Holland 2010: 436). However, Morineau’s notion of redress falls short of accounting for the post-African (and other non-Western) narratives of transformation on two counts. Firstly, the themes veil an insistence on *feminist chronology*, as evidenced by her selection of artworks for each theme, as well as the curatorial essays accompanying the themes, both of which are premised on seminal contributions from 1970s and 1980s

American and European artists. This selection neglects to explore a critical global account, and reinforces the centrality of the West. Secondly, given that the selected themes required to generate a curatorial account of an alternative history are drawn from those very contributions, they overlook differences inherent in marginalised societies and geographies. These shortcomings in the exhibition are reinforced by the absence of artworks produced by non-Western artists.

Morineau (2009:18) introduces *elles@centrepompidou*'s emphasis on concept and chronicle by means of six main themes, of which the first, *Fire at will (Feu à volonté)*, pays tribute to women from various spheres of the feminist project. The second theme, *The body-slogan*, focuses on the physicality of womanhood and comprises works that deliberately represent the female body as part of the artists' endeavours. Theme three, *Eccentric abstraction*, presents the role of women in redefining visual and theoretical categories of twentieth century art. The domestic realm of women's experience formed the focus of theme four, *A room of one's own*. Theme five, *Words at work*, focuses on the narrative and explores the employment of linguistics within art practice. The final theme, *Immaterials*, focuses on artworks that speak to a minimalist approach in material and form – a move towards the non-material.¹⁰

The section *Pioneering women* follows the aforementioned thematic exhibition. The curatorial design here comprises several 'themes', part of which refer to modern artistic movements, and part to formalist methodology. This section denies Morineau's preference for non-chronology as these modern works – displayed alongside artworks produced by their male contemporaries – are installed mainly along a timeline of twentieth century art history.

elles@centrepompidou is articulated by a lengthy introduction, both in the exhibition space as well as in the accompanying catalogue; while each artwork is accompanied by information that aids its context both within the scope of the exhibition and in feminism's extended art historical discourse, as well as assessing the artwork against the achievements of prominent Western feminist artists. The scope and

¹⁰ The title for *Immaterials* is derived from Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput's (director of the Centre de Création Industrielle) 1985 exhibition, *Les Immatériaux* which was hosted by the Centre Pompidou. The exhibition staged a complex investigation into the disappearance of the object as a result of the impact of new materials and technologies. The exhibition is considered a landmark show due to its structure, generated by communication theory and the immersive experience it offered its audience. Although Morineau (2009:18) aligns her thematic exploration in *elles@centrepompidou* with the "institutional history" and "reinvention of history" that Lyotard's and Chaput's exhibition promotes, she does not further explore these ideas. This is affirmed by the thematic essay accompanying *Immaterials* in the catalogue by Quentin Bajac, which demonstrates his insistence on the formal and conceptual discussions of the works selected for this theme.

length of these accounts seem overwhelming at times, and appear to over-compensate for Morineau's curatorial resolve to situate the contributions of women as a serious contingent of modern and contemporary art history.

Introduced by the Guerilla Girls' poster *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, the theme *Fire at will* is marked by Niki de Saint Phalle's arresting piece *Tir (Shooting)* (1961) (Figure 4), which alludes to women's rage aimed at phallogentric¹¹ configurations of knowledge from historical, political and social structures. This thematically curated section is furthermore sub-divided into separate



Left: Figure 4: Niki de Saint Phalle, *Tir (Shooting)* (1961). Plaster, paint, metal and miscellaneous objects on plywood, 175 x 80 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (*elles@centrepompidou. Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle* 2009:52).

¹¹ Phallogentrism is a term derived from the psychoanalytic work of Ernest Jones, and in brief, denotes a system of power relations whereby the privileging of the masculine (phallus) stands primary to the construction of meaning. French feminist thinkers, including Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous who criticised male-centred Lacanian theory, adopted the term. Derrida's notion of logocentrism (which criticises master narratives of Western discourse) strongly influenced French intellectual feminism which assumed his deconstructionist approach to disband patriarchal power. The term 'phallogocentrism', derived from Derrida's term, logocentrism is also often employed (Makaryk 1993:46,606).

themed-rooms that house the artworks. *Muses against museums*, situated at the entrance to the show, is launched by Bajac's (2009:48) curatorial essay wherein he calls on Orlan's *Le Baiser de l'artiste. Le Distributeur automatique ou Presque! No 2* (1977) (Figure 5) to consider her diffusion of "the boundaries between the role of the artist and whore" against the backdrop of a male dominated artworld. Bajac (2009:49) continually draws attention to the historical feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s and highlights 'key' works from this period, where women are "becoming protagonists in their own right". The presentation of these seminal works in an almost linear fashion not only contradicts Morineau's curatorial strategy of foregoing chronology, but also constructs an alternative feminist 'canon' that rests only upon the shoulders of Western women artists.



Right: Figure 5: Orlan, *Baiser de l'artiste. Le Distributeur automatique ou Presque! No 2* (1977). Gelatin silver print under Diasec, printed 1996, 157 x 110 cm, Sound tape of *Baiser de l'artiste*, 3-part document printed on both sides. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (Orlan [Sa]:[sp]).

An extension of historical feminist narratives focused on other geographies outside the parameters of the West, would induce a disruption in the linearity of this theme – even if only in the form of a critical essay, should non-Western artworks outside of the Centre Pompidou’s collection be inaccessible. The acknowledgement of non-Western women artists within the context of this theme would present a conflation of gender with racial, ethnic and social aspects of identity – an aspect explored so clearly in Penny Siopis’s *Patience on a monument – “A history painting”* (1988) (Figure 6). Siopis’ seminal work signals a counterpoint to European narrative through

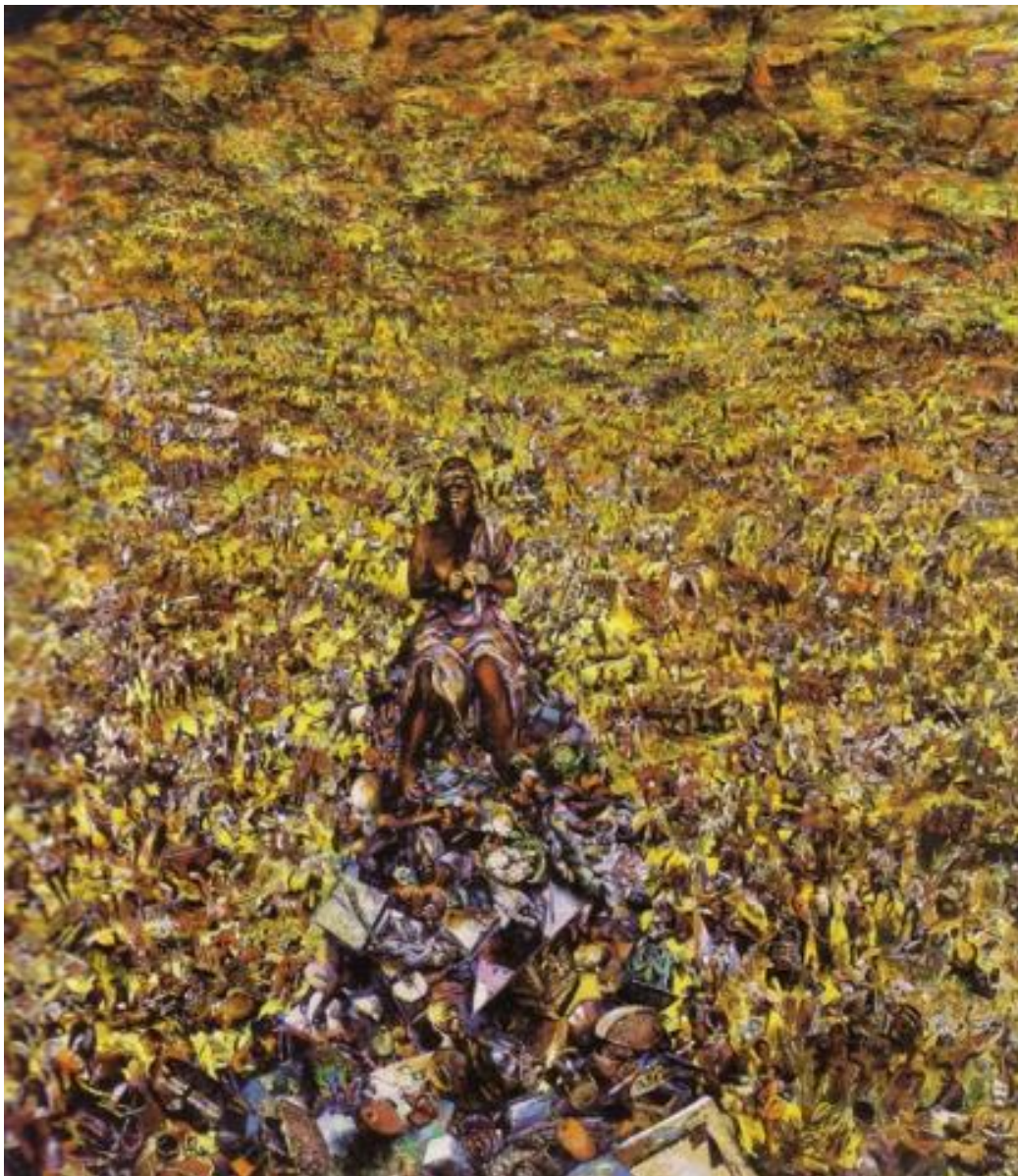


Figure 6: Penny Siopis, *Patience on a monument – ‘A history painting’* (1989). Oil and collage on canvas. 200 x 180 cm. (Williamson 1989:21).

its indirect referencing of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty leading the people* (1830); and the setting up of the colonised, female subject as a dominant figure of history deconstructs the patriarchal and colonial desires of the apartheid ideology in South Africa. Siopis is considered an influential artist within South African trajectories of feminist art, and inclusion of her work in Morineau's alternative narrative could have extended the project beyond its delimiting borders of the West.

As part of *Fire at will*, the works gathered in *Genital panic*¹² express protest against degrading representations of women, the male gaze, and the imposition of new archetypes of women. Hannah Wilke's *S.O.S. Starification Object Series: An Adult Game of Mastication* (1974 – 1975) (Figure 7), wherein she embodies the disfiguration brought about by the objectification of women, is part of this grouping. The confrontational nature of works such as Valerie Export's *Aktionshose: Genitalpanik* (1969), and Rebecca Horn's *Whipmachine* (1988) (Figure 8), continue to demonstrate the militant demands for change articulated by this theme.



Figure 7: Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series: An Adult Game of Mastication* (1974 – 1975). Installation comprising a set of playing instructions, games box containing 8 black and white photographs, 50 playing cards and 16 packets of chewing-gum, set of 12 chewing-gum sculptures, set of 28 black and white photographs, one black and white photograph of the artist, gelatin-silver prints, gum, paper, card, Plexiglas, variable sizes. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (Hannah Wilke [Sa]:[sp]).

¹² The title is derived from Valerie Export's *Aktionshose: Genitalpanik* (1969) – a performance held in a Munich theatre showing pornographic films.



Figure 8: Rebecca Horn, *Whipmachine* (1988). Electric compressor, metal box, whip, tubing, string, variable sizes. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (elles@centrepompidou. *Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle*. 2009:55).

Fire at will highlights some of feminism's earliest, and perhaps most important, concerns. However, as evinced by the very short paragraph at the end of Bajac's essay, the condemnation of the patriarchal, colonial oppression of women appears as an afterthought. Bajac (2009:49) explains in a rather cursory fashion:

Finally, by re-examining the histories of their country, a number of women artists bring together public and private, individual and collective issues, as well as biographical and historical preoccupations, no matter what artistic medium they employ.

Bajac (2009:49) continues, as briefly, to mention four non-Western women artists¹³ works that form part of the selection, yet neglects to refer to any one of them specifically, or to offer any contextualisation or interpretation of them. An opening up of this topic could both potentially yield valuable insights into the global world of female art production, and extend Western concerns centred around male

¹³ Bajac (2009:49) lists Sanja Iveković's video work, Sandra Vásquez de la Horra's graphic work, and Maja Bajević and Shirin Neshat's contributions – again as an afterthought to his explication of the theme.

domination – such as female oppression due to colonialist subjugation, and the perpetuation of exotic and exploitative depictions of non-Western women.

Granted, without the constraints of an existing collection to exclusively select artwork from, the inclusion of works such as *Looking back* (1999) (Figure 9), from Berni Searle's *Colour me* series (1998 – 2000), could offer a more significant global reading. *Looking back* is premised on bell hooks' (1992:115-116) reference to an "oppositional gaze", whereby monolithic practices such as the male gaze is obfuscated. Searle's confrontational gaze challenges not only patriarchal notions of voyeurism, but extends the argument to include a non-Western female perspective – where the artist's body is both scrutinised because of her gender and exploited for her racial inscription. I believe that the incorporation of such artworks has the potential to broaden the scope of *elles@centrepompidou's* explication of this sub-theme, to encompass a global interpretation of feminist politics.

Similarly, the exhibition's Western focus is evident in the second theme, *The body slogan*. This is explained as the "visual and semantic potential of performance art", and there is also a general emphasis on the body as material for artmaking practices (Lavigne 2009:90). Again, historically aligned with the 1960s' feminist expression of "the political power of the body", this section foregrounds the female body as a site



Figure 9: 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. (Bester 2003:11).

for discourse (Lavigne 2009:90). Most of the work in this section concentrates on employing the body as the “material of the artwork itself”, and this aligns, once again, with Lippard’s “dematerialisation of the art object” (Lavigne 2009:90). Here, the employment of the body as a device for physical expression is apparent in Jana Sterbak’s work *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorectic* (1987) (Figure 10), a dress made from raw meat.



Figure 10: Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorectic* (1987). Raw beef on dummy and colour photograph. 113 cm (dummy); 23.5 x 18.5 cm (photograph: Louis Lussier). Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (elles@centrepompidou. *Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d’art moderne, Centre de création industrielle*. 2009:95).

The potential exists – albeit unrealised – to discuss issues around the ‘death’ that sets in through repressive social practices associated with beauty and body modification, and where a curatorial counterpoint demonstrating non-Western commodification of women’s bodies could yield richer dialogues. The inclusion of artworks such as Nandipha Mntambo’s sculptural cow hide figurations (Figure 11), would have given a wider reference to this theme, beyond the strictures of Western art. Despite Williamson’s (2009:194) reading of Mntambo’s work as a comment on the cultural practice of *lobola* (bride-price), which offers a “complex negotiation of modernity in the contemporary African state”, Mntambo (in Buys 2010:111) denies such connotations:

...I started working with my own body. I wasn’t trying to make a comment about black women being sold for *lobola* or anything like that. While there is a place for political content in art, looking for it all the time can be restrictive.



Figure 11: Nandipha Mntambo, *Iqaba Lami* (2007). Cowhide, cows' faces, resin, polyester mesh, waxed cord, 150 x 115 x 75cm. (Nandipha Mntambo 2007:[sp]).

While Williamson's interpretation demonstrates the differences between African and Western premised themes and interpretations, her (mis)reading of Mntambo's work also foregrounds the disparities evident in South Africa's multicultural society. This aspect underpins the exigency for an alternative feminist trajectory to initiate discussion around post-African female identity through which difference and similitude could be explored. *Iqaba Lami* offers a closer reading to Sterbak's piece through delivering commentary on femininity as shaped by culture. However, the distinguishing factor here is the *difference* between African and Western culture, as Mntambo's piece aims to subvert conventional notions of beauty by recasting her own body in cow hide, to explore "what is attractive and repulsive" (Mntambo in Buys 2010:109).¹⁴

In the preface to *Eccentric abstraction*¹⁵ – a term borrowed from an exhibition by the same title – Morineau (2009:118) explains that this theme points both to a defiance as denoted by the word 'eccentric', and to 'abstraction' as part of the modernist canon. She (Morineau 2009a:118-119) continues that modernism is a "well-oiled, theoretico-formalist mechanism" wherein neat categories are defied by the eccentricity of some artists, such as women who do not conform to such categories. However, her resolve to situate women within the neatly organised canon is compromised by her suggestion that women are eccentric, and this reinforces the otherness of 'women's work'.¹⁶ Disregarding the association of the title of this theme with modernist chronology, Morineau (2009:119) includes here work from the 1970s to the present, based on Lucy Lippard's definition of the theme, namely the "[v]isual, tactile and visceral", and in fact, this section features a number of non-Western artworks that employ alternative materials in a modernist aesthetic, including, Ghada Amer (Figure 12).

Eccentric abstraction is perhaps one of the exhibition's more successful themes. Although it is still rooted in Western art traditions, Morineau's open-ended positioning of the theme as promoting "not one but several possible tensions" reliant on new materials and explorations, does not foreclose cultural or social particularities in terms of femininity.

¹⁴ The artist explains, "[w]hen I was in high school all the other girls were shaving, and I don't have body hair, so I would feel left out. I started thinking about how people might react to a completely hairy female body" (Mntambo in Buys 2010:111).

¹⁵ *Eccentric abstraction* (1966) was an exhibition curated by Lucy Lippard at the Fischbach Gallery, New York, that showcased the work of Alice Adams, Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Gary Kuehn, Bruce Nauman, Don Potts, Keith Sonnier and Frank Lincoln Viner (Lippard 1966:34).

¹⁶ In the 1970s, much criticism was raised against the notion of 'women's art', or that art produced by women demonstrates a specific aesthetic.



Figure 12: Ghada Amer, *Big pink diagonal / Big Angie – RFGA* (2002). Acrylic paint, embroidery and adhesive gel on canvas. 249 x 300 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (*elles@centrepompidou. Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle. 2009:127*).

A room of one's own, named after Virginia Woolf's famous essay published in 1929, deals with the restricting forces of the (Western) domestic space, summed up in Dorothea Tanning's piece, *Chambre 202, Hôtel du Pavot* (1970) (Figure 13). The contextualisation of the domestic sphere through referencing the 1970s *Feminist Art Program* and the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, initiatives by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, once again clearly demarcates this theme as Western premised. Lavigne (2009b:156) draws associations with 'housewives' and 'home-makers', gendered tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and intimacy – associations clearly understood within a Western context. Issues of class, poverty, lack of housing, diaspora, and domestic labour are consequently cast in an oblique light due to their parochial exploration within this theme.

A room of one's own lacks engagement with the gendered domestic realm beyond the borders of the West. An extended and more inclusive interpretation of the theme, and particularly, a significant version of one historically-acknowledged role linked to black female identity as domestic worker, servant or slave, would have provided more global and critical debate. My curatorial gesture within this theme would be to add Mary Sibande's *I'm a lady* (2009) (Figure 14). In her larger-than-life scale series



Figure 13: Dorothea Tanning, *Chambre 202*, *Hôtel du Pavot* (1970). Installation with black velvet fetish doll, figures made of various fabrics filled with wool, wood and wool fireplace and table, woolen carpet, wallpaper and fake wood wainscoting, electric light bulb. 340 x 310 x 470 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (elles@centrepompidou. *Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle*. 2009:166).



Figure 14: Mary Sibande, *I'm a lady* (2009). Digital print on cotton rag matte paper, 90x 60 cm. (Goniwe 2013:22).

of sculptural works, Sibande comments on the domestic realm as narrated through her alter ego, the housemaid Sophie. These re-imaginings of a colonially-inscribed, black female identity, could provoke dialogue around such aspects of domesticity and its prevalence.

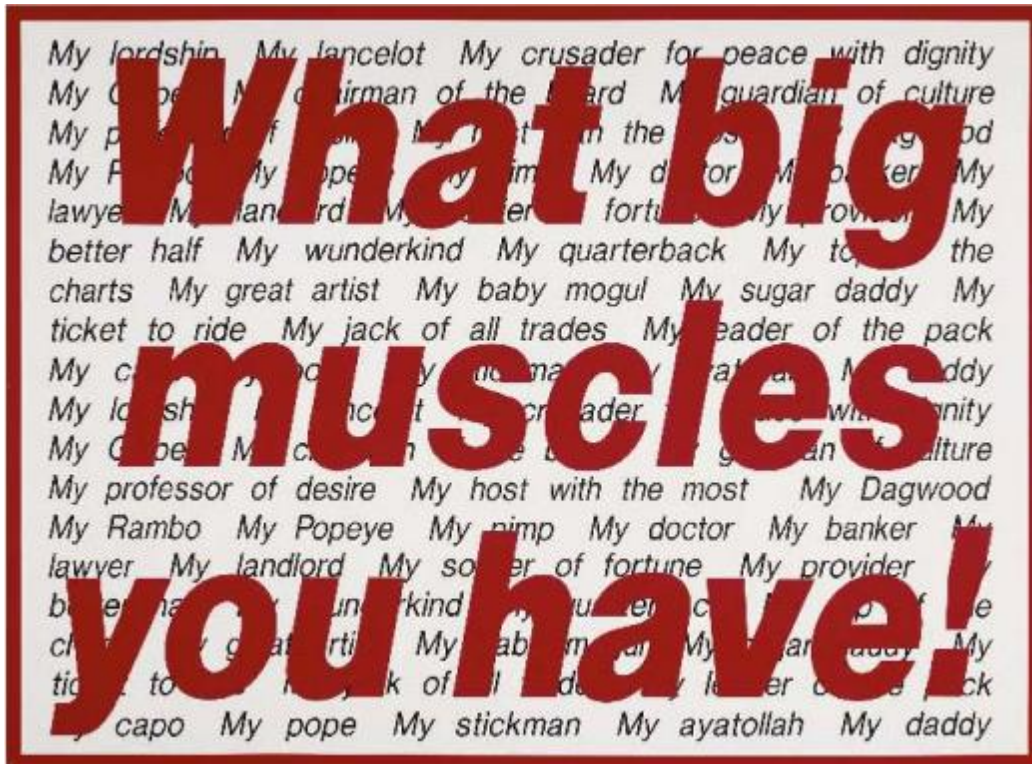


Figure 15: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (What big muscles you have!)* (1989). Self-adhesive strips and leterset on acrylic panel, 152.5 x 208 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (elles@centrepompidou. *Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle* 2009:184-185).

Morineau (2009:182) presents the theme, *Words at work*, by introducing the viewer to works that derive their artistic merit from the narrative and/or the autobiographical, as characterised by the conceptual art movement and the dematerialisation of the art object. The 'other history' is considered here through the use of "personal histories, through ritualised implication of the body, or by bringing gender [...] into play" (Morineau 2009a:182). Morineau's consistent and chronological plotting of the works by seminal feminist artists that comprise this curatorial selection is represented by the American Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (What big muscles you have!)* (1986) (Figure 15), where Kruger deconstructs advertising language.

A contemporary South African work also exploiting popular media is Nontsikelelo Veleko's *Screamblacklips!* (2009) (Figure 16). Veleko considers the delimiting language that inscribes the colonised body, and employs the language of fashion as a means of reframing the black South African woman. The vivid jewellery that echoes the colours of the inside of her mouth, worn confidently and stylishly by her subject,



The Figure 16: Nontsikelelo Veleko, *Screamblacklips! Self portrait series: Nono* (2005). Digital print with pigment dyes on cotton paper, 42 x 29.7 cm. (Williamson 2009:300).

renders post-African identity as liberated from its past, and specifically from apartheid's crippling and prescriptive restrictions regarding dress code and silence for black women. Veleko instead, institutes "a liberal, sharp and confident identity free of all previous constraints" as Williamson (2009:300) confirms.

As Bajac (2009:220) explains, the sixth theme *Immaterials* is an "economy of means, the search for a certain metaphysics that is nonetheless anchored in a powerful attention to materials". This impulse, driven by "simplification of action and materials",

stands central to the artworks comprising this thematic selection (Bajac 2009:220). While this theme successfully explores work by women artists, without necessarily engaging overtly with feminist concerns, the curated selection still fails to extend to what could have been a richer examination of material and concept. The quiet and simple contemplation of the artist's New York living space or environment, as evident in Monika Sosnowska's work (2006–2008) (Figure 17), could have yielded a provocative dialogue of difference if juxtaposed with a South African expression of space, such as Dineo Seshee Bopape's bulging plastic bag installation, *Growing every day* (2005) (Figure 18). This work recalls the disparities evident in consumption and poverty, and the overcrowded housing 'solutions' in South Africa. Bopape sees her work as "an attempt to conceal and mask, while simultaneously attempting to peel away the husk and layers that crust over secretive stories embedded in objects and in people" (Bopape in Williamson 2009:276).



Figure 17: Monika Sosnowska, *Rubble* (2006 – 2008). Aluminium, wood and emulsified acrylic paint, variable sizes, gift of the Société des Amis du Musée national d'art moderne, 2009. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (*elles@centrepompidou. Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle* 2009:240-241).



Figure 18: Dineo Seshee Bopape, *Growing every day* (2005). Installation comprising plastic bags and mixed media, 270 x 605 x 124 cm. Exhibited as part of *Making: Materials and processes* (2005) at the Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, curated by Sophie Perryer. (Williamson 2009:277).

Cécile Debray's introduction of *Pioneering women* appears at the beginning of the catalogue as a preamble for *elles@centrepompidou*, and it is not considered to form part of Morineau's thematic exploration. As mentioned before, *Pioneering women* is located separately on the fifth floor – as an adjunct to the exhibition – and is curated in an almost strictly chronological arrangement.

Rather than structuring them as part of an alternative feminist trajectory that alludes to the master narrative but is able to hold its own, Debray (2009:24) maintains that the works comprising *Pioneering women* are part of the dominant modernist story of art history. Their focus is on the “social and material hardship” that faced these women artists (Debray 2009:24). Another curatorial approach here could have been to insert them thematically among their contemporary counterparts, instead of reinforcing the binary nature of modernism by arranging them in a progress-narrative.

Pioneering women encompasses seven thematically organised rooms (*Reflective, Objective, Women Warriors, Surrealists, Urban, Industrial* and *Abstract*). However,

these ‘themes’ are misleading here, as the artworks are put together in a chronologically prearranged order alongside artworks from the same periods produced by ‘great (male) masters’. Since *elles@centrepompidou*’s insistence was on a ‘women-only’ showcase, Gonnard (2010:153) notes that this raises questions around the rest of the exhibition, saying that it

seems to affirm the existence of a kind of “women’s art” as it is set off against its male counterparts; however, despite the contextualisation premised on the “hardships” women artists face, these artworks remain “divorced from any context [...] developed outside the critically recognised movements in art history.

In agreement with Gonnard, I argue that Morineau situates these ‘pioneering women’ as the ‘other’, and their artistic contributions as subjugate to those of their male counterparts. More benefit may have been achieved from the curatorial introduction of a counter-historical arrangement that, instead, would have focused on women in the global context who have contributed either to form or to content in relation to the modern period. In this way, a linear construction could more easily have been avoided.

While South African art does not claim to fall within specific art periods that correspond to the Western canon, there are a vast number of works by local artists that resonate with such movements. I suggest that the curator of *Pioneering women* could have served the project better by replacing the artworks produced by men with works produced by women artists from different locations and histories. These need not necessarily be bound by time, but rather have a focus on the sub-themes. A global investigation through multiple histories would not only undermine the notion of the ‘great male genius’ through denying its authority and position within the artistic canon, but also offer an alternative, inclusive and polyvocal narrative of the roots of feminist art.

Local contributions that may explore this section’s focus on the “social and material hardship” (Debray 2009:24) that faced women artists historically include Helen Sebidi’s *The child’s mother holds the sharp side of the knife* (1988 – 1989) (Figure 19) which explores the great power the artist attributes to women within her rural context (Arnold 1996:140). Irma Stern’s expressionistic and powerful depictions of women despite the strict conservative Afrikaner culture of the early 1900s such as *Pondo woman* (1929) (Figure 20) and Maggie Laubser’s *Self-portrait* (1924) (Figure



Figure 19: Helen Sebidi, *The child's mother holds the sharp side of the knife* (1988 – 1989). Pastel on paper, 186.5 x 280 cm, South African National Gallery. (Arnold 1996:[sp]).



Left: Figure 20: Irma Stern, *Pondo woman* (1929). Oil on canvas, 86 x 72 cm, Pretoria Art Museum. (Berman 1993:[sp]).



Right: Figure 21: Maggie Laubser, *Self-portrait* (1924). Oil on board, 47.5 x 34 cm, Sanlam Art Collection, Bellville. (Arnold 1996:[sp]).

21), could have offered a curatorial counterpoint with Suzanne Valadon's Western depiction of women such as *La chambre bleue* (1923) (Figure 22). While a South African modernist history would be chronologically out of sync with the West, the latter resonates both in terms of style and subject matter with their Western counterparts. Given Morineau's eschewing of a chronological arrangement, these South African examples would have enriched her curatorial project greatly through offering various works produced by women who are considered 'seminal' within their own contexts. Such an arrangement may espouse far more evocative associations of style, approach and the representation of women.



Figure 22: Suzanne Valadon, *La Chambre bleue* (1923). Oil on canvas. 90 x 116 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. (elles@centrepompidou. *Women artists in the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle*. 2009:30).

Morineau's contribution to academic research is presented in the form of an impressively published exhibition catalogue.¹⁷ This, like the exhibition, is organised into the six distinct themes, each of which is introduced by an essay that elaborates on the concept, followed by full-colour images of the artworks, tagged with brief descriptions and bibliographical content. The compilation also contains twelve additional essays that critically address issues surrounding women's art.¹⁸ It concludes with a lengthy chronology which aims to contextualise women's art within a century of social, political and economic events.

¹⁷ The 381-page, full-colour catalogue was published in French and English, and begins with introductory messages and Morineau's curatorial essay, wherein she explains the intention of the exhibition and positions it within the contemporary global art world.

¹⁸ The catalogue includes the following essays: *Women's art: what's in a name?* by Élisabeth Lebovici (277-279), *A diary of injuries* by Avital Ronell (280-285), *Women artists and French institutions before 1950* by Catherine Connard (286-289), *Genital panic, The threat of feminist bodies and parafeminism* by Amelia Jones (290-295), *Gender paradoxes. The case of Spain* by Juan Vicente Aliaga (296-299), *Gender in representations* by Éric Fassin (300-303), *On gender and things. Reflections on an exhibition on Gendered Artefacts* by Nelly Oudshoorn, Ann Rudinow Saetnan and Merete Lie (304-308), *Pussy Galore Buddha of the future. Women, graphic design, etc.* by Catherine de Smet (309-313), *Danger! Artists working under feminist influence* by Fabienne Dumont (314-317), *Write, they said* by Elvan Zabunyan (318-321), *Virtuality, aesthetics, sexual difference and the exhibition: Towards the Virtual Feminist Museum* by Griselda Pollock (322-329) and, *Posthuman feminist theory* by Rosi Braidotti (330-335).

The above documentation is augmented by an accompanying website, which further expands on the artistic contributions and the context wherein they were produced, through a myriad of hyperlinks.¹⁹ The site does underscore Morineau's (2009:18) intention to “‘ruffle’ the idea of “gender””, as it allows for the viewer to make new associations while referring to a historical framework and the art historical canon. In addition, the viewer is also given the option to organise the information he/she gathers either based on the themes of the exhibition, or according to a timeline, thus supporting the notion of reclaiming the power of the self. Added to this, due to its comprehensive information and design, and through its referencing of content, the website attempts to extend the project beyond the geographical intersection of the Centre Pompidou, allowing for more interesting nexuses to be made. Yet, this intention is fast rendered obsolete since the site exists only in French. Consequently, this restricts not only its global reception, but its usefulness as a resource, and it can speak only to an audience from a specific, language-limited culture.

Although Morineau's effort has certainly contributed to raising awareness of society's still-prevalent gender imbalances, her curatorial plan would have benefited greatly from a feminist strategy premised on inclusion and plurality. Such a plurality could manifest in a theorisation of the appellation ‘women’ as a gendered and racialised construct. If coupled with a liminal approach to curating, various constellations of feminist inquiry could have yielded instances of fluid, multiple female selves, to realise a historical narrative that deconstructs master narratives and disrupts hegemonic structures of knowledge.

2.4 Alternative curatorial strategies

In the light of the critique launched at Morineau's curatorial strategy, I propose a curatorial methodology able to explore the contradictions and conflicts present in post-African narratives with particular emphasis on women. I argue that the employment of a feminist approach to curatorship relies on being critical of its own strategies, since inclusivity is central to feminist politics. To this end, I proffer a curatorial position that fluctuates in-between various historical narratives,

¹⁹ The exhibition website <http://www.elles.centrepompidou.fr> provides detailed discussions of each theme, artist and artwork, while contextualising the information. Supplementary material, including additional artworks, video and audio recordings of interviews with artists and discussions of the artworks, provides viewers with a rich source of information. This supplements the catalogue and the exhibition, and extends the project beyond the walls of the Centre Pompidou.

experiences and geographies without promoting a fixed allegiance to a specific ambit, but rather by alluding to a multiplicity of realms simultaneously. In this way, singular, homogenous and parochial narratives – including the art historical canon and the patriarchal history of museum displays – could be overturned. This could offer feminism an all-encompassing and “skeptical engagement with the new” (Molesworth 2010:512). A sense of plurality would also lend itself towards a more inclusive understanding of the categorisation, women, and resolve many of the pitfalls discussed (cf. section 2.1).

In line with the above, I suggest an approach to curatorship that is of the history of exhibition practice itself. The curation of an all-women exhibition, with the prerogative to provide an updated reading of the history of women in art historical terms, would demand an approach that questions the very structures that have marginalised women artists for so long. An atypical or unorthodox strategy could have allowed Morineau to produce a more inclusive exhibition.

I propose the use of video to acknowledge and expand the limitations of the Centre Pompidou’s collection. This could serve to ‘update’ history. The fluidity offered by the medium of video also interjects the chronological flow of time to offer a display that “admits the coexistence in time of locationally distinct narratives and connects disjointed temporalities” (Meskimmon 2007:324). The notions of plurality and simultaneity inherent in the medium of video enable the production of new meaning, or a “recalibration of alliances” (Molesworth 2010:512), whereby the female curator is promoted to a *producer* instead of *purveyor* of knowledge.

In line with this thinking, I offer a curatorial strategy that prioritises space over time. In this way, spatial organisations may expose various sites of knowledge simultaneously, as instances of difference and sameness that conjure up an ‘other space’, aimed at an evolving and contesting feminist practice. This is envisioned heterotopically in its potential as a site of “alternative social ordering” (Hetherington 1997:40). Hetherington (1997:43) explains that these heterotopia, or counter-organisations, rely on “similitude which produces [...] monstrous combinations that unsettle the flow of discourse”. Similarly, heterotopia establish themselves as different from other sites, rather than through their “[o]therness deriving from a site itself” (Hetherington 1997:43).

Therefore, a local post-African feminist trajectory could be realised through the evocation of a heterotopic space that engages with various histories and discourses

to reveal dialogue around liminal selves. Heterotopian spaces also allow for a curatorial strategy whereby themes lodged in-between various instances of post-African selves, could be employed as an organising structure for the curated exhibition. The liminal dispersion of narratives, experiences and knowledge of post-African women allows for various curatorial themes to account for liminal female identity, without employing reductionist or universalising principles of display.

To enable a suitable curatorial strategy for the purposes of this study, I undertake a revisionary investigation of key exhibitions that contributed to the shaping of narratives and discourses around local women. In the following chapter, I identify and analyse these seminal shows to yield a revisionist reading of curatorship's means of highlighting or erasing past contributions by local women artists. Furthermore, I consider the notion of liminality throughout the discussion of the exhibitions and artworks, to indicate the transgression of boundaries and political agenda foregrounded by South African women artists and curators.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTESTING BOUNDARIES: FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS CROSS THE THRESHOLD

I would call 'feminine' the moment of rupture of negativity which conditions the newness of any practice (Kristeva in Sauzeau-Boetti 1979:229).

To untangle local art historical narratives, and lay bare a curatorial gesture premised on women, presents many challenges. I have identified the 1980s as the best point of inception to begin a revisionist reading of selected South African art exhibitions. There are two reasons for this decision. Firstly, the 1980s stands as an art historical beacon for the beginning of a feminist impulse in the work of local women artists; and secondly, this period recognises the appearance of a counter-hegemony in art practice, albeit largely intent on overthrowing apartheid rhetoric rather than disputing gender disparity. I intend to show, through my discussion of key curatorial moments, how local artworks by women were curatorially positioned, and how these exhibitions contributed to the rendering of contemporary, post-African female identity as liminal, fluid and incomplete.

The void in literature¹ on art from this period – especially from the perspective of women or a feminist curatorial stance – as well as the absence of an African feminist agenda within the arts, ensures that the task of establishing a local trajectory of feminist consciousness remains a venture into new frontiers, with only tangential connections to be made. Nonetheless, this chapter plots key curatorial moments through an innovative revisionist reading of local and global art practice, to re-inscribe current narratives with a local feminist trajectory.

I premise the revision on the notion of liminality and its allusion to “threshold people”, as Turner (1967:95) refers to individuals in the process of transformation. Similarly, I consider women artists' entrance into the local art historical narrative through their contesting of boundaries and deliberate crossing of borders. I furthermore suggest

¹ This includes books, journal articles and exhibition catalogues.

² The Soweto Uprisings took place on 16 June 1976, when youth from Soweto schools protested in opposition to the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which instituted, in 1974, the language of Afrikaans alongside English as a compulsory medium of instruction in schools. The protests were met with strong resistance from the police and resulted in several fatalities among the students.

that, within the transition from an apartheid to a post-apartheid constituency, the local woman carved out her position adjacent to local and global metanarratives of art. A liminal position enables the conceptualisation of instances where structure and agency is complicated. This complication frees subjects from structure and allows for creative and innovative readings of the self, infused with a sense of unsettlement, where “hierarchies and standing norms” disappear within structural orders (Thomassen 2014:1). In line with the former, I argue that local women artists’ and curators’ interrogation of the restricting and fixed normative constructs, inscribed by both colonial and patriarchal borders, serves to undermine authority through their ability to negotiate themselves in a liminal manner.

This chapter therefore embarks on a brief historical overview of South Africa’s pre-democracy period during which early traces of a feminist trajectory in local art practice are foregrounded. Following this is a discussion of early post-apartheid moments of articulation. These laid the foundation for a more performative rendering of post-African agency, as evident in recent exhibitions and artworks. The revisionist reading of key exhibitions which provoked negotiation around female selves is critically discussed, while attention is drawn to major role players in the local art context who have contributed to the appellation of ‘women’ in an interstitial and, initially, sporadic way.

Despite the local spirit of crisis in this area, issues surrounding gender were distinctly secondary to racial politics. Marion Arnold was the first to engage with the notion of women and art in her books, *Women and art in South Africa* (1996) and *Between union and liberation: Women artists in South Africa 1910 – 1994* (2005) co-edited with Brenda Schmahmann. Schmahmann’s contribution to local art practice is equally evident in her numerous publications and curated exhibitions. These have been focused on contemporary female art practice, and have yielded much insight into local women’s artistic production as well as feminist concerns. Schmahmann’s publications include *Mapula: Embroidery and empowerment in the Winterveld* (2006), *Material Matters* (2000), and *Through the Looking Glass: Representations of self by South African women artists* (2004) – a book that stems from her curated exhibition with the same title. Arnold’s and Schmahmann’s publications have become prototypical sources pertaining to local feminist practice. To date, these books remain the few seminal sources attempting to reconstruct an interrogation of female concerns within local artistic practice. It is this deficiency in discourse that this study wishes to attend to.

3.1 Rebels with a cause – opening up the threshold

Liminal personae aim to rupture conventional hegemonic sameness. It is this element of transgressive engagement that characterises early feminist interventions into local art practices, and conjures up the image of Braidotti's (1994:1) nomad figuration – a way of thinking that induces “ways out of phallogentric visions of the subject”. The figuration of the nomad presents “a map of where s/he has already been”, marked by a fluidity, mobility and multiplicity that offers nomadic identity as “an inventory of traces” (Braidotti 1994:14). In its reliance upon diversity, the nomad institutes a kind of counter-memory able to resist acculturation into conventional ways of portraying the self (Braidotti 1994:25). It is this spirit of rebellion and aversion that has situated local women's concerns – a task foregrounded by several seminal role players, whose influence in local art practice extends to include both feminist concerns and racial exclusion. These ‘rebels’ of the local art world ignited discussions around women through their contribution to discourse, curatorship or art practice.

Arnold (1996:131) notes that feminism was met with much caution in South Africa. Even though “race consistently trumps gender” against an apartheid stronghold, patriarchal ideology prevails as a dominating impetus in and across racial and ethnic communities. Arnold (1996:174) maintains that the prevalence of patriarchy often overshadows female concerns when men (both black and white) rely on ‘their’ women for solidarity and allegiance in political and social instances. However, apart from these obvious concerns, most women opted to disassociate themselves from feminist doctrines. Arnold (1996:131) explains:

In general, white women are persuaded that feminism denigrates their feminine sexuality; black women, that it is a foreign import which will dilute their racial heritage.

Arnold (1996:15) stresses that political pressure ensured that black women were cautioned against feminism, as it was viewed as “an unacceptable doctrine espoused by middle-class white women”, while the latter received “bad press from a challenged patriarchy”. Mario Pissarra (2011:7) shares Arnold's sentiments, and further complicates issues by speculating about the contrast between white university-schooled women artists, and black women artists who were usually trained at community arts centres, or by a mentor who was often white. Apartheid wedged a

clear distinction between white and black women, and served to further discredit the notion 'women' as an all-encompassing designation. I argue that the racial tension of the apartheid regime ensured that gender and race have become enmeshed. This, coupled with South Africa's sanctioned exclusion from the world at large, has cast South African women's art production as distinct from the international contingent of feminism – both in its history and its ideology.

The Soweto Uprisings² of 1976 mark Sue Williamson's (1989:8) identification of a moment when many local artists were "jolted out of lethargy". This call to action ushered in the 1980s as a period of counter-hegemony. Galleries, artists and curators, in sync with global revisionist trends and protesting the draconian nature of apartheid governance, were intent on showcasing the work of black artists as a means to redress the considerable imbalance in representation. Sadly, South Africa's exclusion from the international art market due to the mounting number of cultural boycotts during this period meant that few artists³ were awarded access to global trends and markets. This resulted in the local art scene becoming closed-off, dislocated and ostracised from the mainstream international art practice, consequently then operating on its own terms in a kind of "heterotopia of crisis", as Foucault (1986:24) refers to such dislocated spaces.⁴ Therefore the local, marginalised art scene may be understood through relations of power, expressed by the very representation of its structures.

Such an exposed position of place allows for the controlling ideology or hegemonic discourse – whether apartheid ideology, colonial discourse and (exclusionary) Western feminist practice – to become a prospect for resistance (Hetherington 1997:20). This opportunity for transgression is yielded by "interstitial or marginal spaces [...] and counter-hegemonic representations of space [read alternative feminist trajectories]" (Hetherington 1997:20). These spaces emerge as "temporal situations" that appear in particular places to engage in moments of resistance (Hetherington 1997:22) - and this tempestuous period certainly put forward an urgent call for revision of personal and collective identity.

² The Soweto Uprisings took place on 16 June 1976, when youth from Soweto schools protested in opposition to the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which instituted, in 1974, the language of Afrikaans alongside English as a compulsory medium of instruction in schools. The protests were met with strong resistance from the police and resulted in several fatalities among the students.

³ These were mostly white artists or black artists in exile.

⁴ "Heterotopia of crisis" is described by Foucault (1986:24) as "spaces reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis." Foucault (1986:24) cites adolescents, menstruating or expectant women, and the elderly as examples of individuals in a liminal state.

It is the curatorial projects of this period that expressed resistance against marginalisation and sovereignty during the pre-democracy period. I suggest that these arrangements of artworks prompted an opportunity for new imaginings of the self. As such, certain local men and women stepped up to the task of erecting “temporal situations” - or curatorial projects - to foreground the role of women within South African art practice. They are viewed as “transgressive” curatorial figures, or, as Renee Baert (1996:117) calls them, “facilitator[s] of the artist-transgressor”.

Williamson is acknowledged as a major role player in holding up a mirror to exclusionary practices in society while igniting the power of artists and artwork. In addition to her artistic practice and curatorship, she has impacted widely on South African contemporary art discourse through her numerous published books and articles, which have become vital and central sources. Her contribution to (and coining of the term) resistance art⁵ is evident in her book, *Resistance art in South Africa* (1989)⁶ This publication records the roles of both black and white artists who produced work as a counter argument and in resistance to, the reigning government. Williamson’s inclusion of many previously excluded and marginalised artists contributed to the pluralistic impulse of redress, which not only elevated the status of South African artists, but also projected local art practice into the global arena.

Building similar bridges to international platforms (and perhaps burning some at home), Linda Givon, the founder of Goodman Gallery,⁷ played an equally significant role by producing exhibitions that deliberately showcased its disagreement with apartheid ideologies during a time when museums subscribed to the beliefs of the autocratic government. Despite the numerous international boycotts instituted against South Africa during the 1980s, Givon negotiated access to international

⁵ ‘Resistance art’ refers specifically to local art practice that appeared systematically between 1976 and the early 1990s – from within established art practice and at grassroots level – that aimed to expose and assault apartheid doctrines. Although much art originating from this period shows enquiry into identity, the politics of race by far overshadows those relating to gender.

⁶ Arnold (1996:14-15) notes that, despite Sue Williamson’s involvement in feminist activity, her seminal book, *Resistance art in South Africa* (1989), only focuses on “resistance to racism” and not “women’s oppression or resistance to patriarchy.” Similarly, topics relating to oppression and segregation were the order of the day for most artwork produced during this time. Also, in cases where alternative themes (including women’s issues) were raised, these were often tainted by the political overtones of this period.

⁷ The Goodman Gallery is one of South Africa’s leading commercial contemporary art galleries and showcases contemporary South African and African artwork. The gallery was established in 1966 in Johannesburg, and much later extended to Cape Town. Originally founded by its owner Linda Givon, the gallery was sold to Liza Essers in 2008 and remains committed in terms of its contribution to local art practice and its dedication to artists from the Global South.

participation in Art Basel⁸ and provided continued support of local artists. Williamson (1999:[sp]) concurs about Givon:

Passionate about art, and strongly supportive of her artists, Givon never felt herself restricted to the gallery, and has sat on committees, banged on government doors to loosen up cultural funds, curated, trod on a number of authoritarian toes, and been immensely enabling in helping art and artists participate in international exhibitions.

The significance of Marilyn Martin's role in local art practice should also be noted here. As Director of the South African National Gallery between 1990 and 2001, and in her current appointment as Director of Art Collections for Iziko Museums of Cape Town since 2001, she has made major curatorial contributions, and ensured that these exhibitions have crossed local borders to travel world-wide.⁹ Martin has worked consistently towards redressing preponderant museum practice in her inclusion of black voices in the local narrative of art, has served on numerous boards and panels, and has produced an extensive body of literature on local art practice.¹⁰

Although women artists were not overtly excluded from participating during this period, very few South African exhibitions were dedicated to topics around feminist issues and womanhood.¹¹ When coupled with a governing paternalistic viewpoint, this rendered the reception of women's artwork within local art practice questionable at best. Ivor Powell (1985:6) disputes the feminist claim regarding the exclusion of women from the art arena. In the exhibition catalogue of the *Women artists in South Africa / Vrouekunstenaars in Suid-Afrika*¹², Powell (1985:6) maintains that of "the handful of South African artists that have anything like international reputations, a

⁸ Art Basel has hosted modern and contemporary art shows yearly in Basel, Switzerland, Miami Beach, USA and Hong Kong since 1970, providing an international platform for gallerists and artists to showcase artworks from around the world.

⁹ Martin has curated several exhibitions of South African art in Mali, Denmark, France, the USA and Brazil.

¹⁰ Martin has written numerous articles on art, culture and architecture. Recent publications include essays in the following catalogues and books: *Coexistence: Contemporary cultural production in South Africa* (2003), *Art/Aids and KSouth Africa: The social expression of a pandemic* (2003), *A decade of democracy: South African art 1994 – 2004 from the permanent collection of Iziko* (2004), and *New identities zeitgenössische kunst aus Südafrika* (2004), to highlight but a few.

¹¹ A *Women's Festival of the Arts* (1985) was hosted in Johannesburg and comprised several informal exhibitions and performances. Arnold (1996:15) notes that, due to the lack of focus and poor selection processes, the endeavour failed to communicate issues around gender equality effectively to the public, but succeeded in women artists "recognis[ing] that they were not isolated". Also in 1985, SANG mounted *Women artists of South Africa* – an exhibition that aimed to redress the lack of attention to the historical contribution of sixty-seven named and eight anonymous women (Arnold 1996:160). In addition to this, the work of many women artists was shown in important exhibitions, including *Tributaries* and the *Cape Town Triennials*, albeit usually devoid of content premised on women's issues.

¹² Hereafter referred to as 'Women artists'.

very significant part is in fact made up of women.” In this pursuit to disprove the assertion that women are excluded from the art world, Powell (1985:6) named just four women artists, disregarded those without “international reputations”, and neglected to comment on black women artists.

Notwithstanding his view that the South African art scene “is traditionally a female preserve”, Powell (1985:6) does concede that the production of art by women still occurred within a “patriarchal conceptual framework.” He (Powell 1985:7) explains that despite local imperialist roots, and within the Afrikaans community at least, art was not viewed as an important tool for transmitting ideology. Instead, it was considered an “effeminate pastime”, unless employed for monumentalising Afrikanerdom or “naturalising ideology”, where the appointed artist would certainly have been male. However, Powell’s views around the inability of women artists working with feminist concerns to compete with racial politics as part of the period’s social agenda were contradicted, since in the 1980s there emerged an awareness of feminist and women’s movements. This began to appear, albeit sporadically and subjugated by apartheid politics, in artwork produced by South African women artists.

3.2 Passing through the door: Plotting feminist concerns on the threshold

For women artists to pass through the doors of galleries and museums marks the first steps towards instigating a feminist art premise through transition rites. Following Van Gennep (1960:23), such “rites of separation from a previous world” suggest the passing from constricting doctrines to a metaphorical space of renegotiation of the self.

Conversely, Thomassen (2014:13-14) misinterprets ‘liminality’ when he explains that liminality depends on an understanding of “passages and passage experiences”, stating that these expressions stem from the Latin *patio* (to suffer, to undergo). From this viewpoint, he defines liminality as a “displacement, a process of transformation undertaken but not yet finished”; but here, the term ‘passage’ is being confused with the Latin origin of ‘passion’. Liminality could be considered an embracing of an understanding of “passages and passage experiences” only when considered in the light of the true etymology of ‘passage’, which is from the Latin *passus*, meaning “pace” or “step”. In this way, the concept of becoming is underlined, of evolving in-

between, of moving from one position to another, of being incomplete, of always being on the threshold of the new.

From this perspective, the concerted efforts of South African curators and artists to foreground issues pertaining to local female identity have marked the post-African woman's entry into South African narratives of art history, as well as encouraging a counter-narrative founded on feminist concerns. It should also be noted that these moments of feminist impulse do not merely function as fixed pockets of knowledge along an alternative trajectory. Instead, these narratives function simultaneously, both as an instance of numerous debates, and as vantage points through which female identity remains constantly in the process of negotiation.

3.2.1 *The inception of an alternative, 'inclusive' narrative*

Constructing an inclusive feminist trajectory of local female art production remains a complex task. Arnold (2005:19) notes that the lack of research material is due to the scarcity of South African black women (art) historians because of apartheid's exclusion of black people from education. It is argued that the consequent lack of documentation, catalogues and articles on the black women artists who did manage to overcome the difficulties presented and exhibit their work, also extends from an apartheid agenda. The refusal to recognise such artists, especially by means of writing – as this would have granted them status – underscores the exclusionary politics of the time. This 'lack' of black voices, whether as artists, curators and historians, is slowly being redressed in this century (cf. section 4.1), in line with Arnold's (2005:20) call for a "commitment to speaking about (not claiming to speak for) [black] women."

Women artists, hosted by the South African National Gallery in Cape Town in 1985, was curated by Lynn McClelland and Lucy Alexander. It was the first local curatorial arrangement to open the door to an awareness of female politics as an ideological investigation, in contrast to the social politics of the time.¹³ Although this "general all-women show" was not intended as a feminist exploration but rather as a revision of art produced by women in South Africa, the exhibition still provoked discourse

¹³ This all-women exhibition showcased a historical account of art produced by women in South Africa ranging from the early 1900s to the 1980s via 128 artworks by 67 known and 8 unknown artists.

around the issues that complicate local feminine expression (Kenton 1985:11).¹⁴ Contradictory to Diana Kenton's disassociation with feminism, Ivor Powell (1985:6) suggests that despite (most) work's avoidance of overt feminist references, its presentation as part of a "women's show places it firmly within a feminist context." *Women artists* as the first show of its kind in South Africa, served not only to raise awareness of the lack of art produced by black women artists, but also to provoke significant debates around the notion of craft.

With the inclusion of only ten black women artists in the exhibition, the dominance of white women artists is demonstrable. While this disparity draws attention to the lack of representation of black women artists during this period, the curators of *Women artists* must be commended for showcasing the work of the black artists that they did have access to, as to do so, they had to disregard the government's punitive legislation. To further complicate matters, as there was a scarcity of source material around many black artists, the curators had little information about them to disclose in the catalogues and other literary supplements. Although I believe that every effort was made by the curators to acquire sufficient biographical information about the artists included, the unavailability of this resulted in brief catalogue inscriptions. For example, R Mdluli¹⁵ is cited only by her initial and surname with no other details. The impression of namelessness is extended in the catalogue to the collective, non-specific description "Ndebele women" when making reference to the beadwork produced by these women.

The other black woman artist whose work was included is Gladys Mgudlandlu (Figure 23), who is also cited as the first black woman to gain recognition as an artist within South African artistic confines (Arnold 1996:13).¹⁶ Her work aligns with the current painting trends of the time when analysed by formal Western fine art conventions. Patricia Davidson's essay could have discussed Mgudlandlu's work alongside the works of her white contemporaries, and this would have served the exhibition's attempt at inclusion adequately. The overall failure of the catalogue to

¹⁴ Around the same time as *Women artists* showed in Cape Town, Johannesburg hosted a *Women's Festival of the Arts* with a similar democratic agenda in mind. Arnold (1996:15) notes that this festival was criticised for being "unequal in quality", and failed to present issues pertaining to women's art production to its audience; but the effort still reinforced the notion that "gender was central to [female] creativity", and so ushered in an awareness of feminism and the art of women in South Africa.

¹⁵ *The lions in the fire* ([Isa]) is part of The South African National Gallery Collection, and was again showcased in the museum's exhibition *1910 – 2010: Pierneef to Gugulective* (2010). In this catalogue, however, the artist is referred to as E. Mdluli and is still devoid of any further detail.

¹⁶ Ntobeko Ntombela (2013a:72) questions the naming of Mgudlandlu as the first black woman artist in South Africa (cf. section 4.3.1).



Figure 23: Gladys Mgudlandlu, *Table Mountain* (1961). Gouache on paper. 55 x 74 cm. Collection of LC Isaacson at the time. Exhibited as part of *Women artists* (1985) (Mutual Art [sa]:[sp]).

frame the exhibition's inclusion of black women artists' work, could be read as a positioning of black female identity as distinct and marginal from that of white women – and merely echoes the apartheid era's borders of exclusion.¹⁷

While the lack of representation of black women artists in the exhibition is understood within the political and historical constraints of the time, *Women artists* would have benefitted, and perhaps made a far more potent contribution to local art history and practice, from a more open reference to the above issues. Instead, the curators and critics of the day often appeared patronising, and almost tainted by the political conditions. Powell (1985:7) avers, condescendingly, that black societies “of course have no traditional concept properly comparable to that of art” but that they are “undoubtedly patriarchal in character”, albeit different from Western patriarchy. This denigration of art contributions from black communities also highlights the ongoing discourse at the time around what constitutes craft and fine art – from a Western perspective.

¹⁷ Arnold (1996:13) explains that Mgudlandlu's status as an artist was also met with “embarrassingly effusive and patronising journalism”.

Davison (1985:18) argued that Eurocentric conventions are inadequate in relation to the work of black women artists, as Western perceptions around fine art were foreign to them, due to the apartheid period's elitist education policies (cf. section 3.2.1). She (Davison 1985:18-20) continues that the tradition of Ndebele beadwork subscribes to both artistic and ethnographic frameworks, and asserts that the "domestic nature of African women's artistic expression" – as it pertains to black women in traditional rural situations – is largely restricted to the production of pots, baskets and beadwork. Conversely, metalwork and woodcarving are male dominated mediums. This gendered division of labour not only raises feminist concerns regarding the equality of black women in traditional settings, but also points to the subjugation of craft to fine art – a conventional distinction that affects both gendered and racial understanding of what constitutes art. The inclusion of the Ndebele artworks on the exhibition provoked discourse around such issues, and was in line with similar international focus on art and craft at the time, despite South Africa's exclusion from these arenas.

Western feminist agendas during the late 1970s and 1980s interrogated the relegation of women artists' work to craft along with its associations to the domestic realm, and challenged the perceptions that, due to these associations and its public assimilation, it was of less importance than the fine art produced by men.¹⁸ Early discourse around fine art versus craft foregrounds a distinctly anti-feminist view, given early feminist attacks on the sexualised hierarchical relegation of 'women's work' as subjugated to (male) fine art.

While the international debate was concerned mainly with a gendered reading of art produced by women, the South African debate also had to include a racially informed categorisation. This renders black women artists doubly marginalised due to the implied ethnographic framing, and these issues must be of concern when curating work produced by South African women artists. In line with feminist methodologies of inclusivity, I argue that my definition of art remains comprehensive enough to allow for the inclusion of both conventional clarifications of fine art, such as oil painting and bronze sculpting, originally considered the preserve of men; as well as that which is considered craft, which includes – but is not limited to – watercolour painting, basketry, knitting, embroidery and beadwork (cf. sections 3.2.2 & 4.3.1).

¹⁸ Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock ([1981] 2013:78) suggest that it "is precisely the specific history of women and their artwork that is effaced when art historical discourse categorizes this kind of art practice as decorative, dexterous, industrious, geometric and 'the expression of the feminine spirit in art'".

Martin (in Goodnow, Lohman & Bredekamp 2006:171) concurs and states, in relation to her curatorial overseeing of the South African National Gallery exhibition, that beadwork, basketry, textiles and other products made by women in traditional rural contexts should bear the same status as paintings and sculptures. She (Martin in Goodnow, Lohman & Bredekamp 2006:171) explains her stance: “I’m not interested in the so-called ‘fine art’ categories because they are not our categories. They’re European categories and we shifted from all that to be inclusive.”

The inclusion of non-Western artists, as well as attempts to account for the kinds of artistic production which fell outside of the traditional confines of fine art at the time, became curatorial strategies in the 1980s. Several large-scale exhibitions showcased the work of non-Western artists among their Western ‘counterparts’. International exhibitions such as “*Primitivism*” in 20th century art: *Affinity of the tribal and the modern* (1984)¹⁹ and *Magiciens de la terre* (1989)²⁰ are considered landmark exhibitions. Although critics condemned the apparent ethnocentric curation of the works on display, the exhibitions still represent breakthroughs in crossing racial divides and in presenting a more inclusive definition of what constitutes art. Despite South Africa’s barring from the international art arena, local curators investigated similar concerns, organising historically significant and comprehensive exhibitions such as *Tributaries: A view of contemporary South African Art* (1985)²¹ and *The*

¹⁹ Hereafter referred to as *Primitivism*. William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe curated the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Documented as one of the first exhibitions in which non-Western objects were represented outside the frame of ethnography and alongside Western works of art, critics lashed out against the obvious ethnocentric curation of the works on display. The most notable criticism was the curators’ delineation of so-called ‘primitive’ cultures and geographies as exotic through methods reliant upon binary oppositions.

²⁰ Hereafter referred to as *Magiciens*. This exhibition is considered to be a landmark in its dedication to represent contemporary art from non-Western centres, shown alongside contemporary Western pieces, and its contribution towards opening up debate surrounding the decontextualised representation of non-Western art. Curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in collaboration with Mark Francis and others at the Centre Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette in Paris, the ideologically charged project employed many specialists who searched widely for artists extending beyond the borders of traditional Western art centres to participate in what Buchloh (1989:150) dubbed the “The whole earth show”. While Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:10) concur that *Magiciens* marks “one paradigmatic moment that helped break the border of marginality of African artists”, it did not escape postcolonialist scrutiny. Martin’s central role as the curator challenges the “locus of artistic enunciation” as it transposes the emphasis of the individual works “to the very project of their gathering in an exhibition” (Lamoureux 2005:66).

²¹ Hereafter referred to as *Tributaries*. The exhibition, curated by Ricky Burnett, was sponsored by BMW and hosted in a warehouse, which later became Museum Africa. It assimilated an eclectic mix of art comprising works created by black, white, trained, and untrained South African artists. Anitra Nettleton (2000:26) remarks that the show “sent shockwaves through the country’s established art market”, as it opened up myriads of debates surrounding black and white artists, African and European traditions and the distinction between art and craft. Despite Burnett’s efforts to render an all-encompassing exhibition, Sabine Marschall (2001:53) felt the selection for the arrangement did not take cognisance of the conceptual difference of the pieces on show in its drive to display works that share aesthetic or thematic concerns side by side. While *Tributaries* promoted the careers of many black artists, Burnett’s curatorial strategy of assimilation was aimed at erasing the distinction between the rural crafts(wo)man (mostly black, untrained artists) and the urban artist (mostly white, trained artists); however, in effect it

neglected tradition: Towards a new history of South African Art (1930 – 1988) (1988)²².

Although the above-mentioned international and local exhibitions were not aimed specifically at the inclusion of women, certain works by South African black women artists were selected. One is Esther Mahlangu, whose artwork *House* (1989) (see Figure 24) formed part of the *Magiciens* exhibition; while Maria Mabhena (Figure 25) featured alongside Noria Mabasa in *Tributaries*. While both exhibitions aimed at an inclusive agenda, the struggle to successfully contextualise works that veer off the traditional fine art path when installed alongside Western pieces regrettably allows for critique relating to the paternalistic framing of non-Western artists. An example of this sycophancy may be deduced from Burnett's (1985:[sp]) approach to Mabhena's biography in the accompanying catalogue to *Tributaries*: "probably from the South Ndebele group in the *Rooikoppies* district of the Transvaal, South Africa."²³ Similarly, in the case of Mabasa (Figure 26) the details provided by Burnett bear little semblance to her profile as an artist, and disappointingly serve to reinforce her 'Africanness', while overlooking her transgressive feminist potential.²⁴

The questioning of traditional gender roles is primary to Mabasa's artistic output, which evolved from her initial involvement in the production of functional objects made by women in the Venda community. Her insistence on experimentation with alternative materials resulted in the extension of her practice to that of woodcarving – traditionally an exclusively male practice. Mabasa's impact as a female artist is rooted in her resistance to patriarchal impositions on artistic practice, and her forging

highlighted the cultural divide that he was trying so hard to avoid and relegated art produced by black artists as secondary to that produced by their white contemporaries.

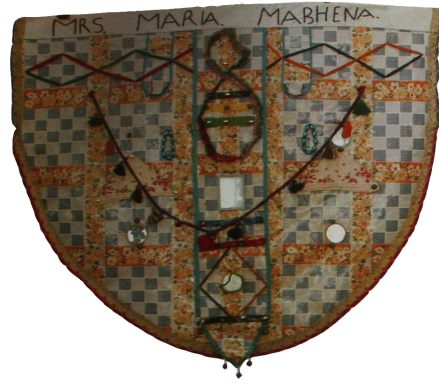
²² Hereafter referred to as *The neglected tradition*. The exhibition was curated by Steven Sack for the Johannesburg Art Gallery and, as part of the "revisionist impulse", the show aimed to trace the tradition of modern and contemporary art produced by black artists, previously excluded from the art market. Except for certain white artists' inclusion in the show, "based on their integral relationships with the historical development of black South African art" (Sack 1988:7), the emphasis was on curating the work of black artists. Once again, the curator (and the white artist mentor) is posed as a cultural arbiter rooted in Western value systems. Brenda Danilowitz (1990:95) notes, "behind every black successful black artist was a white teacher or mentor" whose "intervention ranges from the most condescending paternalism to the real possibility of black and white artists working side by side [...]."

²³ Marschall (2001a:53) concurs that non-Western works are often accompanied by an almost overcompensation of information which foregrounds the artist's history, training, experiences and so forth to 'contextualise' it within the exhibition and the larger art market. These accounts are often exaggerated: Marschall (2001a:53) explains that, as "a result, an artist's persona, sometimes illustrious, often heroi[s]ed and mythology[s]ed, emerges from the sea of anonymous craftsmen, lending credibility to the work and justifying its consideration on an equal footing with the work of white artists".

²⁴ Burnett (1985:[sp]) explains that she was born in 1938, in Xigalo in the Ramukhumba district of the Northern Transvaal, South Africa. She is widowed with two children. She makes pots, sculpture and grows vegetables in the Vuwani district of Venda.



Left: Figure 24: Esther Mahlangu, *House* (1989) installation of plaster, cement, dung and vinyl paint. Grande Halle de la Villette as part of the exhibition, *Magiciens* (Francis [sa]:[sp]).



Right: Figure 25: Maria Mabhena, *Ceremonial mantle* (1985). This work formed part of the exhibition, *Tributaries – a view of contemporary South African art* (1985) (Burnett 1985:17).



Figure 26: Noria Mabasa, *Carnage II* (1988). Wood, 79 x 179 x 218,5 cm (Water, the [delicate] thread of life [sa]:[sp]).

of a visual language carved in wood. Ethnographic framing and exotic strategies often inform issues regarding the display of work by black women artists and it is by opening colour divisions that these dialogues can be explored as central to the engagement of a liminal post-African female identity.

3.2.2 *Raising feminist concerns*

While in 1980s conservative society feminist politics were not favoured, the combined impulse of more inclusive curated exhibitions, often highlighting the work of women artists, managed to transgress such boundaries. Prominent feminist concerns were unveiled, such as the patriarchal restrictions that relegate women to the domestic sphere, and prevalent notions around ‘women’s work’ within the terrain of art.

An example is *Table setting* (1985) by Siopis, included in *Women artists*. This work negotiates these hierarchical borders through its ‘contamination’ of high art traditions of oil painting by the domesticity implied in ‘icing cakes’. Her other artworks of this era²⁵ – *Still life with watermelon and other things* (1985), *Table three* (1985) (Figure 27), and *Melancholia* (1986) – depict tables laden with excess. In both representation and technique, Siopis deconstructs Western artistic traditions and conventions. Her use of an icing syringe to literally ‘ice’ the tablecloths, cakes and food onto the canvas, plays on the notion of stereotypical interpretations of women, domesticity and art, thus subverting Powell’s remarks discussed earlier.

Women artists highlighted issues pertaining to the paternalistic views of black women, specifically their tangential and often obscure inclusion in local art practice. This was underlined by their marginalisation and absence from local art markets, as well as by the patriarchal insistence on ‘women’s work’ and ‘female artists’ imposed on women. Despite the shortcomings of McClelland and Alexander’s *Women artists*, they succeeded in bringing to the fore women’s concerns in South African curatorship.

²⁵ *Still life with watermelon and other things* (1985) received a Merit award at the Cape Town Triennial of the same year; *Table three* (1985) was produced for *Tributaries*; and Siopis was awarded the Volkskas Atelier Prize for *Melancholia* (1986).



Figure 27: Penny Siopis, *Table three* (1985). Oil on canvas. Exhibited as part of *Tributaries* (1985) (Burnett 1985:40).

*South African mail art – A view from the inside*²⁶ (1989) (Figure 28) was curated by Janet Goldner with the support of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid, in an attempt to align women's issues with the liberation struggle.²⁷ Although the show engaged with issues relating to race, class and gender, Cheryl Walker (1991:xiv) notes that it was black women's "blackness rather than their femaleness" that informs their political practice: "[w]omen's struggles against male domination [...] were always subordinated to the claims of national liberation [...] [and] were for the most part private and riddled with ambiguity. Few have acknowledged them as 'political'." The wide-ranging aim was to present an exhibition of 400 postcards created by South African women invited from all backgrounds, to express their own 'view from the inside'. At art workshops held in Johannesburg and Cape Town, artists, relatives of political (and other) prisoners, children in the townships and women in rural areas were invited to produce work for the exhibition (Goldner [sa]:[sp]).

²⁶ Hereafter referred to as '*South African mail art*'.

²⁷ Apart from forging this alignment ideologically, participants were able to take part in the exhibition and accompanying workshops free of charge provided each individual signed an anti-apartheid pledge. The pledge promised to work towards achieving a "free and democratic culture in South Africa" and dismissed "all discrimination based on race, sex and age" (Richards 1991:121).



Figure 28: Bongi Dhlomo's postcard for *South African mail art* (1989) (Goldner [sa]:[sp]).

The propaganda-like tone of the exhibition echoed the British feminist movements of the 1970s, as it accentuated “communication, broad creative rights [and] the power of the collective”, aspects which invariably brought tensions of race, class and gender to the surface (Richards 1991:121). The notion of ‘shared oppression’, however, veiled the particularities of black women and threatened solidarity – the ideal so desired for *South African mail art* (Richards 1991:121). Similarly, the show exposed the disparity dividing women into separate camps and fronted the need for a feminist agenda able to account for the differences induced by race and culture, and between women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In part celebration of South Africa's newfound democracy and the opening of international cultural borders, and part in keeping with the current global biennale²⁸ phenomenon, the first Johannesburg Biennale *Africus*²⁹ was launched in 1995, followed in 1997 by the second Johannesburg Biennale, *Trade routes: History and*

²⁸ This mega-exhibition typically encompasses a “large-scale, international group exhibition” that takes place on a biennial basis, is usually supported by vast financial provisions, and puts an emphasis on “internationalism” and globalism (O’Neill 2012:52).

²⁹ *Africus*, organised by local director, Christopher Till, with Lorna Ferguson as artistic director for the biennale, was aimed at providing a bridge for resident artists to the international art arena. The accompanying catalogue was unmistakably designed to promote South Africa to a global audience: it contains images of South Africa supplemented with references to the historically debilitating effect of apartheid on the visual arts; and with critical essays by renowned local and international writers (many of whom came from Africa and its diaspora) deliberating aspects, such as post-apartheid South Africa, democracy and postcoloniality.

geography.³⁰ The inclusive strategies evident in both biennale projects endorsed the rainbow nation ideal, but they also drew harsh criticism premised on the perception that they were perfunctory gestures, rendering “tokenism and an act of political correctness” instead of encouraging earnest support for the multicultural project (Marschall 1999:122).³¹ Although women artists were not excluded from either event, a focus on feminist concerns was suppressed by the overall interests in global art markets and in postcolonial critique.

In a deliberate stance against Enwezor’s denial of a women-only exhibition as part of the biennale,³² Jones positioned her *Trade routes* curatorial contribution, titled *Life’s little necessities: Installations by women in the 1990s*³³ (1997) (Figure 29), as an exhibition allowing women-only participation. Jones (2000:129) explains: “I chose to use women’s art and the issues of identity constructions as the context for viewing globalism.”³⁴ Aware of the issues surrounding the local body politic (cf. section 3.2), Jones touches briefly on aspects of the sexualised black female body in globalised art worlds, and then moves on to position her inquiry locally. She (Jones 1997:288) congratulates South Africa for having a relatively high number of women in parliament, but names “a few traditional African practices” (such as polygamy and lobola) that, in her opinion, are at odds with “modern [Western] concepts of feminism.” However, Jones, a woman of colour herself, fails to account satisfactorily for the differences present in South African female art practice. She also bases her project on principles of inclusion in her alignment of local feminist concerns with globalised definitions of ‘women’, but with little significant engagement with, or contextualisation of, local female subjectivities and cultural practices.

³⁰ Hereafter referred to as *Trade routes*. Enwezor (USA) and Octavio Zaya (USA) curated the main exhibition, *Alternating currents; Important and exportant*, was curated by Gerardo Mosquera (Cuba); Kellie Jones (USA) curated *Life’s little necessities*; Hou Hanru (France) curated *Hong Kong etc.*; *Transversions* was curated by Yu Yeon Kim (USA & Korea); and *Graft* was curated by Colin Richards (South Africa).

³¹ *Africus* prized aesthetics over the political and has, therefore, been criticised for “pandering to an international audience” (Budney 1998:89-90).

³² Jones (2000:127) explains Enwezor was “dead set against” her curating a show entitled *Reclaiming Venus*, a previously conceived idea, amidst the raging debate on the representation of black female bodies in South Africa. Jones (2000:127) therefore explored “ideas of women’s agency, power, and sexuality” within the context of “global, transnational, and postcolonial.” It is dissatisfying that Enwezor chose to avoid an exploration of issues that are so close to his heart that he embarked on, what was to become, a war of words with South African art practitioners. It is furthermore telling that Jones, in her selection of female artists for the show, carefully sidestepped, not only the specific white female artists Enwezor derided, but also all white female artists in general.

³³ Hereafter referred to, *Life’s little necessities*. The exhibition was installed at the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town.

³⁴ Of the thirteen participants, five are of African descent and two from South Africa. The artists included Zarina Bhimji (Uganda), Maria Magdalene Campos-Pons (Cuba), Silvia Gruner (Mexico), Veliswa Gwintsa (South Africa), Glenda Heyliger (Aruba), Wangechi Mutu (Kenya), Berni Searle (South Africa), Lorna Simpson (USA), Melanie Smith (UK), Valeska Soares (Brazil), Jocelyn Taylor (USA), Fatimah Tuggar (Nigeria) and Pat Ward Williams (USA).

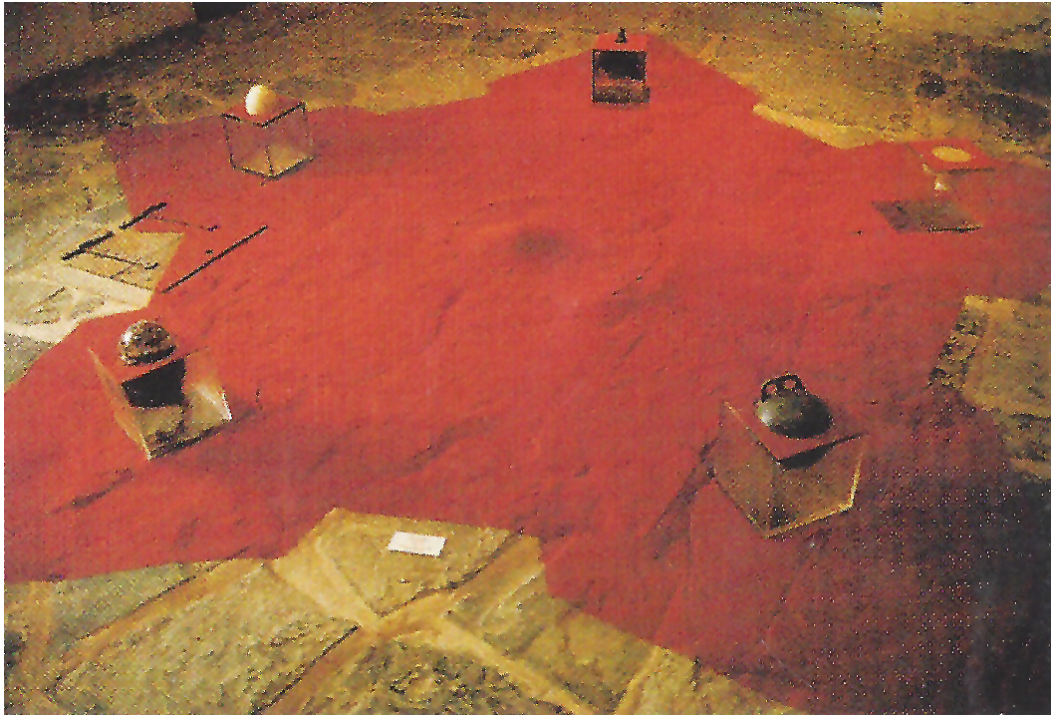


Figure 29: Berni Searle, *Com-fort* (1997). Installation of spice and resin objects as part of *Life's little necessities* at the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town (Bester 2003:15).

While the premise of race stood as the privileged point of entry for debate around identity politics during the 1990s, aspects of female stereotyping and in particular, around the maternal woman, also succeeded in raising some eyebrows. *Purity and Danger*³⁵ (1997), curated by Siopis, considered aspects of “natural categorisation, taboo and transgression, order and pollution” Dubin (2012:145). Jane Taylor (in Dubin 2010:145) opened the show by questioning “what is more radical, for now, in a time in which our constitution in so many ways is more radical, for some even more transgressive, than much popular opinion?” The works showcased an engagement with the body as a space for scrutiny – “secrecy and abuse that had been cloaked with the shame of repressive religious morality and politically conspiratorial silences” (Dubin 2012:145).

Siopis’s curatorial arrangement shifted the censored boundaries upheld by the previous political regime, and inserted the body politic into the public domain.

³⁵ The exhibition, was premised conceptually on anthropologist and cultural theorist, Mary Douglas’s publication *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (1966), in which she considers societal beliefs around purity and dirt as they inform practices of religion and conduct in shaping identity. Siopis’s show launched an investigation of the body as a site subjected to repression and shame inspired by religious and political practices, and considers the taboos present in a newfound post-apartheid South Africa (Dubin 2012:145).



Figure 30: Terry Kurgan, *I'm the king of the castle* (1997). Installation of 39 photographic prints displayed as part of *Purity and danger* as part of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, *Trade routes*, displayed at the Gertrude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg (Terry Kurgan [sa]:[sp]).

Siopis's boundary-crossing was especially significant in the public indignation caused by female artists. In particular, Kurgan's *I'm the king of the castle* (1997) (Figure 30) caused outrage. Depicting a series of play-acting portraits of Kurgan's six-year-old son, the 39 photographs were perceived as highlighting "childhood sexuality and the eroticized bond between mother and child", a position that subscribes in its entirety to naturalised beliefs around the maternal woman, their relegation to the private domain, and their inappropriateness for discussion in the public realm.

In part propagated by the debate her work encouraged, Kurgan curated *Bringing up baby: artists survey the reproductive body* in 1998, first displayed at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, and later at the Castle in Cape Town. This exhibition examined the broader aspects of motherhood and the reproductive body, as well as aligning these feminist concerns to current political agendas. The show, comprising work by both male and female South African artists³⁶, transpired as

³⁶ *Bringing up baby* exhibited work by Jane Alexander, Msizi Kuhlana, Doris Nkosi, Mfeli Nkosi, Terry Kurgan, Mandla Mabila, Diana Mabunda, Bronwen Findlay, Veronique Malherbe, Fátima Mendonça, Antoinette Murdoch, Colin Richards, Ruth Rosengarten, Claudette Schreuders, Penny Siopis, Warrick Sony and Clive van den Berg.

a confluence of Kurgan's personal experience³⁷ and socio-political events at the time. These circumstances are evident of post-apartheid democracy and include the attention given to aspects relating to "reproductive rights, domestic violence, child abuse and sexual harassment"; the ascension of women into parliamentary positions; the foregrounding of pregnancy and rape in newly defined acts; and the reformation of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill (Kurgan 1998:1-2).

Kurgan's (1998:1) curatorial slant probes notions of idealised motherhood – its representation in art often portrayed within a religious context – and the naturalisation thereof of public opinion surrounding female identity. This exhibition questions the lack of "critical representation of the lived experience of the maternal" (Kurgan 1998:1), and engages the curatorial gesture to affix feminist concerns to staid political views regarding women. Moreover, it provokes discussion pertaining to abortion, and propels "previously private matters of sexuality into the public eye" (Dubin 2012:145). Consequently, the artworks comprising *Bringing up baby* challenge the distinction "between the public and the private, the political and the personal" (Kurgan 1998:2).

Adding an additional layer of interpretation that conflates debate around mothers as caregivers, is Claudette Schreuders' *Family tree* (1995) (Figure 31). This extends commonplace notions associated with aspects of the maternal to a South African socio-political arena, where white motherhood has often come to include reliance upon a nanny, usually a black woman. Schreuders' strategy of storytelling ascribes identity to the *colon* figures³⁸ she carves from a single block of wood to express (female) characters, fragile and solemn in nature. Her figure sculptures are protagonists that present "the narrative complexity of growing into a life in the world". They straddle African and Western traditions of sculpture, negotiating identity amidst divergent cultural practices and systems of belief, often drawing on biblical and mythical tales (Bester [sa]:[sp]).

³⁷ Kurgan (1998:1) declares that the exhibition transpired, partly, because of "a personal history of rape, pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage, birth, and after that, the rearing of children."

³⁸ *Colon* figures, or 'colonial' statues, are found in societies throughout West Africa and generally refer to wooden, figurative sculptures depicting Europeans or Africans in Western attire. Although these pieces bear traces of European dress, they were initially intended as domestic use, depicting an individual's "spirit lover". These works soon became commodities and gave rise to their exchange as 'tourist art' (Steiner 1994:148).



Figure 31: Claudette Schreuders, *Family tree* (1995). Cypress and American basswood and enamel paint. 91 cm. Work displayed as part of *Bringing up baby* showcased at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown and the Castle, Cape Town (Claudette Schreuders 2012:[sp]).

Conversely, Misizi Kuhlane explores the underbelly of black caregivers in a documentary, *Ghetto diaries*³⁹ (1997) (Figure 32), which portrays the longing of Doris Nkosi for her son, Mfeli Nkosi. Their lives are separated due to her employment as a domestic worker in the city where she cares for a white infant.

³⁹ *Ghetto Diaries* was a documentary series produced for Guardian Television and presented by SABC 1 during 1997. The series focused on personal South African stories of non-filmmakers in townships encouraged to film their lives. Kuhlane, along with five young South African directors, Munier Parker, Robbie Thorpe, Palesa Nkosi, Junaid Ahmed and Thulani Mokoena, took part in the project, which was honoured with a Prix Sud-Nord as part of the Rencontres Media Nord-Sud Festival held in Geneva, Switzerland and nominated for the Pierre Alain Donner Prize from Swiss-French Television.



Figure 32: Msizi Kuhlana, Doris Nkosi and Mfeli Nkosi, *Ghetto diaries: Across the divide*. Video stills produced for the documentary *Ghetto diaries*. Video displayed as part of *Bringing up baby* showcased at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown and the Castle, Cape Town (Kurgan 1998:21).

Despite the South African artworld's over-emphasis on racial politics, the exhibitions discussed above nonetheless adopted practices of postmodernity whereby "complexity, contradiction and ambiguity" could be negotiated through their dedication to persisting in crossing racially and patriarchally-based boundaries within local art practice. It is the foregrounding of these early feminist concerns that opened discussions for more complex issues to follow.

3.3 Piercing skin: black and white female bodies

"To write from the interstices, from the in-between", Thomassen (2014:8) suggests, informs both postmodern and postcolonial literature. In *The location of culture* (2004), Bhabha develops Turner's notions of liminality further, to encompass a theory around the shifting nature of (postcolonial) identity. Bhabha (2004:235) views the limen as a kind of displacement, bringing about "the slippage of signification" that results from

the expression of difference to dominant cultural practices. It is this “expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment” that reveals both conflict with and resistance to fixed conceptions of identity (Bhabha 2004:6).

In their openness to transformation, dialogue and exchange, these borderlines are viewed by Bhabha (2004:7) as the moment of passage where space and time intersect to fabricate the complex figurations of difference and identity – figures of “past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.” It is argued that Bhabha’s (2004:2) interpretation of liminality both as “the beyond” and as ambiguous, provides opportunity for the rejection of staid structures and hegemonies through the multiplicity of heterogeneous spaces that open up. It is here where alternative narratives of post-African selves can be constructed.

With the advent of an inclusive art arena in South Africa, issues surrounding the representation of black women’s bodies threatened local art practice’s boundaries. Despite the varying degrees of adoption of and aversion to feminism amongst black and white women artists in South Africa, various works promoting a counter-narrative to derogatory depictions of black women were produced during this period. Catherine de Zegher (in Malvern 2013:109) notes that periods of political crises elicit a need to break down prevalent forms of representation to reconstruct a new visual language. Although no exhibitions were initially dedicated to explore such new methods of representation of women, sporadic works appeared in various group exhibitions and competitions. These challenged orthodox methods of display, and encouraged debate around representation – a topic that would implode on the local art scene immediately following South Africa’s move to democracy.

3.3.1 Memories of Saartjie Baartman

In the early 1990s, Richards (1991:101, original emphasis) warned, “the apartheid vision has ensured that even to speak *about* cultural others – let alone speak *for* them – is to risk reproducing its repressive regimes.” Integral to this debate is the colonial exploitation of black women, in particular, on ethnographic and scientific racial difference, which situated the black female as the ultimate other. The “sexualisation of colonial discourse” renders the female other as both exotic and erotic (Arnold 1996:4).

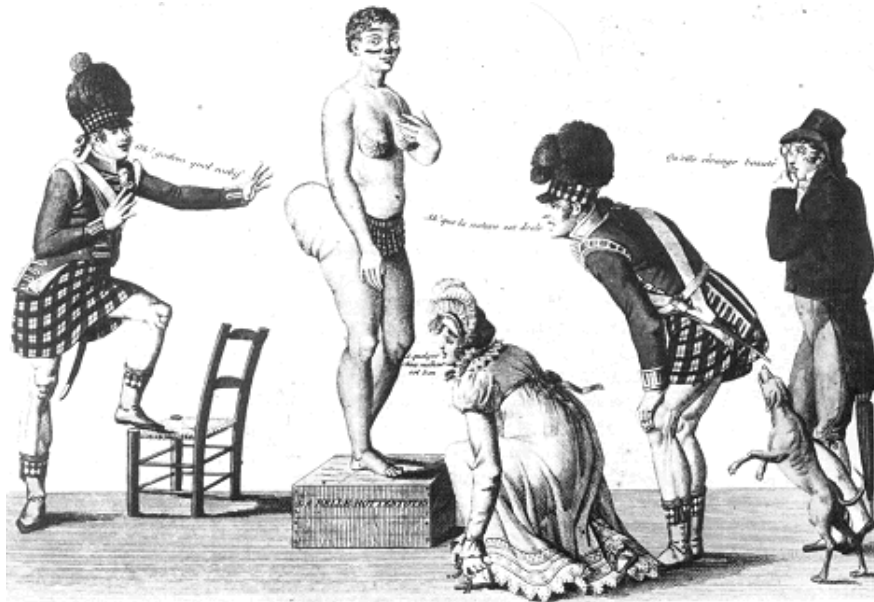


Figure 33: *Les Curieux en extase ou les cordons de souliers* ('The curious in ecstasy at the shoelaces') (c. 1815) (Arnold 1996:26).

Colonial infatuation with difference is best personified by the tale of the 'Hottentot Venus', Saartjie Baartman⁴⁰ who was exhibited in 1810 in London and Paris as a spectacle to showcase the *steatopygia* – protruding buttocks – to Europeans (Figure 33) (Gilman 1985:213).⁴¹ Although Baartman died in Paris in 1815, her body was subject to further exploitation. After autopsies, first performed by Henri de Blainville in 1816 and later by the famous Georges Cuvier in 1817, curious visitors could continue to examine her buttocks and genitalia. Sander L. Gilman (1985:216) suggests that Baartman's sexual features conjured the image of the black female throughout the nineteenth century as possessing 'primitive' sexual organs and a large sexual proclivity. Baartman's (and others') remains were later displayed in the *Musée de l'homme* in Paris, France.⁴²

⁴⁰ Saartjie Baartman is also referred to as Sarah Bartmann or Saat-Jee and also known as the "Hottentot Venus". The term Hottentot is considered a slur to refer to the Khoi-San.

⁴¹ Details surrounding Baartman's relocation from South Africa to Europe are highly contested, but it is generally believed that she was sold as a slave to Alfred Dunlop, a British ship doctor, who was responsible for her trip (Dubin 2009:89).

⁴² Baartman's remains, her skeleton, labia, brain and the casts made of her face and body upon her death, were returned to South Africa in 2002 (Jones 2010:140-143). A high-profile funeral marked the return of Baartman's remnants and provoked several discussions relating to colonial exploits (Dubin 2009:85). In her memory, the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children was established in 1999 on the Cape Flats in Cape Town as a means of recognising the tremendous amount of crime and violence inflicted on women and children. The centre provides multi-disciplinary services for abused women and children (Dubin 2009:111).



Figure 34: Penny Siopis, *Dora and the other woman* (1988). Pastel on paper. 153 x 120 cm (Williamson 1989:23).

The Western impulse to categorise difference has produced considerable imagery subjugating black women, who under such circumstances, is regarded as the ‘other’. In an attempt to challenge the existing stereotypes around the black woman, Siopis produced *Dora and the other woman* (1988) (Figure 34). This depicts, alongside her own image in the role of Sigmund Freud’s Dora, the account of Baartman, to expose the misrepresentation, objectification and othering of women in history. While Siopis (in Coombes & Siopis 1997:121) is confident that “[she] was simply re-representing” already existing representations of Baartman in this work, the conflation of black and white women’s experiences under the banner of Western feminist inquiry came under sharp attack during this period by numerous theorists. Mohanty (1988b:65)

contends that such feminist analysis views women as a “singular group based on a shared oppression”, which implies their oppression to be similar and so discards individual materiality which, in the case of black women, is escalated by colonialist subjugation. Mohanty (1988b:62-63) denounces the implied coalition between black and white women’s experience; she contends that Western feminist discourse has the propensity to “discursively colonise” the diverse historical and lived experience of women through producing “a composite, singular ‘third-world woman’ – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse.” She (Mohanty 1988b:63) continues:

I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of western scholarship on the ‘third world’ in the context of a world system dominated by the west on the other, characterize a sizable extent of western feminist work on women in the third world.

I argue that *Dora and the other woman*, as is reinforced by the title, proposes multiple women, and does not purport to conflate the experiences of black and white women. However, it would have been necessary, especially during the racially-sensitive pre-democracy period in South Africa, to tread with caution as many white women artists were denounced by theorists for speaking on behalf of the black other (cf. section 3.2.2). While discursive colonialism does hold true for the West making assumptions about Africa, the local scenario is not that easily untangled.

As a sign of allegiance to anti-apartheid ideologies, many artists during this period produced work that sought to expose the fraught politics of apartheid. Artists who produced work under this banner of resistance art, saw themselves as taking part in the struggle against apartheid and, as such, numerous white artists foregrounded the plight of black subjects to drive home the injustices imposed by the government. Accessing Siopis’s oeuvre from this political situation, to which she is both materially and historically linked, makes a unified alliance with Western feminism paradoxical. Although Siopis clearly speaks from a position of (white) privilege, apartheid inscribed the lives of all women (although to varying degrees) in South Africa.⁴³ Siopis (in Jones 2010:139) explains this duality aptly when commenting on her interest in Baartman specifically:

⁴³ Siopis (in Jones 2010:131-132) argues that this also holds true in reverse when she explains that African American women “generally romanticize Africa” and imagine a superficial allegiance with their “brothers and sisters” in Africa which merely reinforces “romantic and timeless notions of Africa [...]”

As a woman I identified with her. As a white person, this is more fraught. While African, I am marked by my European descent, whether I like this or not. This connects me – discursively at least – to “the colonizer”, the settler position. But I am not easily a settler, a European. I am South African. As a South African, race visibly defines me. But so does being a woman. I thus experience a feeling of being both insider and outsider. Saartjie’s image hammered this predicament home to me and this is a large part of why I developed such a deep interest in her. She pictures my ambivalence and challenges my composure.

In a similar vein, exhibited as part of *Tributaries*, Sue Williamson displays part of her series, *A few South Africans* (1982 – 1986) (Figures 35 and 36). The full series comprised sixteen graphic icon-like portraits paying homage to South African women who contributed to the fight against apartheid. Williamson’s deliberate naming of the women she portrays contests female effacement (Arnold 1996:134). To this end, Williamson reframes South African history by offering a counter-narrative comprising a non-racial, female dispensation.



Left: Figure 35: Sue Williamson, *A few South Africans* (detail) (1985). Photo etching and screenprint collages. 70 x 52 cm (Burnett 1985:62).

Right: Figure 36: Sue Williamson, *A few South Africans* (detail) (1985). Photo etching and screenprint collages. 70 x 52 cm (Burnett 1985:62).

3.3.2 *Speaking for the other*

The challenge for South Africa at the dawn of the post-apartheid era lay in reimagining rainbow-coloured selves in a manner that subverts negative stereotypes into positive revisions. Marked by intense discourse, premised on representation and the intersection of gender and race, the era of post-apartheid produced a myriad of exhibitions that contributed largely to the shaping of South African women's identity. In the attempt to break free from the constricting apartheid policies of censorship, and to reposition enfranchised identity, artists probed these newly anticipated borders – transgressions that often turned into heated debate relating to representation.

The revisionist spirit and emphasis on nationhood, already initiated during the previous decade, drew much attention to aspects of selfhood – a project which *Africus*, in its concentration on the local, served well. One of the biennale exhibitions, *Objects of defiance / spaces of contemplation*⁴⁴ curated by Emma Bedford (1995:88), investigated how new discourses on gender, when constructed by disputing patriarchal configurations, may advocate alternative ways of conceiving femininity and masculinity. The exhibition's artists, predominantly women, questioned aspects affiliated to Western feminism, although Bedford's (1995:88) curatorial interrogation remained fixed on the intersection of race and gender embedded in the South African situation. Here, artistic intervention explored ways in which local history shaped female identity, transgressed gendered knowledge, and expressed the volatile present full of violence and abuse. This is evident in Lien Botha's *Telegram*, part of the *Africana Collectanea* series (1994) (Figure 37).

Similarly, in representing the Spanish entry for *Africus*, Octavio Zaya, Danielle Tilkin and Tumelo Mosaka curated *Black looks, white myths: Race, power and representation*⁴⁵ at Museum Africa, Johannesburg. Comprising largely South African artists, Zaya, Tilkin and Mosaka (1995:204) positioned the show to reinforce issues around representation in South Africa.⁴⁶ The aim was to review the complex task of

⁴⁴ Hereafter referred to as *Objects of defiance*. The exhibition showcased the work of local artists Marion Arnold, Lien Botha, Veliswa Gwintsa, Anne Holliday, Sandra Kriel, Veronique Malherbe, Mavis Mtandeki, Andrew Putter, Colin Richards, Martha Rosler, Kim Siebert, Penny Siopis, Michele Sohn, Primrose Talakumeni, Bronwyn Thomson, Margaret Vorster and Sue Williamson.

⁴⁵ Hereafter referred to as *Black looks, white myths*.

⁴⁶ The show included Federico Guzmán, Rogelio López Cuenca, Elena Del Rivero and Marta Sentis from Spain, as well as Wayne Barker, Willie Bester, Candice Breitz, David Goldblatt, Jennifer Gordon, Themba Hadebe, Steve Hilton-Barber, Fanie Jason, Alf Khumalo, Clement Lekanyane, Rashid



Figure 37: Lien Botha, *Telegram* as part of the *Africana Collectanea* series (1994). Collage and mixed media. Displayed in Bedford's curated exhibition, *Objects of defiance / spaces of contemplation* as part of the 1st Johannesburg Biennale, *Africus* (Africus 1995:89).

expressing the multi-faceted experiences of South Africa's historical past. *Black looks, white myths* also intended to contribute to a "narrative of critical intervention and resistance to racist exploitation and control in the process of decolonizing our minds." Although the photographic works on display are largely documentary in nature, the confrontational title of the exhibition evokes pertinent questions evident in the display of black (women's) identity within the context of the newly devised post-apartheid South Africa.

Curators Colin Richards and Pitika Ntuli (1995:100) staked similar claims in the discourse around identity in *Taking liberties: The body politic*⁴⁷ for *Africus*, and

Lombard, Mofihalefi Mahlabe, Santu Mofokeng, Ruth Mothau, Juda Ngwenya, Cedric Nunn, Obie Oberholzer, Penny Siopis, Guy Tillim and Gary van Wyk from South Africa.

⁴⁷ Hereafter referred to as *Taking liberties*. The exhibition was hosted at the Gertrude Posel Gallery, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg as part of *Africus*. The exhibition included the following artists: Vincent Baloyi, Willie Bester, Candice Breitz, Jean Brundrit, Andrea Christelis, Leora Farber, Zwelidumile Feni, Zamu Gumedede, Kay Hassan, Jackson Hlungwani, Steven Hobbs, Belina Liburu, Reggie Letsatsu, Esther Maswanganyi, Noria Mbaso, Sizakele Mchunu, Julius Mfete, Gcina Mhlope, Sfiso KaMkane, Johannes Fanozi-(Chickenman) Mkhize, Thamsanqa Mnyele, Ken Oosterbroek, Freddie Ramabulana, Lucas Siage, Johannes Segolela, Vikile Skosana, Penny Siopis, Alfred Thoba, Alex Trapani, Hentie van der Merwe, Justin Wheeler and Sandile Zulu.

positioned the body “as the prime object of social regulation as well as a site of resistance.” Curatorially, the exhibition explored the heterogeneity of the body to reinscribe racialised and gendered South African identity. Furthermore, it aimed to extend beyond mere representation to encompass experience lived through the body, expressed in materials “from blood and milk to metal and electrical charges, liquorice and guava rolls to burnt wood and plaster casts” (Richards & Ntuli 1995:100).

Despite criticism denouncing the biennale’s efforts, *Africus* did succeed in setting up a debate premised on a reconstitution of South African identity with the body as the main site of scrutiny. It is the black female body, as a continued locus of contention and trauma, that instigated fierce discourse around representation. Kaolin Thompson’s notorious artwork, *Useful objects* (1996) (Figure 38) won the Martienssen Prize⁴⁸ and marked the commencement of intense debate around the representation of black women’s bodies.



Figure 38: Kaolin Thompson, *Useful objects* (1996). Ceramic. (Atkinson 1996:[sp]).

⁴⁸ The Martienssen Prize is an art competition for Fine Arts students at the University of the Witwatersrand. First introduced in 1981, the competition entries are showcased annually at the Wits Art Museum.

Exhibited as part of the competition's exhibition, an image of *Useful objects* was depicted alongside Hazel Friedman's publicised review of the show. Tugging at censorship and freedom of expression, *Useful objects* ignited debate in many spheres: Baleka Kgositsile (1996:10) fervently argued in *The Star*, shortly after Friedman's (1996a:[sp]) suggestion in her article that the piece resembled "a black vagina, lips or a turd", that if the artwork had depicted the genitalia of a white woman, the image would not have been published.⁴⁹ Although an inquiry into black women's sexuality was not what Thompson aimed for, it appears that the colour divide, at that point still deeply rooted in South African consciousness, seemed obvious to this work's viewers.

In a similar vein, Nomboniso Gasa (1996:[sp]) suggested that the dissemination of disturbing images to arrest audience attention is certainly an acceptable mode of raising awareness, but emphasised that such tactics should remain empowering rather than demeaning those it intends to elevate. For her (Gasa 1996:[sp]), *Useful objects* failed to balance the two vital notions of raising awareness, and treating (black) women's bodies with respect. She (Gasa 1996:[sp]) continued that this disproportion merely rendered African women victims, and reiterated their debasement within societal structures.

As the debate surrounding the representation of black female identity ensued, it was largely the introduction of two prominent African curators that catapulted the argument to global spheres: Enwezor, in *Reframing the black subject: Ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African art*⁵⁰ (1997), and Olu Oguibe, in *Beyond visual pleasure: A brief reflection of the work of contemporary African women artists*⁵¹

⁴⁹ Dubin (2012:142) and Schmahmann (1999:227) note that at the time, the Film and Publications Bill was revised to relax strict censorship laws regarding sexually explicit content. Kgositsile (1996:10) refers to this when employing *Useful objects* as an illustration of the need to extend censorship laws to govern the publication of imagery published in newspapers and on television. Kgositsile's stance invited much public participation, and resulted in numerous open letters, charging debates surrounding censorship and the debasement of (black) women's bodies in representation. The revision of censorship in South Africa formed part of the government's revision and abolishment projects aimed at eradicating the apartheid ideology that scrutinised all forms of creativity to keep their sense of power and control intact.

⁵⁰ The article was originally written for and published as part of the accompanying catalogue for the Norwegian exhibition, *Contemporary art from South Africa* (1997), curated by Marith Hope. Brenda Atkinson (1999:17) explains that the South African public was made aware of Enwezor's essay through Kendell Geers' article, *Dangers inherent in foreign curating* (1997), published in *The Star's* cultural supplement, *Tonight*. Atkinson (1999:17) explains that Geers was critical of Hope's "sentimental and patronising" selection strategies and made references to Enwezor's contribution as well. Enwezor's essay was published in the journal, *Third Text*, later that year.

⁵¹ The article was Oguibe's contribution to the exhibition, *Gendered visions. The art of contemporary Africana women artists*, curated by Salah M. Hassan for the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, New York, in 1997.

(1997). Both authors chastised white South African women artists⁵² for their application of black (female) identity in their artworks.⁵³ While Enwezor (1997a:22-23) acknowledges that South Africa is a nation “seeking a new identity”, he dismantles the rainbow nation ideal⁵⁴ on the premise that whiteness is “an ideological fantasy [...] framed in the old mode of nationalist address” where the “black body has been tendered as display” in order to “reproduce the abject as a sign of black identification.”⁵⁵

Similarly, Oguibe (1997:69) agrees “the bodies of Black women are taken without consent or sensitivity, and fed into various deterministic [...] discourses of gender politics in a discriminate manner [...].” For Enwezor (1997a:25), speaking from a self-appointed paternalistic position, the question of identity in post-apartheid South Africa rests on who presides over the representational intent of the body politic. To this end, Enwezor (1997a:26) questions what such images should look like within the local decolonising dispensation, and who may or may not use such images.⁵⁶

Candice Breitz’s *Rainbow series* (1996) (Figure 39), comprising several photomontages⁵⁷, was described with contempt by Enwezor (1997a:35) as “crude

⁵² In his article, Enwezor makes mention of several local artists taking part in perverse strategies of representation, and makes obvious his allegiance to and prejudice in favour of black creativity which is largely unsubstantiated. He mentions the transgressions of Wayne Barker, Peet Pienaar and Gunther Herbst cursorily, and contrasts these by praise for the work of Santu Mofokeng and Willie Bester. Conversely, he delves into violent argumentation against the perceived exploitation evident in the art of white female artists, including Penny Siopis, Lien Botha and Pippa Skotnes, while dedicating the remainder of the essay to the dismemberment of Candice Breitz’s work. For the purposes of this study, the research will only highlight a selection of the works under discussion, pertaining to the shaping of women’s South African identity. It is, furthermore, noteworthy to mention that most of the artists (in particular Breitz) under attack in Enwezor’s essay were not participants in the exhibition *Contemporary art from South Africa* for which the paper was intended.

⁵³ As a result of Enwezor’s heated arguments, an explosion of perspectives followed in a stream of e-mail correspondence between artists and theorists. The latter was compiled in 1999 as a book, *Grey areas: Representation, identity and politics in contemporary South African art*, edited by Atkinson and Breitz, so as to open up debate around these critical issues.

⁵⁴ Enwezor (1997a:26-27) considers this ideal “Mandela’s daydream”, as a means to “articulate a reborn but new nationalism”. He dismisses its potential for longevity when suggesting that “no one in full honesty believes the ‘Rainbow Nation’ to be a long-term project.”

⁵⁵ Here, Enwezor (1997:23) makes specific reference to Baartman’s objectification by European imaginations as a spectacle, which he suggests is “a kind of black genitalia abjection, products of a white masochist enjoyment.” While Enwezor (1997:23) appreciates that the West has departed from such colonialist exploitation, he suggests that it still lingers in popular culture and implies that it is very much alive in the South African milieu.

⁵⁶ Enwezor was lambasted for his self-appointed position of spokesperson on behalf of the black woman’s body, motivated by what Carol Becker (1999:69) refers to as a “paternalistic [...] need to protect the female [...] [as] she cannot protect herself”.

⁵⁷ The *Rainbow series*, part of Breitz’s solo exhibition, *The rainbow show*, was held at The Space in Johannesburg in 1996, and constituted a number of photomontages, reminiscent of the Dada female artist, Hannah Höch’s 1930s series *From an ethnographic museum*, in which she juxtaposed images of women’s bodies with parts of African sculptures. Breitz’s collages presented viewers with reconfigured bodies made up of disparate body parts of women extracted from diverse sources ranging from popular



Figure 39: Candice Breitz, *Rainbow series #6* (1996). Cibachrome photograph. 152.5 x 101.5 cm (Atkinson 1996:13).

joinings”, that blend the bodies of “pubescent black children with those of leering and sexually exposed white women.” He (Enwezor 1997a:35) continues that, in his opinion, Breitz’s artwork suggests a “discursive absurdity” which lies in the apparent suggestion that these visual fusions propose an experience of womanhood shared by both white and black (or ‘African’, as Enwezor insisted on referring to black women).⁵⁸

and pornographic magazines as well as ethnographic tourist postcards. The images were later scanned and digitally printed.

⁵⁸ In the course of the article, it is evident that Enwezor draws distinct colour lines between South African women. Moreover, it is apparent that, by insistently referring to black women as African, he does not foresee a place for white women in the constitution of South African identity. Although this research does not disregard the difference in lived experience and conceptions of self between local black and white women, and does not suggest that a singular understanding of identity should serve both groups equally, it does regard all South African women, albeit differentiated or congruent, as inhabitants of the African continent, and the so-called African woman in the greater interpretation of the term.

In an interview with Brenda Atkinson (1996:6), Breitz explains that the choice of a “scalpel as a tool or weapon with which these images are constructed”, comments in a satirical way on the rainbow nation ideal which holds individuals as “violently exquisite corpses, fragmented and scarred by their multiple identities [...] far from the romanticised hybrid imagined [...]” The ‘crude joinings’ that Enwezor describes extends beyond the images’ technical production, in that he also references pornographic subject matter. Breitz (in Atkinson 1996:6) explains that pornography became legally available in South Africa for the first time in decades, having been banned by the strict apartheid censorship laws. The opening up of cultural boundaries censored during the apartheid era, coupled with the sudden and monstrous rise in rape cases, for Breitz presents an ironic and alternative view of the rainbow nation, and it is the expression of this irony that forms Breitz’s intention when conceiving the *Rainbow series*. To this end, a ‘discursive absurdity’ is exactly what Breitz (in Atkinson 1996:6) targets in order to lay bare utopian beliefs in the rainbow ideal.

Enwezor (1997a:36) continues that white women “metaphorically sodomised and pornographicised black women by using their bodies as functional objects of labour, as domestic workers, as maids and nannies and wet nurses” while he conveniently ignores these white women’s fight against apartheid (Richards 1999:177). To this end, he (Enwezor 1997a:37) concludes that Breitz’s works exacerbate the objectification of the black woman’s body through the restating of stereotypes, while the coalescence of race ensures the “subject’s muteness and silence.” I disagree with Enwezor, as in my opinion, Breitz’s methods of appropriation – “erasing, splitting, tearing, deleting, and reconfiguring / disfiguring” – serve to expose exploitative practices of representation (Law 2000:47). Breitz (in Atkinson 1996:17) argues that the sources comprising the *Rainbow series* are appropriated from existing representations, which her photomontages reframe to render the situation more absurd.

Voicelessness, or the method of “obliterating the faces of black women” is also a critique raised by Oguibe (1997:69), regarding Breitz’s *Ghost series* (1994 – 1996) (Figure 40). This series comprised, as its source, ethnographic tourist postcards of black women, over which Breitz had painted out the skins of the figures white correction fluid, leaving evidence only of the contours of the bodies, their colourful ethnic regalia and the background environments visible. After this intervention, Breitz had the images scanned and digitally printed.



Figure 40: Candice Breitz, *Ghost series #6* (1994-6). Chromogenic print. 101.5 x 68.5 cm (Breitz [sa]:[sp]).

In response to this, Oguibe (1997:69-70) suggests that Breitz “literally whites them out”, and understands this as an act of “disfiguring a portion of a visage” and a subsequent erasure of identity, serving to mute and objectify black women. However, Breitz’s tactic of removing individuality – a strategy that Law (2000:47) names “counter-possession” – is employed to threaten the symbolic visual image and to subvert stereotypical notions of identity. It is this process, however, that Oguibe

(1997:70) suggests objectifies and reduces black women to “mere fodder for political rhetoric”.

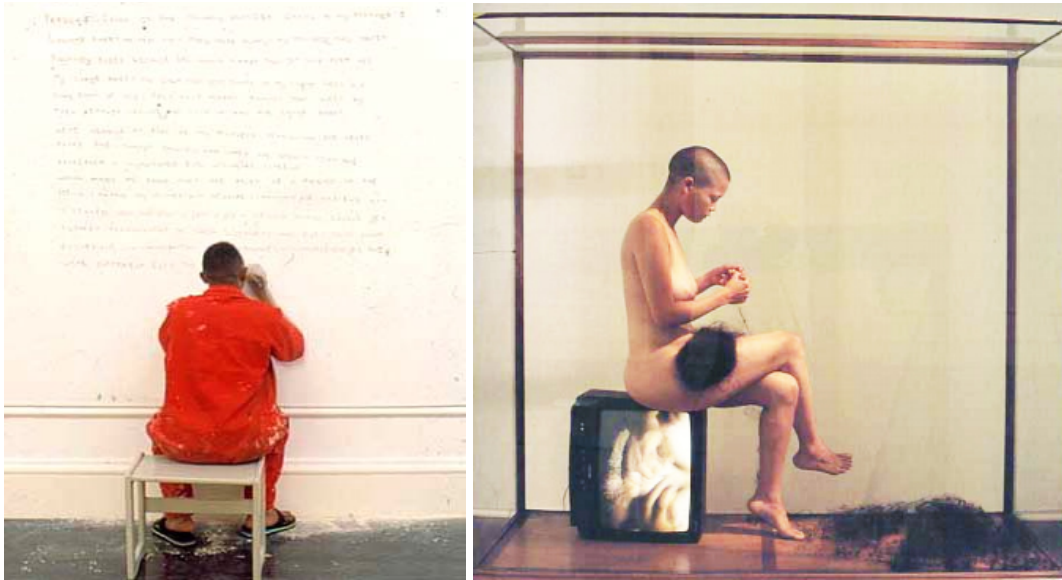
*Graft*⁵⁹(1997), curated by Richards as part of the *Trade routes* display at the South African National Gallery, considers post-apartheid engagement through the work of exclusively South African artists. Richards (1997:234) explains that the title of this exhibition aims to “capture [...] the state of our socially entangled objects and spaces of culture” and proposes, instead, a “counter- narrative” to the notions of collective identity embedded in the rainbow nation ideal. As her participation in this exhibition, and with the intention of revealing perceptions regarding women’s agency, Tracey Rose presents such an alternative account by exhibiting herself nude inside a glass display cabinet as part of her performance work *Span I & II*⁶⁰ (1997) (Figures 41 and 42).

Mgcineni Sobopha (2005:127) maintains that Rose’s “transgressive voyeurism of the self” challenges a Eurocentric, patriarchal appropriation of (black) women, and highlights these issues as localised concerns when contemplating South African female identity. Coombes (2003:256) notes that Rose’s performance disturbs rather than invites “voyeuristic pleasure” and functions as an adjunct to the “passive consumption” entertained by ethnic dioramas. Rose’s showcasing of herself serves to reclaim black female agency previously denied to women such as Baartman.

Richards (*Trade routes revisited* 2012:50) positions the curatorial reference of *Graft* as “pre-eminently about contact and exchange within shifting layers and undertows of cultural and political violence.” It is ultimately within the interstices created by curatorial juxtaposing of visual narratives that multiple selves thrive simultaneously. It is this kind of annexation of threshold positions that serves local female identity in unsettling homogeneity and proclaiming a liminal, hybrid sense of self.

⁵⁹ Richards’ curatorial premise was built around three distinct variations on the title, *Graft*: in its botanical interpretation, a “cutting and joining exercise”; an emblem of hard work; and an allusion to corruption (Lamprecht 2003:[sp]). These notions are considered in the work of Alan Alborough, Siemon Allen, Bridget Baker, Candice Breitz, Pitso Chimzima, Maureen de Jager, Angela Ferreira, Anton Karstel, Moshekwa Langa, Antoinette Murdoch, Johannes Phokela, Tracey Rose, Sluice, Marlaine Tosoni and Sandile Zulu.

⁶⁰ *Span II* comprises a performance within a glass vitrine, in which Rose sits aptly on a television screen (displaying an image of her body posed as a reclining nude), patiently knotting her own (shaved off) hair. The piece is accompanied by *Span I*, which comprises a prisoner incising text (memories of Rose’s childhood, with particular reference to the role of hair) on the gallery walls. Both pieces were presented simultaneously as part of the exhibition.



Left: Figure 41: Tracey Rose, *Span I* (Detail) (1997). Performance including a prisoner incising words onto the gallery wall, as part of *Graft* at the South African National Gallery, Cape Town (Williamson 2001:[sp]).

Right: Figure 42: Tracey Rose, *Span II* (Detail) (1997). Performance including a video installation, vitrine, television monitors and human hair, as part of *Graft* at the South African National Gallery, Cape Town (Williamson 2001:[sp]).

The pre- and post-apartheid schism yielded the opening up of boundaries that reinforced the restrictive categorisation and organisation of local women. The brave attempts at pushing open the doors of museums, galleries and public platforms, and dragging feminist concerns regarding 'women's work', exclusionary practices, sexuality and the body politic to the edges of discursive frontiers, set up liminal post-African female selves, reinvigorated in curatorial projects of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERFORMING SOUTH AFRICAN FEMALE BODIES

The *fin de siècle* of the second millennium was marked both by disquietude and anticipation about the future of South Africa. The last decade of the 1900s exposed multiple autopsies of a post-apartheid society. Local bodies were dissected by a newly ascribed consciousness, then injected into the cultural, political and social arenas. The ‘new’ present millennium held the promise of – and hopes for – a resurrection from the wreckage of South Africa’s brutal past.

Despite the still-visible scars of the past, the early 2000s signified an emergence from the enforced, subjugated state of women’s selves. Although far from complete emancipation, local women’s identities began to manifest as more than just theorised and reimagined constructs amidst numerous frames offered by postcolonial and contemporary literary debates. Instead, these subjects arose most notably as visceral and mobilised accomplices in activities primary to female (South) African identity, such as the writing of discourse, and the practice of socio-political representation.

Although thematic explorations in art practice are still centred on race, politics and the past, contemporary artists explore these topics with far more complexity, and with an increased awareness of international trends. As Williamson (2009:27) suggests, South Africa remains “an ongoing experiment, a laboratory in diverse human relations” in the global imagination. This sustains an international demand for work founded on the socio-political effects of apartheid, generally well-supported through financial investment.

Barring a few exhibitions which I discuss later in this chapter, there remains a noticeable lack of South African curatorial projects with an emphasis purely on feminist concerns. Despite this, local women artists – especially the many voices of black women that now contribute to the debate – pursue these issues as part of their *oeuvres*. These explorations echo the global upsurge of feminist visibility evident from the early 2000s, and underscore the need for research around a localised, curatorial strategy able to engage simultaneous instances of collusion and assertion with global (feminist) artistic practice. Here, I extend my account of the local feminist

narrative as discussed in Chapter Three, and argue for the entry of new female voices into the story of art, cultivated by an atmosphere of inclusivity and multiplicity. While acknowledging that my project is by no means complete, my intention is that the addition of these insights will contribute to notions around post-African female identity in provocative and meaningful ways. By referencing certain contemporary large-scale exhibitions, I explore the ways in which globalisation has shaped and positioned post-African women. I conclude the chapter with a discussion on the performativity evoked by local women's art practice, and consider several local exhibitions, artists and curators who are dedicated to the shaping of feminist concerns in South Africa.

4.1 On the threshold of an inclusive, alternative narrative

As outlined in the previous chapter, the institution of a local feminist art trajectory premised on inclusivity remains a complex engagement. This is due to the sporadic and sparse research material available around local women's art practice and, in particular, research produced by South African black women. Bhabha (1994:7) explains that the

borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. 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.

Following Bhabha (1994:7), my alternative feminist trajectory – the “borderline work” – relies on a perpetual resurgence of new voices to revise the past as an unprecedented liminal situation. However, as noted before, the mere practice of accommodating previously excluded races into an existing Western paradigm is not sufficient, and merely conserves an “unequal power-play” (Carman 2007:60). In 2003, fine art and history of art departments at local universities still comprised mostly white academics, and art museums had mostly white directors with few black curators (Carman 2007:63). Although the situation has improved since then, especially regarding black female curators and artists, this imbalance is still far from being satisfactorily restructured.

The imbalance of racial representation within local and global art markets has resulted in a small, exclusive group of black art practitioners who are well-patronised. Thembinkosi Goniwe (2003:43, original emphasis) suggests that the racial tagging of black art practitioners “reflects the disconcerting circumstances of black art professionals in South Africa, in what seems to be an *unnatural* or *uncustomary* participation in the field of contemporary visual culture”.¹ These circumstances ultimately appear to be mere extensions and perpetuations of blackness – or otherness – in relation to whiteness. Goniwe (2003:46-7) continues that this “black marker” speaks of these practitioners’ assimilation into the current (white) art market, both locally and globally, suggesting that the “vocalisation of the black tag” simply reinforces a narrative of an exotic and paternalistic nature. This is not just about the number of artists, but rather about the need for an overhaul of the practices and approaches to mediate past imbalances.

The local art arena is no longer dominated by white men, but as Goniwe (2003:43) notes, it appears that they have merely been replaced with white women. While this attests to the contributions made by women to local art practice as outlined in Chapter Three, the “hypervisibility” (Gqola 2006:84) of a handful of black female artists and curators serves only to obscure the real state of transformation in the South African art *milieu*.² In an article, *Aluta continua: Doing it for daddy*³ (2006), Sharlene Khan attests to this ongoing privileging of white artists and curators in local art practice. With attention given to the 2010 South African Visual Arts Historians conference, Khan (2011:[sp]) refers to Goniwe’s argument of “how a patronizing white mommy has displaced the art world’s patriarchal apartheid white daddy”. She (Khan (2011:[sp])) also mentions Sobopha’s identification of “a glaring quirk of this redress”, in that the ‘redress’ has given way to “a “white-female-only ascendance” into positions of power formerly occupied by white males”. Khan (2011:[sp]) argues that white women in the arts should demand institutional reform in order to avoid “a warped system that continues to disadvantage the majority of this country’s citizens.”

¹ In an article, *Painted black* (2003), Goniwe (2003:43, original emphasis) speaks, in particular, about the “new *black gallery* that opened in Johannesburg” (Gallery Momo founded by Monna wa Mokoena).

² These assertions of hypervisibility are also echoed in the documentary film, *The luggage is still labelled* (2003), in which edited interviews with black artists aim to investigate issues around blackness in South African art. *The luggage is still labelled* is a film produced by Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee and was shown at the South African Visual Arts Historians conference in Stellenbosch in 2003.

³ The title of Khan’s article refers to an article by bell hooks, *Doing it for daddy* (1995), in which she (hooks 1995:99) argues that “white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” is uniquely structured to position black males and white females in competition “for the favors [that] white ‘daddies’ in power can extend to them.” The situation is, according to hooks (1995:99), perpetually promoted through mass media and advertising in order to maintain this position of power.

In response to Khan's article, the 'Doing it for daddy' collective⁴ was founded in 2006 by Renée Holleman, Bettina Malcomess and Linda Stupart, with the aim of challenging prevailing attitudes in the local art landscape – “creative practitioners hell bent on challenging existing perceptions and attitudes in the visual arts” (Large 2008:[sp]). While the collective's efforts to confront normative situations in local practice is notable, their engagement with Khan's article does not extend beyond its providing a name for the trio. However, there were scathing attacks on Khan's article⁵ because of her condemnation of institutional whiteness; and this reaction points to the racial divides being far from resolved in the South African (female) art arena.

In a recent issue of the Mail & Guardian (6 March 2015), Nadine Botha (2015:[sp]) reports that, although 47 percent of business owners in the arts in South Africa are women, only 16 percent of senior and middle management positions are held by black women. This signifies that local women might have successfully negotiated the local patriarchal art systems, but that racial disparity is still prevalent. Gabisile Ngcobo (in Botha 2015:[sp]) explains that, apart from the historical challenges that black women face, the media's propensity for making black female curators hypervisible further complicates the matter. Similarly, Nontobeko Ntombela (in Botha 2015:[sp]) asserts that such strategies institute gatekeeping, as these curators are used often just to facilitate the system's need to show itself as redressing the current dispensation, and this 'sugar-coats' the messy underbelly of transformation.

Another part of the disparity could be that relatively few black women pursue a career in the arts when offered tertiary education, not only due to the financial burden, but also to the poor guarantees offered by the art world for “reasonable wage-earning prospects” (Arnold 2005:19-20). Viewed from this perspective, the cause for the lack of redress and the subsequent hypervisibility of black women art practitioners might be socio-economic rather than racially based (cf. section 3.2.1).

While there are no clear-cut answers to these issues, some of the complexities inherent in the current South African art arena seem to have evolved as a direct result of the utopian principles promoted by the 'rainbow nation' ideal. Dagmawi Woubshet (2003:34) explains:

⁴ The *Doing it for daddy* collective was one of the winners of the 2007 Spier Contemporary awards.

⁵ As a result of Khan's article she was flooded with hate mail, belittled during interviews, excluded from newspapers' listings, and letters were sent to gallerists urging them not to exhibit her work, (Botha 2015:[sp]).

The reigning discourse in contemporary South Africa, rainbowism reifies a politics of innocence, where history is forgotten, criticism is stifled, critique of institutions is perceived as ad hominem attacks, and critical self-inventory turns into a political correctness contest. Rainbowism too quickly embraces an imagined coexistence without wishing to anchor its vision in real life; it ignores the pernicious ways white racism compounds itself well after its legal and political demise. In its present manifestation, rainbowism actively thwarts introspection. [...] The most revealing question is not whether one is racist or not, but how racist and racialised discourses and institutions continue to implicate us. For any of us, to deny such an implication is doubtless to live outside the realm of postmodern interpellations.

The utopianism implicit in projects of multiculturalism that rely simply on achieving an acceptable tally of racial scores does not provide opportunity for authentic change. These 'rainbow' projects easily discard history and personal experience, and fail to render new, alternative figurations of the self. Instead, the project of redress in South Africa demands a continued, critical stance towards 'racialised discourses and institutions'. The project of setting up an alternative feminist trajectory should remain open at interstitial levels, to revitalise the past, and both reinvent and suspend the present.

4.2 Negotiating global divides

With the relaxation and abandonment of sanctions along with South Africa's re-entry into the international sphere, the post-apartheid period afforded local art practitioners a broader framework for art production, as well as exposure to international art markets. Although artistic investigations into individual identity still featured largely in local artistic expression, remaining deeply rooted in historical and geographical contexts, these explorations began to extend beyond the specificities of the locale (MacKenny in Perryer 2004:7). Artists' simultaneous senses of attraction yet repulsion towards the international artworld merits an ambiguous approach to globalisation (Richards in Perryer 2004:7). Koloane (in Perryer 2004:8) warns that, while external influence is primary to local artistic development, it is of equal significance to establish a local expression that does not reduce South African articulation to a "sycophantic echo of global expression" but instead must contribute to a multicultural dispensation.

The full extent of globalism has come into mature effect during the twenty-first century, and along with it, the practice of curating aims to surpass the conventional

exhibition framework. Substantial events, generally exemplified by the biennale format, extend to include discursive events, workshops, educational efforts and publications. O’Neil (2011:81) refers to this deluge of the exhibition structure as the “extra-territorialisation” of the curatorial space.

True to its all-encompassing nature, the biennale often has globalism at its core, and advocates notions of democracy, transnationality and diversity (Tang 2013:246). However, the implied levelling of the artistic playing field promoted by this global exhibition platform remains merely a mirage from both an African and a feminist perspective. Despite the ongoing addition of many African art practitioners to the global art stage, the West still primarily fuels the dynamics of the mega-exhibition’s curatorial architecture. Gavin Jantjies (2011:25) notes that the lack of infrastructure and financial investment “forced African scholars to communicate their ideas about globalisation via the nodes in the Western network [during the 1980s and 1990s].” As such, African practitioners remain mere guests in the global art arena, since being sustained and selected are based on Western agendas that are often entirely disjointed from local experience.

Within this global context, the measure of equality remains a complex engagement: outcomes vary, based on whether equality is measured by the number of works contributed by artists, or the number of artists invited to participate. To complicate matters further, Jeannine Tang (2013:246) notes that the same female artists would be invited to partake in biennales repeatedly – aligning with Pumla Gqola’s (2006:84) notion of “hypervisibility”. She (Tang 2013:247) also agrees that this implied emphasis on a “politics of inclusion” rather than critical and systemic transformation veils the lack of true inclusivity.

Since the late-1980s, an ever-growing number of initiatives by African and non-Western scholars (albeit often funded by and/or challenged through the West) have brought anti-colonial ideas about globalisation into established Western debates, as a means of carving out a rightful place in the art circuit. Internationally, accredited journals such as *Third Text* (London) and *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (New York), and, locally, *Art South Africa* (Cape Town) and the online journal *ArtThrob* have contributed greatly in setting up an African voice. However, despite such efforts to bridge the gaps between Africa and the West, the world of art is still far from being interdependently integrated.

4.2.1 *Shifting the boundaries of the West*

Despite the above-mentioned complexities of positioning South Africa within a global paradigm, works by women artists revealing post-African identities still crossed global divides, and succeeded in highlighting contemporary feminist concerns. The exhibition, *Authentic / Ex-Centric: African in and out of Africa*⁶, attempted to cover some Western ground with the work of seven African artists as the “first exhibition of African conceptual art conceived and organi[s]ed by African curators [...]” (Hassan & Oguibe 2001:66).

While the exhibition carried a strong postcolonial agenda in its search of personal identity through conceptualist means, the inclusion of work by Berni Searle served to elevate debate around post-African female selves. Searle’s video contribution, *Snow White (2001)* (Figure 43), contemplates issues regarding the “weightiness of colour”, as Salah Hassan and Oguibe (2001:74) refer to her practice; and interrogates aspects relating to both race and gender as equal inscriptions on her body. Searle’s literal insertion of her body into Western art historical discourse presents her *oeuvre* as an “aesthetics of disappearance” (van der Watt 2003:22), a simultaneous occupation of presence and absence that pushes identity outside of classification and locates it nowhere. *Snow white* offers a liminal account of Searle’s identity as a woman, as it transgresses divisions of colour, history and gender as the flour gradually renders her body oblique. Searle’s performance of her identity underscores the fluidity of post-African identity, and temporarily locates the self interstitially between binaries of black and white, life and death, and the past and the present, highlighted by the double projection (a camera filming from above and another from the front) of the installation.

*Documenta XI*⁷ (2001 – 2002) took place over an 18-month period, and its curator, Enwezor, (2002:43) pronounced that this major artworld event would showcase “spectacular difference” through the “extra-territorialisation” of the curatorial space.

⁶ This exhibition, co-curated by Salah M Hassan and Olu Oguibe, formed part of the 49th Venice Biennale (8 June to 30 September 2001) and featured work from Africa and the African diaspora by seven artists, including Willem Boshoff, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Godfried Donor, Rachid Koraïchi, Berni Searle, Zineb Sedira and Yinka Shonibare. The works on the exhibition were framed within a conceptual mode of production and selected for their allusion to “issues of representation, memory, diaspora, expatriation and other aspects of the African experience” (Hassan & Oguibe 2001:65).

⁷ The mega-exhibition, *Documenta*, has been produced on a five-yearly basis in Kassel, Germany, since its establishment in 1955 and “founded not just as an artistic statement but also as a political one” (Bauer 2002:103). *Documenta XI* (March 2001 – September 2002) saw the appointment of the first non-



Figure 43: Berni Searle, *Snow White* (Video still) (2001). Double screen video installation, played in sync, 9 minutes. Video installation displayed as part of *Authentic / Ex-Centric* showcased as part of the 49th Venice Biennale. (*New identities: Zeitgenössische kunst as Südafrika* 2004:102).

The exhibition aimed to disrupt spatial and temporal continuities by staging five platforms⁸ dispersed across four continents, with the intention of critically investigating artistic conventions, postcoloniality, and globalisation. Enwezor (2002:42) names three tactics that ensured *Documenta XI*'s extraterritoriality.

Firstly, by scattering the platforms across four continents, the exhibition's historical geographic context of Kassel becomes displaced, and the resulting sense of

European curator, Enwezor, along with a panel of co-curators, including Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Octavio Zaya and Mark Nash.

⁸ These five platforms include: *Democracy unrealised* (platform one) started in Vienna in March 2001 and continued to Berlin; *Experiments with truth: Transitional justice and the processes of truth and reconciliation* (platform two) comprised five days of panel discussions, lectures and debates in New Delhi; *Créolité and creolisation* (platform three) was hosted by the West Indian island of St Lucia in the Caribbean; *Under siege: Four African cities Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* (platform four) took place in Lagos; *Passages through the construction of an exhibition* (platform five) was located in Kassel.

dislocation serves to open a critical space of exchange to encompass a global disposition instead. Secondly, Enwezor's disregard of the conventional gallery space to include rather the "[space] of the discursive", extends the curatorial gesture beyond the limits of the exhibition. Thirdly, the opening of "the locus of disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest", stimulates a broader reception that extends the boundaries of the West. Enwezor's selection of distinct geographies successfully illustrates a heterotopic space cultivated through exhibition practice, and this will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Documenta XI's distinct platforms not only stand in opposition to utopias, but also undermine and unsettle them (Johnson 2006:19). The discursive spaces yielded through Enwezor's disruption of the spatio-temporal moment allow for a curatorial strategy that pivots in-between existing structures of knowledge, and ensures a multiple reading of artworks and identities – a strategy that would well serve an alternative feminist approach to curating.

Enwezor's project was innovative in its dedication to disrupting the traditional 'biennale-style' exhibiting format, as his approach of extraterritorialisation endorsed a curated space that literally pushed the boundaries of the West to include non-Western geographies.

Yet, other aspects of his curatorial practice earned much criticism, ranging from its still-disproportionate inclusion of non-Western artists and non-representation of women artists. McEvelley (2002:2) notes that approximately only 20 percent of the included artists were women. Enwezor's appeal for the plight of the postcolonial subject appears to be often just a theoretical approach that fails to mature into a practical achievement, and which seems to exclude women artists. And paradoxically, Enwezor's selection of artists from South Africa comprises three white male artists: David Goldblatt, William Kentridge and Kendall Geers – a selection that is ironic in light of his earlier statements premised on whiteness being "framed in the old mode of nationalist address" in South Africa (Enwezor 1997a:22-23) (cf. section 3.2.2).

The selection of David Goldblatt's *In Boksburg* series (1982) (Figure 44) is appropriate given Enwezor's emphasis on location. However, equally suitable works by women artists could have been made, such as Senzeni Marasela's *Theodora comes to Johannesburg* series (2003 – present) (Figure 45).



Figure 44: David Goldblatt, *In Boksburg town, corner of Commissioner and Eloff Streets. December 2008* (2008). Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper. (David Goldblatt 2009:[sp]).



Figure 45: Senzeni Marasela, *Theodora comes to Johannesburg* series (2003 – present). Colour photograph, 59.4 x 84.1 cm Photographer: Sidney Seshibedi. (Williamson 2009:115).

This piece explores the artist's performance of herself through a re-enactment of her mother, Theodora. The yellow dress worn here by Marasela signifies Theodora's jarring experience of this urban environment.

Her mother, who had been diagnosed with mild schizophrenia, originates from the small town of Vosloorus, near Johannesburg. Marasela's work delivers cutting commentary on the incongruities fundamental to the engagement of Africa with the globalised world – from the artist's perspective, a possibly absurd engagement. The work renders the image of post-African female selves as fragmentary and partial, and construes the potential danger of public spaces, and on women as located in-between the crevices that have opened in society.

Similarly, *Africa remix: Contemporary art of a continent*⁹ (2004 – 2007), an exhibition curated by Simon Njami in collaboration with a team of curators and galleries across the globe, in my opinion, disparages a post-African identity. The exhibition was largely premised on the complexity of tackling aspects relating to the self and identity within both the African *milieu* and the globalised world. The notion of coming to terms with issues of identity within the context of the exhibition, initiated three areas of focus namely, *Identity and history*, *Body and soul*, and *City and land*. The thematic exploration raises questions of the African experience and its entanglement with history, the notion of the African body as multiple, and the renegotiation of the urban and landscape.

Although the themes of *Africa Remix* seem open-ended, the curatorial ambit does not offer a feminist interpretation. Despite the notions of hybridity suggested by the name of the exhibition, only around a third of the South African artists included here are women. Tracey Rose's DVD video projection with audio, *TKO* (2000) (Figure 46) presents the viewer with an ephemeral depiction of the naked artist battling with a punching bag. The artist's experience here is documented by four surveillance cameras – one in the punchbag – that capture both the distorted and shaky imagery and the sounds of moaning and screaming. With every punch, Rose is commenting

⁹ *Africa remix: Contemporary art of a continent*, hereafter referred to as *Africa Remix*, aimed to provide an overview of the current state of contemporary art from Africa and the African diaspora. The exhibition was shown across the globe at the following venues: Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, Germany (24 July – 7 November 2004); Hayward Gallery, London, (10 February – 17 April 2005); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, (24 May - 15 August 2005); Mori Art Museum (27 May – 31 August); *Moderna Museet*, Stockholm, (14 October 2006 - 14 January 2007); Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, (24 June – 30 September 2007). Artists from across the African continent included the South African artists Jane Alexander, Willie Bester, Andries Botha, Wim Botha, Marlene Dumas, David Goldblatt, Jackson Hlungwani, William Kentridge, Moshekwa Langa, Santu Mofokeng, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Tracey Rose and Guy Tillim.



Figure 46: Tracey Rose, *TKO* (Video still) (2000). DVD video projection with audio presented on a translucent, free-hanging screen, displayed as part of *Africa remix*. (*Africa remix: Contemporary art of a continent* 2007:128).

on violence, as well as the viewer's complicity in this via her/his simultaneous embodiment of both the aggressor and of the female victim within the constraints of her world. Throughout this work, there is a sense of the transient nature of Rose's negotiation of her identity, which is reiterated by the scattered and often out of focus imagery. This, once again, recalls the artist's liminal understanding of the self.

Although the opening of global opportunities started gradually to balance the ratio of non-Western to Western artists in exhibitions intent on displaying the 'whole world', it appears that post-African women remain largely excluded from this celebratory undertaking. It is of concern when curators, such as Enwezor who has made use of the works of black women artists in his attempt to strengthen his postcolonial treatise, now disregards their contribution and avoids aspects surrounding post-African women's concerns.

4.2.2 *Towards a globalised feminism?*

To survey a distinctly feminist impulse within the globalised structures of the art world, it is necessary to examine briefly other prominent survey-exhibitions that surfaced in America and Europe. In alignment with the ‘feminist revival’ during the first part of this century, the curators of the exhibitions *elles@centrepompidou*, *WACK! Art and the feminist revolution*¹⁰ (2007) and *Global feminisms*¹¹ (2007) were equally committed to showcase the contributions made by women artists to the history of art.

Global feminisms, curated by Maura Reilly and Nochlin, provides a revisionist view of American feminist art from the 1970s to the present. In attempting to expand upon the art historical feminist revision, the curators expressed the desire “to challenge, what it argues, is still a Western-centric art system” through the presentation of “a multitude of feminist voices from across cultures” (Reilly 2007:15). The exhibition comprised a reconstruction of significant women involved in the second-wave feminist art movement, but also included several works by non-Western women, such as Rose’s *Venus Baartman* (2003) (Figure 47). However, these were still far from representative in numbers when compared with the American and European artists, who dominated the survey.

Reilly (2007:19) remarks in her curatorial statement for *Global feminisms* that, although more than three decades have elapsed (since the evolution of second-wave feminist art), the representation of women artists in notable galleries remains unrealised. She (Reilly 2007:16) continues that the curatorial project – by ascertaining that transnational feminism serves to add complexity to the ongoing struggles of race, class, sex and gender – aims to highlight the “intersectionality of all the axes of stratification.” This sense of plurality and juncture is endorsed by the

¹⁰ *WACK! Art and the feminist revolution*, hereafter *WACK!*, was an extensive survey exhibition of artworks produced by 119 women in an attempt to trace the historical roots and showcase the legacy of feminist art in the twenty-first century. The show was curated for the Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles (4 March – 16 July 2007), and later travelled to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, DC (21 September – 16 December 2007), the PS1 Contemporary Art Centre, Long Island, New York (February – June 2008) and the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver (4 October, 2008 – 18 January 2009).

¹¹ *Global feminisms* was an exhibition curated in celebration of the opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. The exhibition was hosted from 23 March – 1 July 2007 and showcased feminist art from 1990 to the present.



Figure 47: Tracey Rose, *Venus Baartman* (Video still from *Ciao Bella*) (2001). Lambda print, 119 x 119 cm. Displayed as part of *Global feminisms*. (Reilly 2007:14).

four categories around which the show was organised, as well as Reilly's (2007:38) "relational feminist analysis" curatorial methodology.¹²

This strategy positions diverse and similar artworks in conversation with each other, to tease out both the differences and similarities that emanate from the various contexts of the works, and from "co-implicated histories" (Reilly 2007:39). Reilly's relational method allows for complex and fluid narratives, and makes possible new approaches to feminist readings of artistic production by women in a transnational age. *Global feminisms* offers a temporary, democratic space of equal cultural visibility. However, to disassemble dominant structures of feminism, a more self-reflexive approach is desired when aspiring to a feminist method of curating.

¹² *Global feminisms* is organised around four themes: *Life cycles* charts the stages of life from birth to death in an unconventional manner; *Identities* investigates the multifaceted self; *Politics* presents a collection of artworks by women who consider the personal nature of politics; and *Emotions* is a critical interrogation of the traditional association of women with emotionality and victimhood (Reilly 2007:38).

While the daily realities of women from the different cultures represented continue to unfold in dramatically different and ‘unequal circumstances’, the extensive exhibition catalogue attempts to contextualise the works against the achievements of the second wave feminists. A self-critical approach, aimed at dismantling the dominant white history of feminism, would have maintained the fluidity and difference evident in the selected works, rather than undermine the relational feminist analysis offered in the exhibition. In their strategy, by avoiding the mere re-insertion of non-Western works into the feminist ‘canon’ to insist on a shared sameness amongst transnational women, the curators could have opened new possibilities for a historical account that relies on numerous feminisms, as in keeping with the exhibition’s objectives.

Running concurrently within the timeframe of *Global feminisms*, Cornelia Butler’s extensive curatorial project, *WACK!* offered audiences yet another opportunity to appraise feminist art. Butler (2007:15) states that her goal was to demonstrate the impact that feminist artwork of the 1970s had on art in general, and frames it as the most influential international ‘movement’ of its time. In addition, Butler (2007:15) wishes to show the effect that these feminist influences had on contemporary art practice by presenting feminism as an “ideology of shifting criteria.” Butler (2007:22) devised the themes for this exhibition as “propositions rather than definitive categories”, to determine a discourse around the type of women’s art which draws parallels and other associations across political, geographical and historical concerns. The exhibition focuses include traditional thematic organisations of art produced by women, and encourage the interrogation and dialogue of feminisms across the globe.¹³

Despite *WACK!*’s attempts at inclusivity and its dedication towards offering a multiple reading of feminist art, the exhibition evades clear definition of the category, women.

¹³ *WACK!* explored tentative and open-ended themes to stimulate multiple associations and dialogues within the exhibition: *Family stories*, *Silence and noise*, *Knowledge as power* and *Social intervention*. These offered an historical glance at artists aiming to articulate a particular feminist/activist aesthetic. The goal of *Making up art history* and *Speaking in public* was to expose traditional notions of art history and social conventions; *Collective impulse*, *Labor [sic]* and *Social sculpture* considered the work of artists who examine collaborations as a means to decentralise authorship and “new non-hierarchical models of organization and practice” (Butler 2007:23); *Abstraction*, *Gendered space* and *Female sensibility* endeavoured “to carve out a space for female subjectivity within a phenomenological framework” (Butler 2007:23); *Body and trauma*, *Goddess*, *Gender performance* and *Body as medium* considered the female body as a primary source of inquiry within the feminist project on the whole; *Pattern and assemblage* focused on the formal strategies of colour, texture and ornament; and *Taped and Measured* and *Autophotography* similarly explored “formal devices, such as seriality, to investigate the dynamics of picturing oneself, and the experience of objectification” (Butler 2007:23).

Given that historically, the feminist art movement from the 1970s is generally cited as being Western, Butler's desire to consider the artworks from a transnational perspective demands a clear statement regarding how she views women collectively within the confines of the show. Instead, Butler (2007:16) states that "while individual practices may have initially occurred in a condition of relative isolation, they often coalesce through discourse, affinity and relationship". Her inference of sameness does not allow for the very differences prevalent in women's experiences across racial, ethnic and cultural borders. By avoiding the dismantling of the feminist canon, Butler merely highlights non-Western women's otherness, and replicates colonialist models of repression. Marsha Meskimmon (2007:324) explains in her contributing essay to the catalogue:

The chronological delimitation of the 1970s feminist art implies a cartography focused upon the United States and emanating outward from it [...]. This temporal pattern elides two dubious patterns: first, a tendency for a certain kind of United States-based feminist art practice and discourse to be taken as an unmarked normative category, thereby foreclosing differences both within and beyond the American context, and second, an implicit assumption that the "feminist revolution" will come to us all, eventually. These patterns presuppose the self-same progress narratives that demonstrated the victory of time over space, and, in exploring feminist praxis, their effect is to produce not a critical cartography, but an uncritical chronology.

Wack!'s shortcoming in unsettling conventional defines of women, is that it still prioritises "artistic geniuses" and fails to re-contextualise feminist history, thereby eluding a feminist method of curating such as Richter (2016:64-67) argues for (cf. section 1.1.8). In addition, the lack of attention paid to geography precludes a reading of the various (localised) feminisms that could yield an understanding of female identity outside the ideologies imposed by the West. Consequently, a true heterogeneous reading of feminism is not possible here, and these issues, coupled with the sparse introduction of non-Western women that comprise most of the global space, disbar the critical cartography that Meskimmon desires.

In a similar vein to the feminist art 'blockbusters' discussed above, the Museum of Modern Art, New York also hosted a feminist-oriented revisionist exhibition, *Modern women: Women artists at the Museum of Modern Art*¹⁴ in 2010. The exhibition was divided into a strict linear chronological sequence that embarked from feminist art

¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as *Modern women*.

production during the early modern period through to mid-century contemporary contributions. Since the curatorial strategy unfortunately served to encourage methods of exclusion and paternalism, *Modern women* functioned as a tribute to the institution rather than as a feminist project.

Ironically, Molesworth's (2010:504) essay, *How to install art as a feminist* included in this exhibition's catalogue, questions the very practice of feminist curating. She (Molesworth 2010:504) notes that, to merely fill the cavities of museum archives with work by female artists previously omitted, does not constitute a feminist project. Molesworth (2010:504) offers instead, a feminist approach whereby "different genealogies and hence different versions of how we tell the history of art made by women" are explored. Aligned with Molesworth's thinking, Dimitrakaki (2013:96) suggests that *WACK!*, and by implication *elles@centripompidou*, *Global feminisms* and *Modern women* failed to "acknowledge debates and conflicts within feminism, nor did it address the different contexts and stakes of different moments in the feminist art movement."

Despite globalism's intentions to offer all-encompassing curatorial strategies, its failure to provide evocative and truly inclusive practices, even within feminist-premised agendas, falls far short of accounting for non-Western women. The post-African woman is tangentially positioned, in ways that are liminal, interstitial and situated in-between experiences, histories and geographies. To best portray artwork produced by such women artists, a curatorial practice rooted in feminism should be able to account for both difference and similarity to make new, critical contributions to the history of art and feminism.

4.3 Performing the body: contesting borders and the post-African woman

The spirit of (re-)invention evident in post-African women's art production is captured by the metaphor of laboratory space – a heterotopic space reliant upon both its desire for imaging the new, and its real engagement with material aspects. Such involvement, revealed by the dissipation of racial boundaries and an increased association with the global in the post-millennial period, engendered a new interest in South African female identity. While matters of inclusivity still weigh heavily on the local art scene, an increasing number of women artists have come to the fore, raising issues pertaining to feminist concerns through their performative bodies.

While the black/white ratio is still skewed, it appears that this new generation of post-African women artists has confidently established itself through energising creative experiments within the contemporary local and global art contexts.

The laboratory is a space with an “obligatory point of passage” that “orders in the sense that action is translated through its ordering as a space” (Hetherington 1997:36). These are sites of resistance and transgression that *become* forms of ordering – “socially and technically constructed, contested, heterogeneous, partial, contingent and deferred” nodes or “points of passage” to produce “new modes of ordering” (Hetherington 1997:36).

I argue that the *zeitgeist* of the post-millennial period in South Africa, informed by the ritualistic transformation that played out during the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, afforded the post-African woman nodes of engagement whereby a performance of the self could be realised. This situation that opens up the possibility “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” (Braidotti 2002:2). It is by means of positioning the self, transferred across various instances of agency, that the amelioration of local female identity becomes a true potential in the future – a project focused on alternative figurations which express creativity in their representation of the fluid subjects we have already become, and social locations we inhabit (Braidotti 2002:2). These are social locations ignited by the performative agency evident in its temporary inhabitants – post-African women.

Africa bears a long history of protest launched by means of the naked (female) body, which Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu (2009:46) acknowledge as a form of protest, and as a means of fashioning an image of resistance or “subaltern power”.¹⁵ *Toyitoyi*, a South African dance derived from Zimbabwe, has been used in the same manner in political protests, and was read as “the triumph of spirit through song and dance” during the apartheid era (Ntombela 2013b:23). Ntombela (2013b:23) explains that *toyitoyi* is employed as performance – a means of expression within contemporary South African art – which “vocalises the ‘self’ and ‘self-definition’ that positions [local performance artists’] work”. Here, the post-African body is applied to destabilise and subvert prevailing notions of identity. Thus, binaries assimilate as identity becomes temporarily installed amidst the fissures that emerge in-between

¹⁵ Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:46) recall the image of a group of naked Igbo women in South-East Nigeria who “gathered in defiant protest against the taxation policies of the British colonial administration.” This instance is acknowledged as one of the first instances of Nigerian feminism.

the still-prevalent hegemonic structures of society. Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:46) explain:

The women's clear message is the sacredness of the naked female body, and through it to expose the vulnerability of the colonized body at large. Thus framed, the African body politic which, even at its most vulnerable, remained a vehicle of powerful ethical response. The effect of the women's message, in terms of its communicability – and in reference to its modes of subjectivization – has led to the proliferation of the image of the naked African female body as an object of postcolonial critique of power and as a representation of the body's social agency [...]. [In] other words, in the politicization of the health and death of that body, in its realization and its de-realization.

In this sense, the post-African woman's body becomes one of transgression, as it inserts itself into hegemonic spaces of ordering to set up a series of fluid unsettling juxtapositions. These irreconcilable instances confront the ordering of existing patterns of thought (Hetherington 1997:42). The space of the body, or the bodily space, thus alludes to heterotopia's original association with anatomy – the term's original function to refer to body parts that are “out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumours, alien” (Hetherington 1997:42). These bodily spaces reinforce the notion that, for the post-African female subject, matters of race and class are embedded in discussions around gendered identity.

4.3.1 Performing local 'women' – all-women exhibitions

In recognition of the mounting insurgence of local feminist practice and the arrival of the global 'feminist revival', it comes as no surprise that certain exhibitions, intent on foregrounding a feminist consciousness, carried these concerns over the museums' thresholds during the post-millennium period. Marking a decade of democracy in South Africa, *Through the looking glass: Representations of self by South African women artists*¹⁶ (2004), curated by Schmahmann, presented artworks produced by

¹⁶ The exhibition, hereafter referred to as *Through the looking glass*, was curated by Brenda Schmahmann as part of Rhodes University's Centenary celebrations, and showcased as part of the Standard Bank National Arts Festival of 2004 in Grahamstown, South Africa.

South African women artists¹⁷ who espoused a self-reflexive narrative within their art production.

The exhibition considered local female selves ‘through the looking glass’. Schmahmann (2004:8) relied on the obfuscation of the Lacanian mirror stage to represent the refusal of local identities to reduce themselves to “the reflective other for man.” The catalogue accompanying the exhibition introduces Schmahmann’s curatorial framework – premised on the representation of women artists as an act of ‘mirroring’ the self – by means of a work by Dorothy Kay entitled, *Eye of the beholder* (1953) (Figure 48).



Figure 48: Dorothy Kay, *Eye of the beholder* (1953). Oil on canvas, 44.7 x 34.7 cm. Collection of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Elizabeth. Displayed as part of *Through the looking glass*, Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2004, Grahamstown. (Schmahmann 2004:5).

¹⁷ While most of the artworks selected for *Through the looking glass* are contemporary, Schmahmann also included a number of historical examples. The artists selected included Juliet Armstrong, Marion Arnold, Bonggi Bengu, Candice Breitz, Jean Brundrit, Angela Buckland, Wilma Cruise, Christine Dixie, Leora Farber, Carol Hayward Fell, Lalitha Jawahirilal, Dorothy Kay, Terry Kurgan, Maggie Laubser, Ronniah Maepa, Senzeni Marasela, Pamela Melliar, Antoinette Murdoch, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Tracey Rose, Berni Searle, Penny Siopis, Kathryn Smith and Maud Sumner.

For Schmahmann (2004:4), Kay's work illuminates crucial aspects regarding the techniques employed in artistic representations of the self, as well as their significance. The curator's interest lays in the way Kay negotiated these conventions, and it is this that is applied as the curatorial focus of Schmahmann's exploration.

For this purpose, *Through the looking glass* selects the mirror as its focus – the belief that 'truth' presides over 'mirroring' the natural world (a typically Western pattern of thought), and the mirror's association with the "possession of subjectivity within masculinity", the male gaze and perfection of the female form (Schmahmann 2004:6-7). Coalescing such notions with contemporary theories on representation, Schmahmann (2004:7) disbars fixed notions of identity and, instead, surveys local women's identity as complex and forever in the process of becoming through her selected series of (mostly) contemporary artworks.

Four themes,¹⁸ which Schmahmann (2004:8) cautions are "provisional" and "partial", are initiated by the premise of Kay's self-portrait explored above. Although the themes selected by Schmahmann echo conventional feminist concerns, they remain open-ended enough to allow for multiple readings around the experiences of local women, without reducing non-Western women to sameness. While I am convinced Schmahmann has taken great care to be as inclusive as possible, a decade into our democracy the exhibition remains racially uneven, due to the slow and difficult task of redress discussed earlier (cf. section 3.2.1 and section 4.1).¹⁹ But despite the racially disproportionate selection of artists, Schmahmann's commitment to turning the metaphorical mirror onto feminist curatorial and art practice itself allows her to destabilise conventional approaches and themes, and still offer a polyvocal reading of local South African women's identities.

¹⁸ The exhibition is curatorially organised around four themes: *Self as artist* showcases local female artists' approach to self-portraiture, and their engagement with the artist's studio to interrogate stereotypical associations associated with white, male artists through contemplating memory and personal histories. *Self and family – self and locale* reviews the shaping of identity as informed by location and geography. *Self and body* considers the representation of the female body, prizing the challenging of stereotypes and setting itself up for "transgressive potential". Working from the premise of a so-called gendering of the female self, *Enactments* focuses on artworks that employ aspects of role-playing and the staging of the self as a means of commenting on the self (Schmahmann 2004:8).

¹⁹ Most of the artworks comprising the exhibition are drawn from various local art collections. Being limited at that time by South African art collections' poor representation of work by black women artists, Schmahmann's strategy of inclusivity fell short. Of the 24 women artists included on the exhibition, only seven were black female artists. The same constraints impacted on the curator's selection of Kay's artwork as the centerpiece for the exhibition. While a self-portrait produced by a black women artist exploring the same theme would have positioned the remainder of the work more favourably, access to and availability of such works impeded the selection opportunities.

Schmahmann (2004:19) explains that during the apartheid era “a politics of exclusion” ensured that the notion of the black woman artist remained unacknowledged. Facing similar constraints as the curators of *Women artists* nearly 20 years later, Schmahmann only manages to include a brief, mostly biographical, introduction of Bonnie Ntshalintshali and her work *Self-portrait* (1991) (Figure 49) (cf. section 3.2.1). While the difficulties regarding access to critical discussion around black women artists’ work remains an obstacle – especially earlier works and artists – in my opinion, a discussion offering an interpretation of the content of the work and its relationship to the curatorial focus would have advanced the significance of Ntshalintshali’s artwork. Schmahmann’s (2004:19) exploration of Ntshalintshali explains how this work was a gift to Juliet Armstrong who invited the artist as a guest in the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal:



Figure 49: Bonnie Ntshalintshali, *Self-portrait* (1991). Painted ceramic, 24 x 26 x 19 cm. Collection of Juliet Armstrong. Displayed as part of *Through the looking glass*, Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2004, Grahamstown (Schmahmann 2004:18).

[...] an experience that would enable the young Ardmore sculptor to have access to a different range of ceramic technologies. [...]. Ntshalintshali was a guest in Armstrong's home [...] which was a luxury to which she was wholly unaccustomed.

While the former certainly foregrounds (white) women's continued striving towards fostering local artistic practice, Schmahmann (2004:19) presents Ntshalintshali's practice only through the gratuities offered to her by Armstrong:

More particularly, through her representation of herself at work, the sculpture signifies Ntshalintshali not only viewed herself as a professional artist but she also recognised that Armstrong, another woman artist, would value a representation that showed her in this role.

The remainder of the discussions of (contemporary) black female artists' works, including those produced by Rossinah Maepa, Senzani Marasela, Tracey Rose, Berni Searle, Lalitha Jawahirlal and Bongzi Bengu, are portrayed in an engaging and inclusive manner. Schmahmann aligns her feminist curatorial focus with local concerns and delivers inclusive interpretations of the artists' unique lived experience, in particular political conditions and the politics of displacement that impacts the lives of these women.

Self and body explores the expression of female identity through aspects relating to the body. Here Schmahmann's (2004:72) selection of artworks challenges Western conventions of "representing female nudes as objects of heterosexual male desire", and offers a critique of "stereotypical concepts of physiognomic perfection". Notions surrounding the body within an African context sharply contrast with those criticised and accepted within the West. Schmahmann (2004:70) includes Searle in this selection, and offers an interpretation of Searle's artworks that extends the body to include the artist's racialised identity – her desire to "unsettle the label 'coloured'". The work highlights Searle's gendered black body as a site of resistance to the mindset of the colonial imaginations that accounts for the artist's sense of self in *both* racial and gendered terms.

Schmahmann's treatment of Rose's *Ciao Bella* (2001) (Figure 50) triple-screen DVD projection as part of the theme, *Enactments*, focuses on the piece's deliberate inquisition of colonial histories. Schmahmann (2004:80) draws attention to the



Figure 50: Tracey Rose, Still from *Ciao Bella – ‘Lolita’* (2011). Lambda photograph, 119 x 119 cm. Photograph by Andrew Meintjies. Displayed as part of *Through the looking glass*, Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2004, Grahamstown. (Schmahmann 2004:48).

multiple readings of post-African identities when she concludes that Rose offers “an assortment of femininities” that opens possibilities for “emancipatory transformation.” I concur that post-African female identity is necessarily interlaced with historical, cultural, social and political concerns represented as a “knot of interrelated questions that play on different layers, registers and levels of the self”, as suggested by Braidotti (1994:168).

The inclusion of *Nemesis* (2003 – 2004) (Figure 51) by Leora Farber is evidence of another central woman artist engaged in portraying the female body, shaped and refashioned to conform to “standards of ‘normality’ and ‘beauty’” (Schmahmann 2004:44). *Nemesis* formed a strong curatorial juxtaposition to Searle’s piece, *Not quite white* (2000) (Figure 52) that teased out the differences in the infringement of the margins of women’s racially different bodies.



Figure 51: Leora Farber in collaboration with Strangelove, Panel 1 of *Nemesis* (2003 – 2004). Lambda print mounted on Novalite, 148.5 x 92 cm. Make-up artist: Lyn Kennedy. Collection of the artist. Displayed as part of *Through the looking glass*, Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2004, Grahamstown. (Schmahmann 2004:40).

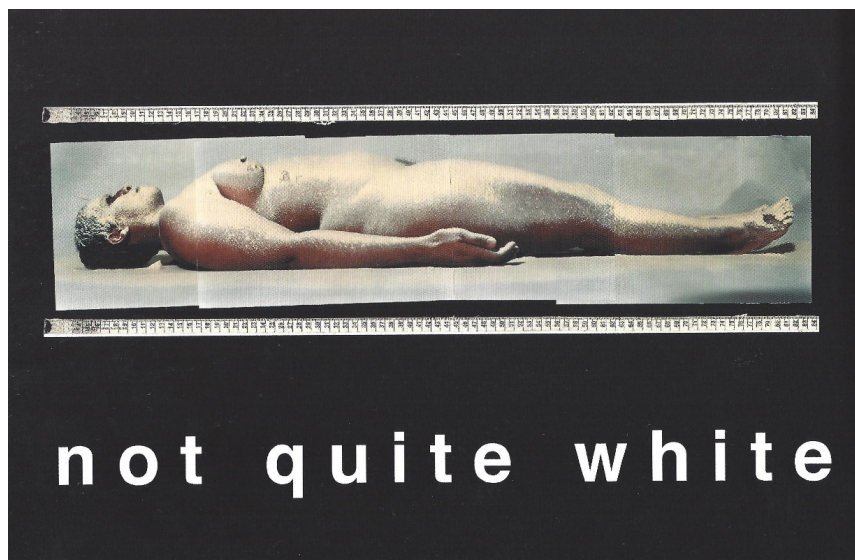


Figure 52: Berni Searle, *Not quite white* (2000). Billboard image, One City Festival, Cape Town. Displayed as part of *Through the looking glass*, Standard Bank National Arts Festival 2004, Grahamstown. (Schmahmann 2004:43).

Through the looking glass bears testament to Schmahmann's valuable contribution to local feminist curatorial practice, as the exhibition foregrounds the work of local women artists engaged in a feminist interrogation of themselves and their environment. The exhibition, and especially the accompanying catalogue, serves as a respected resource of contemporary art produced by South African women.

Following *Through the looking glass* in 2006, *Second to none*²⁰ was curated in commemoration of the 1956 Women's March²¹ and hosted by the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. Curated by Virginia MacKenny and Ngcobo, the exhibition showcased a selection of work by (mostly) local female artists from both established and new generation fronts. The clear objective was to feature a well-represented selection of artists. The exhibition set out to celebrate the historic event, which highlighted the premise of a performative, liminal reading of post-African identity. The broad selection of artwork ensured that *Second to none* offered multiple readings of gender, race and sexuality and their subsequent effects on "struggles for personal freedoms in the public domain" (Ngcobo [sa]:[sp]). While the show celebrated the achievements of the 1956 Women's March demand for freedom of passage, the show also cast a shadow of doubt over just how free South African women are half a century later.

Zanele Muholi's poignant photographic imagery, exhibited as part of *Second to none*, caused much contention in its pursuit to reframe the black body as alternative configurations of local female identity.²² Muholi's gaze is intent on dissolving the invisibility of gay, lesbian and transgender identities by challenging fixed conceptions of femininity, and her deployment of the black body confronts the traditional viewer-subject relationship in an uncompromising way, opening up the possibility for alternative readings of identity that are "subversive, oppositional and innovative"

²⁰ *Second to none* was hosted by the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa from 24 June to 3 September 2006 and comprised a well-balanced mix of contemporary, local artists, including those who were more established, such as Helen Sebidi, Penny Siopis, Noria Mabasa, Tracey Rose, Nicholas Hlobo, Nandipha Mntambo, Dan Halter and Berni Searle, and a new generation of artists including Keorapatse Mosimane, Bridget Baker, Zanele Muholi and Nontsikelelo Veleko. Works for the exhibition were drawn from both the South African National Gallery and independent sources.

²¹ On 9 August 1956, approximately 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in silent protest to present a petition to the prime minister, JG Strydom, against the carrying of passes by black women. The march was organised by the Federation of South African Women. While delivering the petition, the women sang the famous freedom song, *Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo* (You strike a woman, you strike a rock).

²² Ngcobo ([sa]:[sp]) reports two incidents which outraged gallery visitors on their confrontation with Muholi's artwork, *Dada* (2003). The first incident occurred during the hanging of *Subject to change* (2005) at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, when two black women came to see "what 'silly' and 'offensive' things white people were doing to black people." The work failed to make it onto the exhibition. The second encounter took place during the showing of *Second to none*, when two white women were appalled by the imagery and swiftly prompted each other to move onto the "nicer pictures in the Old Masters Galleries; not this horrendous stuff."



Left: Figure 53: Zanele Muholi, *Period IV* (2005). Lambda print, 500 x 375 mm.
Displayed as part of *Second to none*. (Zanele Muholi. Only half the picture
2006:[sp]).

Right: Figure 54: Zanele Muholi, *Dada* (2003). Silver gelatin print, 485 x 300 mm.
Displayed as part of *Second to none*. (Zanele Muholi. Only half the picture
2006:[sp]).

(Sobopha 2011:103). Muholi's mode of visual enactment, evident in *Period IV* (2005) (Figure 53) and *Dada* (2003) (Figure 54), pries open "a space for black female bodies from centuries of objectification [...] ensuring that those rendered voiceless can begin to reclaim the (visual) culture that was historically denied to them" (Ngcobo 2006:[sp]).

However, the vast amount of criticism Muholi drew for showcasing the black body in what was viewed as a disgraceful way, underlines why a continuous forging of feminist concerns should remain at the forefront of local women's art practice. Regrettably, transformation is not realised merely by the courage of curators working with a handful of museums and galleries to display works that might potentially unsettle the museum and gallery-going public. As Muholi (in Ngcobo 2006:[sp]) notes, "[i]t is a time for a visual state of emergence" to challenge cultural, political and social ideologies on a local, public and personal front." Gqola (2007:116) suggests that "it is only through a comprehensive contestation of representation and

voice across class that meaningful gender transformation is possible”, and denounces what she refers to as the “cult of femininity” – the idealised set of traits women are expected to possess as seem evident in local imaginations. Gqola (2007:116-117) continues that while local women are “legislatively empowered”, they live in constant fear on the street and at home.²³ Vastly overshadowed by the Muholi controversy, *Second to none* was successful, however, in its strategy of inclusion in exhibiting work from across the races, and revealing the artists’ portrayal of women’s roles in society as they interpreted them. These works were also complemented by local male contributions²⁴ to interrogate the feminist premise.

*Four tales*²⁵ (2008), curated by Goniwe at Gallery MOMO²⁶ in Johannesburg, catapulted the careers of two significant local women artists, Mary Sibande and Gabrielle Goliath. Sibande’s life-sized sculptures and prints that image the artist’s alter ego, Sophie, operate as a site whereby Sibande recasts herself in various roles to regain power over her racialised and gendered black body. Goniwe (2014:8) explains Sophie’s dresses as “exterior mirrors [...] hybrid designs on whose visual surfaces Sibande inscribes her personal narratives, history and social concerns.” These incarnations draw simultaneously from the past and present and, as evident in *They don’t make them like they used to* (2009) (Figure 55), Sibande subverts traditional, colonial interpretations of the black woman’s body and, instead, sets up her identity as premised between idealised narratives and real, lived experience.

Hetherington (1997:42-3) explains that heterotopias signify through similitude where the rendering of meaning in terms of identity “is dislocated through a series of deferrals”, and aligns them with Foucault’s (1986:24) assertion that these sites of alternate ordering comprise a multiplicity of positions in “an almost magical, uncertain space, monstrous combinations that unsettle the flow of discourse.”

²³ Gqola (2007:118-120) explains that local women’s “ostensibly empowered” status does not afford them the right to express their sexual orientation when certain elements in society believe that the women must be “cured” of being lesbian by being exposed to practices such as “jackrolling” (the high level of gang-raping that was commonplace in townships around Johannesburg and Pretoria during the 1980s and 1990s) or “*iinitsara*” (where black youths from Nyanga township in Cape Town in the late 1980s and 1990s became infamous for stabbing, rape and other violent crimes), “since this is made out to be just another way in which we play hard to get and put ourselves out of the ownership of violent men.”

²⁴ Works by Dan Halter and Nicholas Hlobo also formed part of the female cast, which included work by Penny Siopis, Tracey Rose, Diane Victor, Tracey Payne, Bridget Baker and Carol-Anne Gainer.

²⁵ *Four tales* focused on four individual narratives of young, local, women artists, including Mary Sibande, Gabrielle Goliath, Nomusa Makhubu and Gina van Zyl de Oliveira. The exhibition was on display from 27 March to 29 April 2008.

²⁶ Monna Mokoena founded gallery MOMO in 2003 in Johannesburg. The gallery quickly became synonymous with contemporary South African and African art, as well becoming a platform for young and upcoming local artists. The gallery opened its Cape Town branch in 2015.



Figure 55: Mary Sibande, *They don't make them like they used to* (2008). Digital print on cotton rag matte paper, 90x 60 cm. Displayed as part of *Four tales*, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg. (Goniwe 2013:6).



Figure 56: Gabrielle Goliath, *Bouquet III* (2007). Pigment ink on cotton Baryta, three prints of 26 x 130 cm each. Displayed as part of *Four tales*, Gallery MOMO, Johannesburg. (Buys 2008:[sp]).

In a similarly unsettling and arresting manner, Goliath expresses her narrative through the video pieces that form part of *Four tales*, and aims to disrupt staid notions of the self. *Bouquet* (2007) (Figure 56) relates to femininity, romance and death – aspects that the artist expels from her body to rid it from the brutality associated with women’s abuse. The sense of angst and anger evident in the work is sharply contrasted by the serene silence that accompanies the piece, as the use of her own body as subject contemplates both the collective political and historical associations of the body that shape Goliath’s identity. Goliath’s performance of the silenced body connotes an “in-between space that carries the burden of meaning and culture” (Bhabha 1994:38).

To showcase this encumbrance of culture and meaning, *Innovative women*²⁷ (2009) was curated by Bengu both as an expression of black female identity, and as a means of providing a platform for young black women artists to showcase their creative skills, their ability to realise their conceptualisations, and their capabilities.

²⁷ *Innovative women* was funded by the Department of Arts and Culture to coincide with Women’s Day celebrations in August 2009. Showed at the Old Fort at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, the selection of young black female artists included artwork by Bongu Bengu, Dineo Bopabe, Zanele Muholi, Nandipha Mntambo, Ernestine White, Ingrid Masondo, Nontobeko Ntombela, Usha Seejarim, Senzani Marasela and Lerato Shadi.

However, the exhibition, funded by the Department of Arts and Culture and aimed at celebrating National Women’s Day, once again highlighted the prevailing restrictions on women evident in post-millennial South Africa. Despite the participants’ numerous international and local accolades, Lulu Xingwana (in Dubin 2012:172), the then-Minister of Arts and Culture, denounced the exhibition for being “immoral” and “against nation-building” and left without delivering her public address. Xingwana's outrage was mostly aimed at Muholi’s photographic triptych, *Being* (2007) (Figure 57), and Nandipha Mntambo’s *Rape of Europa* (2009) (Figure 58) and *Narcissus* (2009), which Xingwana deemed pornographic.

Although the incident is regrettably discouraging, especially against the celebration of women in South Africa at which it was aimed, it yielded several scholarly articles (including those by Gqola, Ngcobo and Desiree Lewis)²⁸ denouncing Xingwana’s remarks – an aspect which certainly contributed to local discourses engaged with female politics.



Figure 57: Zanele Muholi, *Being* (2007). Triptych of two silver gelatin prints (left and right) and a lambda print (middle), 300 x 225 mm each. Displayed as part of *Innovative women*, Old Fort at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. (Zanele Muholi. *Being* 2007:[sp]).

²⁸ Gqola wrote a ‘letter’ addressed to Xingwana that appeared in *Of other faces* (2006), edited by Muholi and launched as part of her solo exhibition by the same title at the Stevenson in the same year; Ngcobo wrote an artist’s biography on Muholi published by the online resource, Artthrob; Lewis wrote the article, *Against the grain: black women and sexuality* (2011) in which she teases out the restricting boundaries faced by black women with regard to lesbianism within local culture.



Figure 58: Nandipha Mntambo, *Rape of Europa* (2009). Photographic print, 112 x 112 cm. Displayed as part of *Innovative women*, Old Fort at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. (Nandipha Mntambo. The encounter 2009:[sp]).

Mntambo's work explores the limits of representation of the (black) woman's body through her employment of the medium of cowhide (which draws upon traditional Nguni cultural practices). She moulds the cowhide skins onto her own body, and the animal traces embedded in the skins blur stereotypical gendered and racial constructs relating to idealised female beauty (attraction and repulsion), Africa and the West (black and white), and culture and heritage (past and present). Mntambo's rendering of the self as premised amidst multiple worlds subverts traditional accounts of black female identity.

*Ingabisa*²⁹ (2007), Mntambo's first solo exhibition held at the Stevenson, Cape Town, focused on the liminal understanding of identity that the artist aimed to express. This

²⁹ *Ingabisa* was hosted by the Stevenson gallery in Cape Town, from 16 August to 15 September 2007. The title of the exhibition is a Swazi word (Mntambo is originally from Swaziland) and refers to "a young



Left: Figure 59: Nandipha Mntambo, *Balandzeli* (2004). Cowhide, resin and waxed cord, 137 x 360 x 70 cm. Installation view as part of *Ingabisa* at the Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town. Collection of Johannesburg Art Gallery. (Nandipha Mntambo. *Ingabisa*:[sp]).

Right: Figure 60: Nandipha Mntambo, *Indlovukati* (2007). Cowhide, resin, polyester mesh and waxed cord, 153 x 89 x 70 cm. Installation view as part of *Ingabisa* at the Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town. (Nandipha Mntambo. *Ingabisa*:[sp]).

was echoed in the repetitive installation of the body casts, as well as in the interplay between the fullness of the body and the hollowness of the cast, most evident in *Balandzeli* (2004) (Figure 59) and *Indlovukati* (2007) (Figure 60). Mntambo's performance of the post-African body within the interstices yielded by cultural practice and political engagement, positioned her work at the forefront of local feminist practice.

Also, expressing an interest in the representation of the self and with the inclusion of a number of artworks by local women artists in which the desire for a liminal formation of identity is distilled, Brodie/Stevenson³⁰ hosted the group exhibition, *Self*

girl's coming of age" which echoes both the beginning of the shaping of identity and the threshold and liminality upon which her identity is premised in her work (Malcomess 2007:[sp]).

³⁰ Michael Stevenson opened the Stevenson gallery in Cape Town in 2003, and later partnered with David Brodie in Johannesburg, to open a second space, today known as the Stevenson. The gallery

/ *Not-self*³¹ (2009). The exhibition's interrogation of the boundaries between the presence and absence of the self is cleverly explored by means of a curatorial format whereby two exhibitions were juxtaposed through their taking place at different times.

Fragile (2009) (Figure 61) by Lerato Shadi, one of the pieces selected for the show, explores the tradition of self-portraiture or self-representation as a self-reflexive

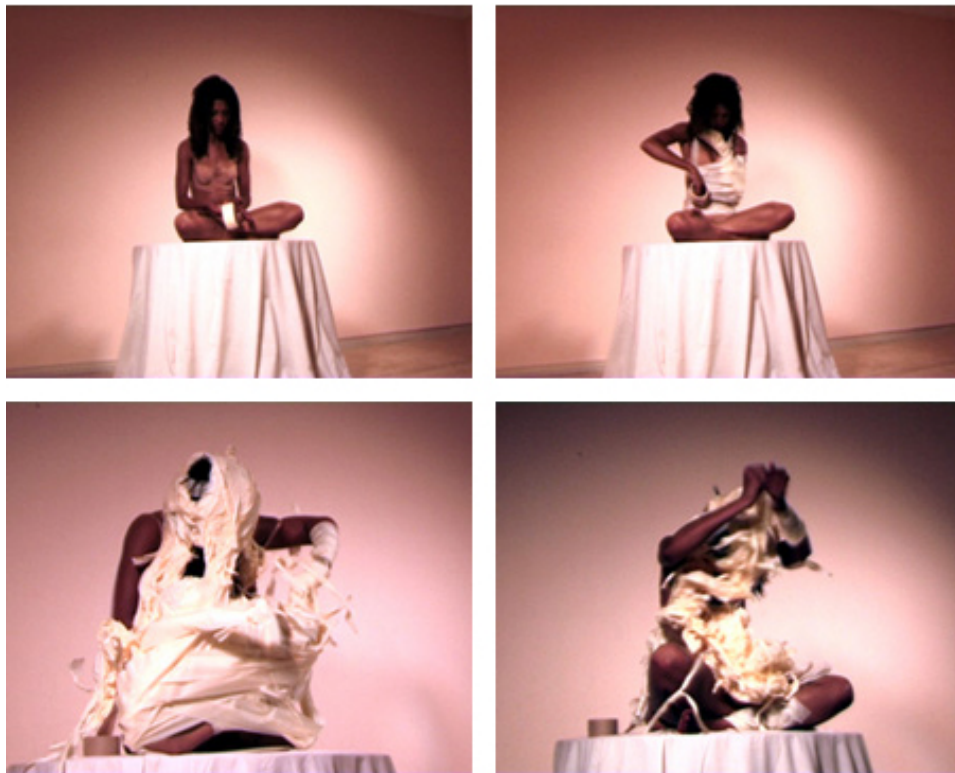


Figure 61: Lerato Shadi, *Fragile* (2009). Video, 5'0". Exhibited as part of *Self / Not-self* at the Brodie/Stevenson, Johannesburg. (Self / Not-self:[sp]).

has contributed much to the local art scene through its showcasing of contemporary art from South Africa, as well as from elsewhere in Africa and the diaspora. The extensive catalogues produced by the gallery have promoted artists both locally and abroad, and serve as a rich art historical resource. The gallery has also assisted artists' participation in international art fairs, including Art Basel, Art Basel Miami Beach, Frieze New York and London, and Art Hong Kong, thus providing much international exposure for local art practice.

³¹ *Self / Not-self* was a two-part curated exhibition hosted by Brodie/Stevenson, Johannesburg. The first exhibition (19 February – 21 March 2009) explored the literal approach of self-representation through the "representation of the body, corporeal traces and other markers of presence" of the self, and included artwork by Pieter Hugo, Lunga Kama, Anton Kannemeyer, Nandipha Mntambo, Zanele Muholi, Serge Alain Niegeka, Tracy Payne, Berni Searle and Lerato Shadi. The second exhibition (26 March – 25 April) considered the absence of direct self-referencing through spotlighting the work of artists, including Avant Car Guard, Conrad Botes, Wim Botha, Reshma Chhiba, Simon Gush, Nicholas Hlobo, Lawrence Lemaona, Michael MacGarry, Richard Penn, Athi-Patra Ruga, Wilhelm Saayman, Penny Siopis, and Sober and Lonely. The works presented as part of the second exhibition employed strategies of surrogacy, projection and alternative figurations of the self (Self / Not-self 2009:[sp]).

narrative. Here, the artist slowly ‘masked out’ her body by wrapping it up with masking tape with the aim of later trying to break free from the restricting tape spun around her. This performance piece, captured on video, invokes powerful associations in the self-involved act of the covering and revealing of identity as part of its transformation. This repetitive performance of the self is premised on the threshold of that which remains fluid and in flux, and showcases post-African identity as constrained in favour of liminality.

*Transformations*³² (2010), curated by Nessa Leibhammer, Reshma Chhiba and Musha Neluheni, aimed to devise a curatorial premise that spotlighted “continuities, ruptures, contrasts and commentary evident in women’s art from the 19th to the 21st century”, in celebration of National Women’s Day (Leibhammer & Neluheni 2010a:212). Artworks for inclusion in the exhibition were selected from the Johannesburg Art Gallery’s international and local holdings.³³ This was the first large scale exhibition of the post-millennium period in South Africa intent on showcasing work produced by women. It aligned itself with the international survey shows during the first decade of the 2000s that aimed to re-evaluate or trace the emancipation of women through their expression in exhibitions (cf. section 4.2.2).

Women’s media, one of the themes forming part of *Transformations*, explored the traditional associations of so-called women’s work, and juxtaposed the demure portrayal of *The seamstress* (circa second half of nineteenth century) (Figure 62) by Rosa Brett with Frances Goodman’s *Bead* series (2006) (Figure 63) and Billie Zangewa’s *Pillow talk* (2004) (Figure 64). The restricted notion of the self is evident in *The seamstress*, which is reinforced by the congested environment that conceals and shields the unassuming figure. This stands in stark contrast to Goodman and Zangewa’s re-interpretation of conventional understandings of female identity and women’s work. Their redeployment of traditional materials, associated here with women’s work as part of contemporary art practice, deconstructs conventional understandings of women, materials and art making. In addition, the referencing of women’s sexuality and rebellion, visible in both artists’ work, highlights conventional

³² *Transformations* was hosted by the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, from 11 August 2010 to 31 January 2011. Nessa Leibhammer, Reshma Chhiba and Musha Neluheni curated the exhibition, comprising a selection of work produced by women from the gallery’s collection, with the aim of representing changes in subject matter, medium and approaches evident in work from the 1900s to 2010. The exhibition was organised into 14 themes including *Abstraction, Buildings and townscapes, Interiors, Mother and child* and *Social commentary*.

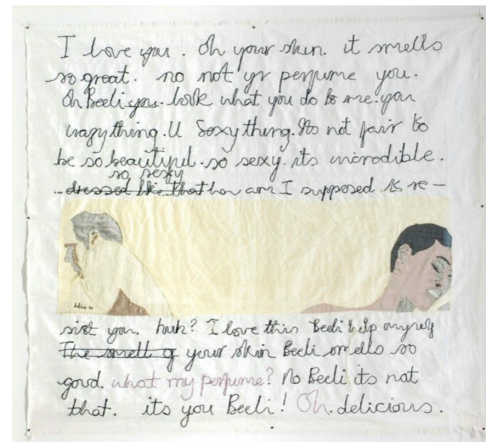
³³ Local women artists featured artworks alongside international artists in the collection including, Lucie Rie, Gwendolen Raverat, Dame Elizabeth Frink, Celia Paul, Marlene Dumas and Barbara Hepworth. The South African contingent included the artists, Maud Sumner, Irma Stern, Dorothy Kay, Elsa Dziomba, Dianne Victor, Zanele Muholi, Frances Goodman, Billie Zangewa and Anthea Moys, amongst others.



Figure 62: Rosa Brett, *The seamstress* (circa second half of the nineteenth century). Oil on canvas. (Leibhammer & Neluheni 2010a:212-3).



Left: Figure 63: Frances Goodman, *Hollow victory* (*Bead series*) (2004-5). Glass beads, silk, thread, 42 x 34 x 8 cm. Displayed as part of *Transformations* at Johannesburg Art Gallery. (Frances Goodman [sa]:[sp]).



Right: Figure 64: Billie Zangewa, *Pillow talk* (2004). Cut silk and cotton, 112 x 100 cm. Displayed as part of *Transformations* at Johannesburg Art Gallery. (Leibhammer & Neluheni 2010a:214).



Figure 65: Exhibition view of *Transformations* (2010) at Johannesburg Art Gallery. (Leibhammer & Nehuleni 2010b:[sp]).

ideals of womanhood, while exploring subject matter of a sexual nature and female agency.

Women's media also resonated with previous explorations of the conflation of this category and its associations with craft (cf. section 3.2.1). Goodman and Zangewa's contributions transgress the imposed boundaries that frame conventional definitions of fine art and craft, and both resonate and contextualise other artworks on the exhibition that would traditionally be considered craft (Figure 65).

While many exhibitions have showcased feminist concerns in recent years, two exhibitions, in particular, extended the discussion to explore what I consider liminal post-African identity. These exhibitions foregrounded alternative incarnations of local women's identities that informed the performative characteristic of post-African identity that I argue for.

The first of these was Chhiba's solo exhibition, *The two talking yonis*³⁴ (2013), curated by Ntombela, which explored the "re-looking, re-examining and re-investigating" of the female self through an installation of works across three distinct spaces (The two talking yonis 2013:[sp]). The opening of curatorial praxis, and the title of the exhibition, is intended to represent the significance of dialogue between the artist and curator.

The word *yoni*³⁵ literally translates to 'vagina' or 'womb'. Here, Ntombela and Chhiba engaged in critical dialogue around issues of identity, female energy and the act of creativity stemming from the artist's deployment of the mythological Hindu goddess, Kāli. Chhiba employed Kāli to renegotiate an empowered and revised view of her female identity through the goddess's image, which further inspired numerous symbolic associations in her work. Kāli acts as a vehicle for Chhiba to examine the intersection of her South African ancestry as a second-generation Indian woman and her Hindu heritage (Chhiba 2013:4).

The exhibition was installed over three locations, but the focal point was a site-specific installation of a larger-than-life *yoni* entitled, *two talking yonis #1* (2013) (Figures 66 & 67), installed at the Women's Jail. The piece enfolded its viewers in an interactive space, and on their entry, they were subject to sounds of sneering, screaming and mocking. The viewers were obliged to move through the red vagina to access the remainder of the artworks. This deliberate act of propelling the viewer into the space of the feminine was pitched as an act of defiance against patriarchal power. With the help of Kāli, the space became one of "revolt, yet at the same time a creative space, not just of birth, but of criticality, protest, mockery, battle and femininity, appealing to spiritual power and defiance" (The two talking yonis 2013:[sp]).

The two talking yonis #2 (Figure 68) comprised a series of works on saris which considered the female body as a source of power and creation. *The two talking yonis #3* (Figure 69) showcased a series of photographic artworks which portrayed the Dasa Mahavidyas – the ten transcendental wisdoms of the goddess Kāli – through aspects of "mime, gesture and posture from the dance style, Bharatnatyam" (The

³⁴ *The two talking yonis* spanned three different venues – the Women's Jail at the Constitution Hill complex (8-31 August 2013), ROOM Gallery/Project Space (8-31 August 2013) and the Kalashnikov Gallery (8-25 August 2013) in Johannesburg – and re-examined ideas regarding the position of the female in a contemporary landscape.

³⁵ The *yoni* is the symbol of the Hindu Divine Mother and is strongly associated with the cycle of life, birth and regeneration within Hindu tradition.



Figure 66 & 67: Reshma Chhiba, *Come inside* (detail) (2013) Installation view of the site-specific installation, *Come inside* as part of *The two talking yonis #1* at the Women's Jail, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. (The two talking yonis 2013:[sp]).

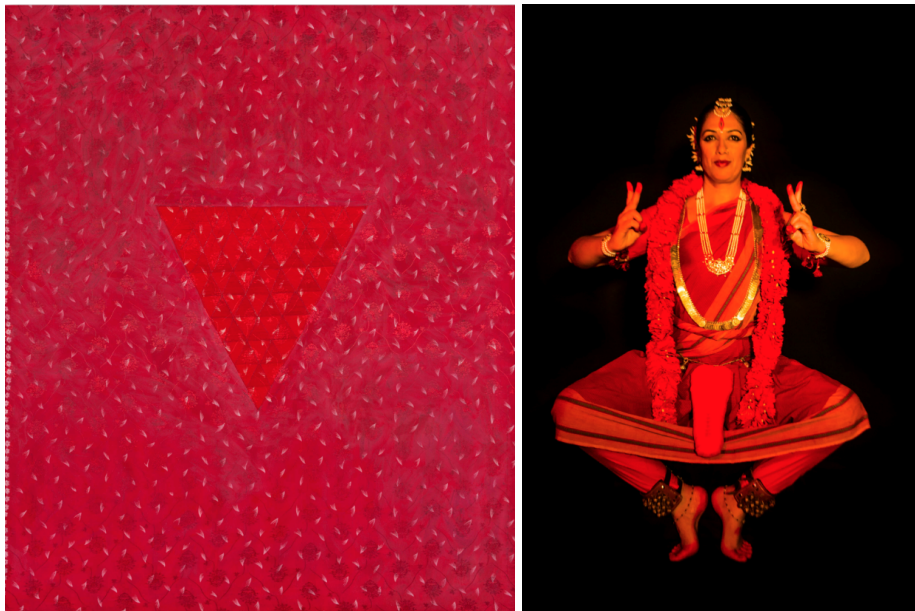


Figure 68: Reshma Chhiba, *Primal energy* (2013). Kumkum powder and thread on sari, 120 x 100 cm. Part of the exhibition, *The two talking yonis #2* at ROOM, Johannesburg. (The two talking yonis 2013:[sp]).

Figure 69: Reshma Chhiba, *The reconstruction of unity* (2013). Digital print on fibre paper, edition 1/5, 136 x 90 cm. Part of the exhibition, *The two talking yonis #3* at Kalashnikov, Johannesburg. (The two talking yonis 2013:[sp]).

two talking yonis 2013:[sp]). Chhiba (2015) conflated Kāli's ferocious tongue with the *yoni* which evolved into a symbol of non-compliance, creation, and regeneration of domination, as well as a reawakening of the feminine self:

The simple act of sticking one's tongue out can mean various things; it can be playful, sexual or even disrespectful [...] [and] used as a weapon of verbal abuse against women.

Vrinda Dalmiya (2002:126) explains that Kāli's power advocates "a collapse of typically 'Western' binary thinking" to undermine what Mohanty (1988:65-6) terms, "discursive colonialism".

The second exhibition, *A fragile archive*³⁶ (2013), also curated by Ntombela, opted for a feminist method of curatorship which she employed to unsettle "the role of history, memory and archive in the positioning of artists in the public sphere" (Ntombela 2013a:70). The curator focused on Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive as central to her investigation to critically consider the position of black women artists in South African from the 1940s to the 1980s. From here various narratives were drawn, which allowed the further exploration of seven other black South African women artists.³⁷

The artworks were organised in five rooms, each emblematic of a different narrative relating to Ntombela's revised archive. The curator's aim was to set up a "chronology of the visibility" – a local, alternative trajectory of South African history of art that subverts traditional notions of truth and history³⁸ (Ntombela 2013a:71-2).

The first room showcased four artworks by Valerie Desmore since, based on Ntombela's research, she appeared chronologically before Mgudlandlu, despite the latter having being named as the 'first' black female artist. The second room "restaged" Mgudlandlu's first exhibition, displaying a combination of artworks and

³⁶ *A fragile archive* was curated by Ntombela in partial fulfilment of the degree, MA (Fine Arts) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The exhibition was hosted by the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, across five exhibition halls on the ground floor from 29 January 2012 to 8 April 2012.

³⁷ The works of Valerie Desmore, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Allina Khumalo, Eliza Xaba, Noria Mabasa, Helen Sebidi and Bongzi Dhlomo were also included in the exhibition alongside Mgudlandlu's artwork.

³⁸ Ntombela (2013a:72) notes that the focus on "history, memory and archive" premised in *A fragile archive*, furthermore highlights the question of Mgudlandlu's depiction in history as South Africa's 'first' black woman artist. Ntombela's constant disruption of spatio-temporal contexts in local history and memory reiterates the need for a liminal exposition of local identities to successfully account for the depiction of limitations impacting the lives of local women artists.



Figure 70: A detail of the second exhibition hall of the exhibition, *A fragile archive* (2013) curated by Nontobeko Ntombela at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. (Ntombela 2013a:90).

archive material, while the third and fourth rooms presented Mgudlundlu's last works which, according to Ntombela (2013a:71), had never been shown in public before. Finally, the exhibition concluded with a fifth room displaying selected works from the Johannesburg Art Gallery's collection by the remaining six artists who came to prominence in the 1980s.

The restaging of Mgudlundlu's 1961 exhibition of paintings and drawings was the focus of *A fragile archive* (Figure 70).³⁹ Specific details from the original exhibition were retained to constrain history, while, at the same time, various curatorial strategies were employed to indicate the curator's retelling or restaging of the archive through a subversive feminist approach. To reflect the aesthetic feel of the original exhibition, Ntombela included archive material such as newspaper articles, image projections, a table, and a voice recording of an interview with Randolph

³⁹ Mgudlundlu's exhibition was held at the *Contact* magazine boardroom in 1961, and comprised a series of drawings and paintings.

Vigne⁴⁰. In the exhibition layout, Ntombela painted the gallery walls grey, and the white vinyl lettering used the same typeface as that in Mgudlandlu's original exhibition catalogue.

Several of the works that had been displayed as part of Mgudlandlu's original exhibition were beyond Ntombela's reach, as these are not represented in any collection. In attempting to comment on the absence and incompleteness of these knowledge structures, the curator literally reinserted these pieces into her restaged archive by projecting some of the artists' works, and displaying others through the pages of a book (Figure 71). The latter, along with the inclusion of text on the walls, also highlights Ntombela's unsettling of the written word, and aligns with Richter's (2016:64-67) wish that a feminist praxis would recontextualise both art history and the practice of curatorship.



Figure 71: A detail of the exhibition, *A fragile archive* (2013) curated by Nontobeko Ntombela at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. (Ntombela 2013a:91).

⁴⁰ Ntombela explains that Vigne played a vital role in realising Mgudlandlu's exhibition. The voice recording was included to disprove the belief, propagated by Elza Miles' book, *Nomfanekiso* (2002), that only women promoted Mgudlandlu's career (Ntombela 2013a:91).

In this chapter, I outlined the extent to which local feminist narratives have been amplified by the inclusion of the works of local women artists in specific and ground-breaking exhibitions, both in South Africa and internationally. I outlined the complex engagement with local female identity, and drew attention to the fact that issues regarding race and ethnicity remain embedded in considerations of women in South Africa. I argued that, due to the insurgence of new women's voices to local feminist discourse – as curators, artists and art historians – the post-African woman arose as an embodied, performative and integrated identity that demands a continued negotiation of the self, amidst the crevices yielded by culture, society and politics.

In the following chapter I expand on the theorised alternative curatorial strategy for the exhibition, *The princess in the veld*.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRINCESS IN THE VELD: CURATING LIMINALITY

The actual creative project of woman as a subject involves betraying the expressive mechanisms of culture in order to express herself through the break, within the gaps between the systematic spaces of artistic language (Boetti in Kirshner 2007:390).

The post-African woman's ongoing critical engagement with identity may disrupt the established cultural apparatus of control. A liminal view of identity, set amidst a forever-changing backdrop of local political, social and cultural vistas, requires a curatorial stage equipped to showcase the post-African woman in all her plurality. I have shown in the preceding chapters how local women have trampled the boundaries imposed by the art world, culture and politics. This transformation of women, read through the curatorial act, reveals the post-African woman's identity in the process of becoming empowered, or as "willful subjects",¹ as Sara Ahmed (2014:9) refers to transgressive female identity.² Ahmed designed her theorisation of women intent on defying the limitations imposed upon them in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's (2011 [1884]:420) short fairy tale, *The willful child*:

Once upon a time there was a child who was willful, and would not do as her mother wished. For this reason God had no pleasure in her, and let her become ill, and no doctor could do her any good, and in a short time she lay on her deathbed. When she had been lowered into her grave, and the earth was spread over her, all at once her arm came out again, and stretched upwards, and when they had put it in and spread fresh earth over it, it was all to no purpose, for the arm always came out again. Then the mother herself was obliged to go to the grave, and strike the arm with a rod, and when she had done that, it was drawn in, and then at last the child had rest beneath the ground.

¹ Despite my following of English spelling conventions, the employment of the American spelling of the word "willful" (versus "wilful" in English) is deliberately utilised within this study in its alignment with Ahmed's theorisation: Ahmed (2014:322) notes that the American version allows for a reading of the "will" in "willful" – an important aspect of the post-African female subject's deliberate acts of defiance and will to ameliorate both their and others' lives.

² Ahmed's book, *Willful subjects* (2014) was kindly introduced to me by Sharlene Khan during an interview with her.

Willfulness is viewed by Ahmed (2014:470) as undermining a subject's survival, since, as is evident in the fairy tale, a deliberate act of transgression is punished by "a passive willing of death, and allowing of death". Although the child in the narrative is not assigned a gender, Ahmed interprets the subject as female. She (Ahmed 2014:322, original emphasis) continues that "willfulness *tends* to be registered as a feminine attribute". I argue that post-African women transgress boundaries, disregard borders, resist authoritative control, and defy parochial constraints. It is this ongoing negotiation of the self that informs the liminal view of the wilful princess that my exhibition, *The princess in the veld*, offers: a view of South African female identity that dismantles the violent obstructions offered by South Africa's historical past and its ferocious present.

Molesworth (2010:504, original emphasis) questions whether a revisionist project aimed at inserting exclusions into the (feminist) art historical canon is "feminist *enough*". She seeks an alternative approach to curatorial practice through a reconsideration of the curatorial space – a so-called "fantasy room" – premised on new allegiances between artworks and artists that expose serendipitous, alternative readings and fluid categories of female concerns.

Molesworth's (2010:508) 'vision' is a curatorial impulse that makes "an issue out of the psychic and social conditions of patriarchy". Her strategy is also to question both the totalising category of women – which she asserts is often instituted by thematic installations that premise Western associations of women – and the addition of female artists' work to the existing canon because of the frequent employment of chronological installations. This research, as foregrounded by the preceding chapters, argues for a curatorial praxis that engages with the complexities that women face, and aligns itself with Molesworth's (2010:509) call for lateral thinking, whereby the curated space is considered as a "site of temporal immediateness" – a spatial organisation that plays out the "ramifications of sameness and difference."

Added to this, the need to engage with the performative post-African subject – her continued renegotiation of identity and dedication to liminal reinvention – demands a curation strategy committed to stimulating discourse through a constant insertion of new voices and narratives into the project of 'women'. The current inclination towards curated projects that aim to expose the interstices yielded within this debate is underscored by my emphasis on research around liminality – both as a reading of a post-African female identity, and as a curatorial function.

The princess in the veld favours a curatorial model with a significant focus on dialogue. This would correspond to Molesworth's (2010:509) notion of a 'fantasy room', wherein the assembling of the artworks "synchronously" enables dialogue between the works of art, and discourse amongst their interstices. This liminal, open-ended and fluid approach to curating similarly reveals the "gaps and absences, the blind spots produced by vertical narratives of patriarchy [and colonialism]" that impact on the lives of post-African women, both in a local and global context (Molesworth 2010:512). Therefore, this exhibition is designed, through its curatorial methodology and conceptual implications, to provoke meaningful engagement with past, present and future expressions of work by South African women artists; and simultaneously engage with African and Western feminist discourse through a contribution to a local feminist trajectory.

With this in mind, and as an outcome of my research, the first section of this chapter theorises on an alternative approach to curating both through an exploration of spatiality, as it pertains to the curated space and broader cultural theory, and through its potential to adequately showcase artworks produced by the liminal post-African woman artist.

5.1 Counter spaces: setting the stage for a post-African, feminist exhibition strategy

As part of the feminist desire to undermine and deconstruct patriarchal and colonial paradigms, I propose a methodology for curating that explores space (cf. section 1.1.1). Here, I highlight spatiality as an imaginative space that may offer a liminal understanding of local post-African female identity. I consider spatiality within the context of *The princess in the veld* as twofold: firstly, I explore space as part of the curatorial function – i.e. the curated space; and secondly, I investigate the conceptual implications for alternative, fluid spaces of display.

5.1.1 *Negotiating gender and race in conventional museum practice*

As part of my feminist aim to undermine and deconstruct a patriarchally premised art historical canon and its colonising hegemonic practices, I propose an overhaul of the very structures that have been responsible for traditional exhibition designs.

Therefore, I propose an exhibition strategy premised on this rethinking of the curated space that may yield a liminal reading of post-African women. It is important to note that the theorised alternative spatial organisation that follows does not intend to discredit traditional museum and gallery spaces. Instead, I wish to explore aspects of space as potential alternatives, positioned in-between the orthodox museum space and the space of real and virtual lived experience.

The conventional curated space stages artworks as a collection of instances, moments and temporal lapses that revive “the endless concatenation of worlds, perspectives, models, counter-models and thinking” that shapes the artistic subject (Enwezor 2002:42). The enactment of these temporal artistic moments – performative, embodied and rooted in the South African cultural, political and social landscape – is framed by the exhibition space, and this informs the reading of the artworks displayed within its specific spatial organisation. The curated space, whether a museum space, biennale complex, or gallery, operates as an “institutional frame” (Kwon 1997:89). This closely managed space features crisp white walls with controlled lighting and temperature that masquerades as an innocent space, but in fact operates as a highly-coded mechanism to maintain ideology (Kwon 1997:89).

The spatial organisation of this space, also referred to as the white cube,³ functions as a container that necessarily directs its embedded ideological framework onto the exhibited artworks. Elena Filipovic (2005:324) notes that the conventional gallery or museum space regulates “an attitude toward art, a mode of presentation, and an aura that confers a halo of inevitability” on the artworks it displays. Accordingly, these classic exhibition spaces exemplify the Western canon of art history and its dedication to showcase works that ‘deserve’ to be elevated to the status of an art object. Miwon Kwon (1997:88) argues that this practice deliberately disconnects the world and the “space of art”, to illuminate the white cube’s “idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchization of values “objective, “disinterested” and “true”.” It is this seamless belief in truth that informs the Western-inscribed, patriarchally

³ Brian O’Doherty’s (1986 [1976]:14) classic essay, *Inside the white cube* (1976), explores the modern gallery space as an ideologically loaded “white, ideal space” that typifies twentieth century art and “clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains.” This space – a beacon of the West – isolates the work through its exclusion of the outside world (the white walls and lack of windows) where objects are ‘deemed’ art through their very presence within this sacred space and reproduce dominant hierarchies of values. While the white cube still serves as the primary exhibition format in galleries, museum and biennale formats, the challenging of this normative space was already explored through the institutional critique of the 1960s and 1970s. The latter sparked numerous alternative theorisations of the gallery space, including the Miwon Kwon’s black box (dedicated to the curation of new media art and film that requires a dark, closed off space for screening).

premised canon of history that excludes women and non-Western cultures from the narrative of art.

Thus, curated spaces that are reliant upon conventional exhibition practices contravene the feminist desire to deconstruct master narratives. The inability of such spaces to shed patriarchal and colonial frames, questions the legitimacy of installing a feminist exhibition within the confines of the white walls of power. Margaret Stetz (2005:209) maintains:

From a political perspective, it would be counter-productive for feminists to cede to anyone a space that still exercises so much cultural influence.

It is not my intention to elaborate on an extensive critique of the exhibition complex, nor do I wish to dismiss the museum or gallery space as a site whereby feminist concerns could be staged – in fact, the latter would undermine the feminist achievements that realised women’s rightful place within these very spaces.

However, in an effort to consummate a counter-space of display for *The princess in the veld*, I negate these conventional exhibition sites in favour of the fluid space offered by the medium of video. I anticipate that this “reframing of the frame”, as Johanne Lamoureux (in Bradley 2003:88) suggests, coupled instead with the recasting of white walls as cinematic frames, could provide the potential to explore artwork produced by post-African women artists in a liminal way. I opt for an alternative curatorial space that opens both in-between conventionally displayed narratives, and filmed sequences of lived experience. I believe that such an alternative approach to display might offer mobile and multiple frames of reference that obfuscate conventional spaces of ordering, and could foreground a fluctuating understanding of both space and identity.

5.1.2 Backstage: alternative spaces of ordering

To theorise an alternative curatorial space suitable for *The princess in the veld*, I draw on recent explorations centred on alternative spaces of ordering. All spatial relations – including hegemonic systems of ordering – should be understood “to be multiple and contested” and could potentially uncover counter-positions within liminal or marginal spaces (Hetherington 1997:20). It is within these interstitial spaces that I

aim to stage a temporary counter-curatorial position to unsettle existing practices. I argue that it is here where patriarchal and colonial conventions could be exposed, and possibilities to reveal post-African women's identities as liminal could become realised.

I consider the theorised exhibition space in association with Foucault's notion of heterotopia which, according to Kevin Hetherington (1997:53), is evoked only when utopian ideals – for example, the amelioration of the lives of women proffered by feminist thought – manifest in society. Desires for reality different from normative dispensation, or “the space of our dreams”, challenge the sense of order and structure entangled within the fabric of society (Foucault 1986:23). “Heterotopology” is explained by Foucault (1986:24, emphasis added) as “a sort of simultaneously mythic and real *contestation* of the space in which we live”. The senses of dispute, resistance, and defiance embedded in such spaces of proximity enable a curatorial stage “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces [...] that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1986:25).

Following Hetherington (1997:46), it is important to clarify that heterotopia “do not exist in the order of things, but in the ordering of things.” The positioning of heterotopias in-between binary oppositions actualises the function to “expose every real space” (Hetherington 1997:46). The heterotopian curated space may showcase local female identity as temporarily and synchronically premised, in the interstices granted by intersecting narratives and discourses to unveil the enduring parochial and colonial views that inscribe post-African women. The plurality and disclosure evident here ruptures conventional spatial organisations, and encourages acts of transgression through their very difference or otherness. The display of artworks in *The princess in the veld* is conceived within this alternatively ordered curated space – a site of “all things displaced, marginal, novel or rejected, or ambivalent” (Hetherington 1997:46).

The marginal as a counter-hegemonic space is central to heterotopias and social ordering. Henri Lefebvre (1991:33) explains that space is a complex engagement convoluted by the *representation* of space, which encapsulates several intersections. Space and its associations assimilate the power relations that representation, such as art, expresses. Lefebvre (1991:33) invokes a “conceptual triad” of the production of space: “spatial practice” involves the production of space through the social relations that arise from production and reproduction within a capitalist system; the

term “representations of space” denotes the relations of production and the order imposed by such relations associated with the produced space; “representational space” signifies resistance to the dominant social order – the covert aspects of social life and art. It is the latter, the “representational space”, that gives rise to the proposed curatorial space and yields potential for exposing the disparities evident in the post-African woman’s identity.

I argue that the proposed counter-space is not a site, but rather a temporal situation that occurs in a specific place – an interstitial moment that offers the possibility of resistance for marginal or non-dominant groups (Hetherington 1997:22). This liminal curatorial space could render “sites that have been left behind or left out as fragments produced by the tensions within the contradictory space” of the hegemonic practices of the museum (Hetherington 1997:23). While a transgression of boundaries disputes the very structure of ordering, I contend that the theorised threshold-space may constitute an alternative form of ordering that overthrows systems of power, and exposes disparities.

5.1.3 Taking cues: the politics of play

Liminal and/or transgressive spaces tend to be organised around the playful and free instead of a sense of order (Hetherington 1997:32). It is within these temporary counter-spaces that the liminal subject evolves to what Turner (1974:58) describes as the liminoid. In the liminoid state, the self is actively involved in the continuous renegotiation of identity. In the essay, *Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology* (1974), Turner explains the notion of liminality within tribal cultures, and further extends his theories to include post-industrial, urban spaces.

Turner founded his theory on Van Gennep’s (1960:11) triadic structure of the undertaking of rites of passage. The first stage, separation, marks the physical removal of individuals from society and characterises the beginning of an individual’s passage from one stage to the next. This is followed by liminality – the in-between phase where individuals are in “a sort of social limbo” (Turner 1974:57) – which has been explored throughout this research and is marked by the threshold. The last stage, “re-aggregation”, pinpoints the moment of reintegration into society as an altered individual (Van Gennep 1960:110).

I argue that post-African women, wishing to abolish existing systems of power and wholeness, reject the notion of ‘re-aggregation’ into a “stable, well-defined position in the total society” (Turner 1974:57). Instead, post-African female identity may be read as temporarily poised on the threshold, where continued transformation is possible and identity is in the process of becoming. It is this form of willful resistance, as well as the need to remain unfixed, that is attributed to the post-African woman’s renewed agency expressed through her deliberate embodied and engaged performance of the self (cf. section 4.3). This position is revealed through the staging of alternative heterotopic sites of ordering that both resist and transgress the existing containments of space prevalent in society.

The post-African woman’s transformation from the liminal to the liminoid, as a marker of her renewed agency, is understood through Turner’s (1974:61, original emphasis) view of the liminoid – a state of “liminality, *par excellence*”. Liminoid states are similar to liminal rituals, but distinctly different through their association with the creative and the ludic (a light-hearted playfulness). Turner (1974:65-66) distinguishes the liminoid from the liminal by the association it has with the notion of play in its allusion to freedom, as well as its insistence on the necessity of motion or action, and performance.⁴ Separate from political and cultural processes, liminoid phenomena are produced and developed constantly along the interstices and thresholds of society. The liminoid, as associated with the individual rather than the collective, is multiple, disjointed and experimental (Turner 1974:85).

The liminoid also embodies social critique, transformation and revolution as promoted through various creative expressions. For example, the performance of identity expressed in contemporary artworks produced by South African women often exposes the injustices, discrimination and incompetence of mainstream social, political, economic and cultural structures (Turner 1974:86). These performances of the self may enable an “escape attempt into what are perceived as more authentic experiences out of which identities are constituted” (Hetherington 1998:121). Similarly, the notion of “flow” – viewed as an extension of play when pertaining to the process of creativity – is associated with the liminoid and liminal, expressed as transformed agency (Turner 1974:87-89). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014 [1975]:136-137) theorises the “flow experience” as an elaboration on the creativity and potential for transformation that evolves from the experience of play:

⁴ Turner’s theorisation of the liminoid is also widely explored in its association with leisure as it pertains to contemporary culture; however, due to the focus of this study, such interpretations are not explored.

Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. [...]. It is the state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future.

The flow experience underscores the fluidity of liminoid understandings of the post-African woman, and highlights the need to display their artworks in alternative spaces of curatorial ordering, to allow the self to be enacted, performed, altered and reinvented. The flow experience could similarly be employed to examine the facets of the form of liminal curating I propose. Foucault (1986:27) concludes his thoughts on heterotopia by referring to the boat as “heterotopia *par excellence*”.⁵ The transitory and temporality of the curatorial gesture, coupled with the liminal, fluid and open-ended instances that the theorised strategy of display implies, resonates with Foucault’s (1986:27) heterotopian theorising of the boat:

[T]he boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens [...].

This “greatest reserve of the imagination”, of which the art museum is exemplary, sets up exhibitions as deferrals of the spatio-temporal arrangement of society, and operates as “a floating piece of place, that exists in itself” distinct from the society it aims to represent (Foucault 1986:27). Conversely, exhibition practice also evokes the real spaces of society, culture and politics through the subsequent display of artworks – or, as Foucault (1986:27) suggests, “precious treasures” – that personify remnants of real, lived experience. Foucault (1986:27) continues that these heterotopian boats, or alternatively, curated exhibition spaces, are integral to human existence:

⁵ The reference of the ship is fleshed out further in *Madness and civilization* (1989) wherein Foucault considers the imprisonment imposed by madness versus the notion of ‘reason’ and order. The “ship of fools”, Plato’s image of an ungoverned vessel populated with deranged inhabitants oblivious of their lack of direction and their impending fate, is employed by Foucault (1989:11, original emphasis) to expand on the heterotopian qualities which render the boat a “half-real, half-imaginary” site which positions the “madman” liminally, “*confined* within the city *gates*” on the threshold, where “he is kept at the point of passage”. The ship as a site does not merely expose the limits of society, but also its ideological beliefs are considered as a space of equivocation and doubt on the threshold of civilisation.

In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.

From this viewpoint, a curatorial strategy premised liminally as a space of ambivalence and thresholds, whereby new possibilities could be reimagined beyond the confines of the exhibition itself, may extend, provoke, instigate and imagine new possibilities for the post-African woman's identity.

5.1.4 *Experimental performance: a heterotopian laboratory of curation*

The continuous flow of the recasting of the self into multiple, interstitial roles coupled with transgressive border-crossing, disrupts hegemonic systems. It is the chaos entangled in these activities that engenders what Turner (1974:75) refers to as an "anti-structure". It is this anti-structure that gives rise to alternative social ordering. Turner (1974:75) explains:

I meant by it not a structural reversal, a mirror-imaging of "profane" workaday socioeconomic structure, or a fantasy-rejection of structural "necessities", but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles [...].

The anti-structure prompts a new, unconventional social ordering, and serves both the project of the post-African subject's transformative becoming in her staging of counter-positions, and the theorised curatorial space's simultaneous rejection of and allusion to traditional exhibition platforms. As such, the anti-structure promotes an unfixed and fluid conception of the view I present of the post-African princess. In the following sections, I consider anti-structure as a curatorial function, and the possibilities this may generate for a liminal reading of post-African female identity.

As suggested previously, the theorised curatorial space is considered as heterotopian, characterised by a belief in the potential of the curated project to reimagine interstitial discourse and to provoke, creatively, debate premised on local feminist concerns. The latter is made possible through the mediation offered by the curator in her/his capacity of curator-as-artist. In line with Turner's metaphor of

science, I liken the curatorial space to the heterotopian laboratory space wherein the curator-as-artist operates in a similar way to the scientist.

Turner (1974:65) extends his notions of play and liminality to experimental science, where liminoid rituals take place in “neutral spaces” or “privileged areas (laboratories or studies) set aside from the mainstream of productive events.” These liminoid settings, like Foucault’s metaphor of the boat, are geared for experimentation. Within these contexts, the curator is likened to an “innovator” – a ‘scientist’ with the courage to create with artworks (Turner 1974:75). The laboratory space, intrinsically linked with the creation of new modes of ordering or sites of resistance and transgression, allows for heterogeneity, partiality, fluidity and deferral as interstices of meaning that shape new modes of ordering (Hetherington 1997:36) (cf. section 4.3).

The heterotopia of the laboratory, like the curatorial space, is arranged through the notion “that action is translated through its ordering as a space” (Hetherington 1997:36). Hetherington (1997:36) illustrates this process of translation and ordering through exertion by means of the microbe:

The microbe gives meaning to the laboratory through its translating effects just as the laboratory space [read curatorial space] gives meaning to the microbe [read post-African female identity]. The meanings of this space are not created in the minds of scientists [read curators] and then communicated to others through the process of learning [read exhibition display], but through the processes of ordering that take place in them.

Similarly, the transformation yielded by the post-African subject, as expressed in the selected artworks for *The princess in the veld*, inscribes the curatorial space through its systems of (anti)ordering. As such, the proposed curated space, like the laboratory, operates as a site of resistance and transgression, and it is these very processes that manifest as forms of ordering, infused with ambivalence (Hetherington 1997:35).

This alternative curatorial spatial organisation, the ‘laboratory of the curatorial space’, functions heterotopically in its fleeting moments of translation, and in its tentativeness. Simultaneously, this space premises itself on the utopian desire of the curator to continually discover, innovate and reproduce new instances of discourse, and on the structure, method and order that underscore exhibition practice (Mastai

2007:176). In this way, the laboratory or “workshop” may be considered a space for experimentation and creativity that informs the identity of the participant (Pollock 2007b:29). Here, the curator functions as “the player, the investigator, the experimentalist” that deals with produced goods (artworks) yet also produces goods (exhibitions). These products reach beyond the significance of their objecthood, and instead express meaning and thought (Pollock 2007b:29).

Through this consideration of the laboratory and the scientist, the liminal approach to curating I employ in *The princess in the veld* is revealed as an ongoing engagement with post-African women and discourse. This approach rests upon the scientist’s (or curator’s) continual action of experimentation, whereby exhibition practice becomes “both performativity and performance art” (Pollock 2007b:30). As rationalised by Pollock (2007b:24-25), the curator as a catalyst for alterity ascribes here to Judith Mastai’s demand for curatorial praxis to be “permeated by the questions”, to think outside the “demonizing museological frame”, and to re-imagine both past and present artistic contributions as “dynamic elements of living cultures” – a desire crucial for post-African female identity rooted in lived experience.

5.2 Lights, camera, action: curatorial methodology and praxis for *The princess in the veld*

Would she ever recover the wildly creative spaces inside herself after years of learning silence, obedience? It is not an easy legacy to undo (hooks 1989:162).

The princess in the veld showcases a selection of artworks produced by local female artists that express the figure of the post-African princess as an embodied protagonist who forges her agency through the deliberate encroachment of restrictive patriarchal and colonial boundaries. Within the context of the exhibition, the princess takes up temporary ‘residence’ in the fluidity of the liminal, heterotopic space revealed amidst ideologically inscribed binary constructs.

Overall, the exhibition is predicated on the notion that an investigation of women’s concerns remains fundamental both to the construction of new historical narratives, and to the questioning of existing narratives in South Africa. Despite our democratically sound constitution, the amelioration of the lives of women remains

unrealised and requires continued negotiation. Gqola (2007:114) suggests that while South Africa's Constitution "affirms women's dignity and rights to full humanity [...] silences and gaps" within local gender discourse remain a stumbling block towards the true realisation of such ideals. It is the lack of interrogation of these issues in our society that *The princess in the veld* wishes to highlight. Such issues are often veiled by the "patriarchal 'cult of femininity'" (delimiting, staid views of femininity) that oppress local women (Gqola 2007:116-117); and many women (52 percent) are "under siege" within the local context. Gqola (2007:120) explains:

We know that today women do not feel safe in the streets and homes of South Africa, that women's bodies are seen as accessible for consumption – touching, raping, kidnapping, commenting on, grabbing, twisting, beating, burning, maiming – and control, that women are denied the very freedom that 'empowerment' suggests, the very freedom the Constitution protects.

The palpable reality that constitutes women's lives in South Africa reiterates the need for dialogue and a profound engagement with feminist concerns – "a comprehensive contestation of representation and voice *across class*", as demanded by Gqola (2007:116, original emphasis). With this in mind, *The princess in the veld*, attempts to spearhead the need for an obligatory engagement with South African women's concerns through stimulating ongoing 'women's empowerment' discourse" (Gqola 2007:116).

The title of the curated exhibition *The princess in the veld* was conceived to address the various issues fronted by this study. Firstly, conventional and docile notions of local women do not apply to the performative, willful post-African princess and her transgressive agency – an aspect that is demonstrated through the exhibition's selected artworks. As such, the exhibition showcases women artists as performative protagonists – willful princesses – temporarily poised on the threshold of the current narrative playing out in society. The liminal curatorial approach underscores the notion that complete amelioration of women's lives remains out of reach, and accentuates the post-African woman's deliberate transgressive and subversive nature as she oscillates between the binary oppositions imposed upon her.

As a significant part of the exhibition title, the 'veld' serves as a metaphor for the ideological inscribing of the South African landscape. The veld also emphasises the

notion of an appropriate theorised, counter-space for a form of curation that is designed to empower local post-African women through its transformative potential (cf. section 1.1.6). The veld – an ‘other’, ‘elsewhere’, ‘paradoxical’ and ‘unsettling’ curatorial space – functions as a site of alternate ordering, a heterotopia whereby threshold-positions could be taken up, and the individual post-African woman – or princess – could be supported in her expressed transformative, willful and liminal identity. The heterotopia of the veld also allows for the simultaneous allusion to and assertion of African or Western narratives of history, feminism and identity, and to the binaries yielded within this geographical delineation.

The title also holds an intrinsic reference to traditional fairy tales – novels of transformation (cf. section 1.1.7). Although the post-African woman’s ‘coming of age’ is still temporarily premised on the threshold, these fables serve to highlight this status of liminality, and they remain mutable to assert womanhood with agency, transgression and performativity. As such, in contrast to traditional fairy tale plots where the protagonist ultimately leaves the in-between space, the post-African princess willfully inhabits the veld, warding off “re-aggregation” into the hegemonic systems offered by society, and unsettling homogeneous systems by (anti)structuring new, alternative spaces of social ordering that remain in flux (Van Gennep 1960:110).

5.2.1 Staging heterotopia: video as a curated space

The medium of video fosters the ability for *The princess in the veld* to inhabit a fluid, interstitial space that spans conventional exhibition practices, and real and imagined lived experience (cf. sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.4). This strategy allows for fluctuating instances of local female identity that are validated by the selected artworks. Conventional exhibitions, especially within traditional galleries and museums, are frequently exclusive in their dissemination of knowledge and consequent lack of opportunities offering understanding and debate, as these highly-contested spaces resonate with only a restricted viewership. Although this is an international tendency, in South Africa there is a crucial need and necessity for significant discourse around the experiences of women in society, and this could be developed through alternative ways of viewing artworks. Despite the claims of mainstream curators that their exhibitions might provoke dialogue around pertinent issues, the space of the white

cube remains beyond the reach of both the potential South African viewership, as well as many exhibiting artists.

It would be quixotic of me to believe that a single exhibition could produce any tangible impact on the lives of women in South Africa; and that the series of videos I offer as a replacement for the temporal exhibition format will necessarily reach a far greater audience. However, I maintain that the longevity offered by my exhibition format could extend *The princess in the veld*'s impact beyond the walls of the museum or gallery space, as well as establishing a potential point of departure for future research projects centred on the concerns of South African women.⁶

The ability of video as a medium to generate a fluid sensation of movement across physical geographies produces the kind of liminal curatorial space I require (cf. section 2.4). This medium allows the 'authentic' creation of real and imagined environments that blurs the boundaries between them (Chung 2012:88). The blurring of boundaries allows the juxtaposition of several spaces, narratives, histories and experiences, in themselves irreconcilable, in a "single real place" (Foucault 1986:25). The curated space primed in each video visualises the conventions of traditional museum practice, juxtaposed by footage of real life. The latter also comprises of the side-by-side placement of footage of two disparate, yet unmistakably South African landscapes as a reference to the veld. I maintain that this strategy allows the selected artworks to be displayed, temporarily, on the threshold of these spaces – both curatorially and thematically.⁷

⁶ Part of my insistence on theorising an alternative curatorial space staged as a series of videos, as opposed to the space offered by traditional exhibition spaces, was also prompted by several external factors that sadly stifles the progress of the local art market. Firstly, the cost involved in curating an exhibition of this magnitude is exorbitant; while generous funding was obtained from the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this study, it still does not nearly cover the costs that *The Princess in the veld*, staged as a temporal exhibition, requires. This ties in with another local concern: the lack of funding that inhibits the development of curatorship and art in South Africa. The lack of resources has an impact on public museums in particular – the Johannesburg Art Gallery's basement flooded and failure to repair the structural problems of the building resulted in a great deal of damage to seminal artworks in the collection. Local museums are battling to preserve their current art collections due to the vast lack of government funding, let alone invest in new acquisitions – a task that should be at the forefront of the local museum agenda, given the continuous emphasis on redressing the racial imbalance prevalent in current public art collections. As such, in my attempt to approach the Johannesburg Art Gallery to host *The princess in the veld*, the curator, Antoinette Murdoch, made it abundantly clear that no funding for exhibitions are available and, although not stated explicitly, broached the subject of a woman-only show with much trepidation. This scepticism around shows of this nature was similarly echoed by curator Paul Bayliss' skirting around the issue when I approached him for assistance to host the show at the Absa Gallery in Johannesburg – an aspect that foregrounds the apprehension of art practitioners, institutions and society, to engage with (local) feminist concerns.

⁷ It is important to note that these curated videos do not attempt to make an artwork of its own through the editing of the selected artworks. Great care has been taken to adhere to traditional exhibition conventions such as labelling the artworks used as well as distinguishing my own footage from the selected artworks. The excerpts should be understood as placing emphasis on particular aspects of the

The princess in the veld presents four gendered spaces, each informed by a fairy tale (cf. section 1.1 and 5.2.3). The first video, *Once upon a time to happily ever after*, considers the interstitial space that opens between the brutal narratives of South Africa's historical past and the farcical beckoning of a utopian, rainbow future. The violent ruptures that appear between the spaces of privacy and the public space of society is considered in *From cinder to the castle*. The third video, *Of sleeping beauties and thorny pricks*, explores the harrowing in-between spaces revealed between voyeurism, objectification and stereotypical representations of women and the performance of the self through the body as a site of resistance. *A terrible beauty and the beauty of terror*, the final video, explores the liminal intervals unveiled between local society's staid notions of idealised female beauty, and the misogynist rendition of women as monstrous, abject and vile when deviating from the cult of femininity. The contrasting footage of these gendered spaces yields the interstitial crevices of society whereby possible counter-sites can be formed that do not simply accept or reject the normative centre (Meskimmon 2007:324).

The medium of video diffuses the boundaries between real and fictional landscapes, and constructs counter-hegemonic spaces that are fictional spaces, "chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic" (Appadurai 1996:35). The medium of video also offers the potential to alter space, to express the harsh realities of the local landscape, and to stage post-African women's unique experiences and histories. The interstitial and temporary 'staging' of these narratives reveals their immersion and embeddedness in complex social and political systems – an "enworlded sexed subjectivity" – that are simultaneously rejected and accepted (Meskimmon 2007:331).

The gendered spaces conveyed by the videos explore local, post-African women artists' views of the self to demonstrate transformative, liminal accounts of local women's identities through a series of selected artworks.⁸ The fluid space of the video enables post-African female identity to be displayed in a state of flux, which reiterates the notion of becoming and liminality, while simultaneously referencing and contesting utopian desires of equality and emancipation, and the real sites these aim to transgress.

artworks that resonate with the thematic premise of the video to espouse new interpretations and readings of the work within this particular frame.

⁸ It is not my intention to categorise artists, their work or their identity through labelling. The proposed themes and the subsequent placement of artworks within the curatorial layout of the exhibition, are representative of an allusion between the artist, artwork, themes and identity that are relevant to local post-African women within the framework of my curatorial investigation.

5.2.2 Casting post-African female protagonists

The line-up of artworks is selected based on their allusion to the themes extrapolated from a selection of four fairy tales of both local and European origin. These tales exemplify transformation as a rite of passage narrative whereby the protagonist, usually a “bourgeois male”, transforms from childhood to adulthood through showcasing his becoming as an assertion of aggression and competitiveness (Endicott 1992:42). These tales typically contrast women’s transition to womanhood, often premised on the physical onset of puberty marked by menstruation – a biologically determined process that is consummated by a girl’s coming-of-age through her acquisition of a man “who [has] passed the test of manhood to take care of them” (Endicott 1992:42).

Fairy tale narratives have received much criticism as a white male-dominated genre that casts women only as the male’s accompaniment. However, Bonnie Hoover Braendlin (1983:76-77) argues that the formal and thematic structure of these tales, when explored from a female perspective, extend much irony and a “retrospective point of view”. Such reflection considers the complex nature of a woman’s quest for identity – an entanglement that plays out between the individual and her embroilment within an environment or spatial structure.

The plot of a typical novel of formation (cf. section 1.1.7) correlates closely with Van Genep’s triadic structure (cf. section 1.1.9), and it is within the liminal phase, positioned between separation and re-aggregation, that the study positions its willful post-African princess. In traditional fairy tales, this represents the mid-point where the female protagonist produces her will to contest oppressive circumstances imposed by the environment she finds herself in (Braendlin 1983:77). Viewed from this perspective, fairy tales could offer a reading that expresses new and self-defined understandings of women’s identities.

In her consideration of female representation within the narrative confines of film and fiction, Teresa De Lauretis (1987:26) speaks of a feminist strategy – “a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses.”⁹ De

⁹ De Lauretis (1987:26) explains the expression “space-off”, borrowed from film theory, as “the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible.” This space exists parallel to the represented space of the frame marked by its absence in the frame and includes “not only the camera (the point of articulation and perspective from which the image is constructed) but also the spectator (the point where the image is received, re-constructed, and re-produced in/as subjectivity)” (De Lauretis

Lauretis's elsewhere-space corresponds with Foucault's notion of heterotopia of crisis (cf. section 3.1).

These moments of crisis, or rites of passage as foregrounded by the fairy tale, should take place in spaces removed from home or society, and serve to highlight the position of the woman in relation to society. These spaces, inscribed both discursively and socially, exist simultaneously and in contradiction in a state of flux (De Lauretis 1987:26). It is this traction – the opposition, plurality and heteronomy – between various histories, narratives and discourses that the theorised counter curatorial space proposes. A space such as this could allow a re-construction of the self within the margins, “between the lines” or “against the grain” (De Lauretis 1987:26).

These elsewhere or heterotopian spaces in fairy tales are generally clearly delineated as forbidden, and exclusive of a female protagonist's entrance. However, it is the allure of the transgression of borders that prompts the desire of the willful princess to engender a sense of self, distinct from hegemonic practices – an aspect fronted by all four of the selected fairy tales. The ludic, performative and deliberate potential evident in De Lauretis's (1987:26) theorisation informs the post-African princess espoused by *The princess in the veld*:

[T]he tension of a twofold pull in contrary directions – the critical negativity of its theory, and the affirmative positivity of its politics – is both the historical condition of existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility. The subject of feminism is en-gendered there. That is to say, elsewhere.

It is this space of elsewhere that contests and resists hegemonic spaces of power, and enables the post-African woman's occupation of sites of interruption to open “discussion, debate [...] and mutual transformation” (Pollock 2007b:29). It is the interruptions that pierce the fabric of South African society that are explored thematically through the selected artworks, and discussed in the following section.

1987:26). De Lauretis' (1987:26) notion of “space-off” clarifies her positioning of women as liminal subject positions and promotes an alternative space – “the elsewhere” – where the self is negotiated instead.

5.2.3 The princess in the veld: *post-African themes of liminality*

The themes premised by *The princess in the veld* are assimilated from four fairy tales¹⁰, and explored through the artworks shown within each of the four video exhibitions.¹¹ What follows is a brief outline of the themes and their accompanying fairy tales.

The woman and the mighty bird, by AC Jordan (1973:241-248), foregrounds the domination of women within society, metaphorically personified in this Xhosa tale by the “mighty bird”, that is overtly described as powerful and male. As in other colonially and patriarchally inscribed spheres, the mechanisms of societal control are conveyed here through the close governance and containment of their women. From my curatorial perspective, the focus of the first video, *Once upon a time to happily ever after*, considers post-African female identity as having the ability to stride across the trauma, violence and dislocation that emanate from incisions made into the South African landscape of the past.

Jordan’s (1973:241) tale portrays these “beautiful and young” women “talking in low tones”, who “never voiced [their] own opinion[s]”. This highlights the voicelessness of women, and their displacement and exclusion from the historical narratives of the past. From this can be extrapolated both the absence of post-African women from the art historical canon, and the explicit barring of entry to prohibited public spaces, as also demarcated by apartheid ideologies. The latter is evident in one of the selected artworks for this motif, in which the beckoning of ‘boundless horizons’ prompts Dineo Seshee Bopape to transgress boundaries in search of spaces elsewhere.

Bopape’s emphasis on excess, history and memory is juxtaposed by her experimental approach to art making, and her unconventional choice of materials and found objects “collide, making them perform a multitude of (temporal) possibilities out in the open” (Ngcobo 2010:31). *The eclipse will not be visible to the naked eye* (2010) (Figure 72) is a site-specific installation comprising disparate found objects (such as mirrors, ribbons, notes and beads), video projections, sculptural

¹⁰ The selected narratives are not included in this thesis as an appendix. Instead, these are transcribed and included in each of the four catalogues due to their primary inscription of the practical component of this study.

¹¹ The curatorial statement for the exhibition and the thematic essays crafted for each motif are further expanded on in the corresponding catalogues, which include discussions on the curatorial selection of artworks and their resonances in relation to the theme associated with each specific fairy tale.



Figure 72: Dineo Seshee Bopape, *the eclipse will not be visible to the naked eye alter* (2010). Site-specific wall collage, 240 x 428 x 26 cm. (Dineo Seshee Bopape. *The eclipse will not be visible to the naked eye* 2010:18-19).

elements, pot plants, linoleum and digital prints – a “video garden” as Bopape (in Dineo Seshee Bopape. *The eclipse will not be visible to the naked eye* 2010:[sp]) states and this specific work delineates her practice.

Bopape’s gathering of sorts – which incorporates both a cacophony of sound, and a visual assault due to dissimilar arrangements – disrupts the spatio-temporal, shifting the viewer into a “rhythmic trance as the mind is transported to distant illusionary worlds” (Dineo Seshee Bopape. *The eclipse will not be visible to the naked eye* 2010:[sp]).

The violence inflicted on local women, and their violation through patriarchal and colonial silencing, remain incised into local female consciousness, memory and remembrance. This harsh reality is sharply contrasted by figments of imagination fed by promises of a utopia and the consummation of women’s empowerment – propaganda carefully sustained by South Africa’s ‘happily ever after’ rainbow-politics. It is the precarious negotiation between a brutally inscribed past and the romantic hopes ‘offered’ by the future that the post-African woman aims to straddle, as she willfully negotiates the thresholds of forever-changing (current) dispensations.

From cinder to the castle, the second video exhibition, is founded on the European tale of *Cinderella* by the Brothers Grimm (2011 [1884]:81-86). Here the boundaries imposed on women are exposed through the post-African princess’s negotiation of her identity between private and public spaces. The fairy tale foregrounds aspects

relating to the domestic space where wives are ‘kept’ in the servitude of their husbands as the “kitchen-wench”, juxtaposed with aspects of class by the “fair of face” step-sisters and “dusty and dirty” Cinderella, who is forbidden to wear “pretty clothes” (Grimm & Grimm 2011 [1884]:81-81). The latter is an important point when considering renditions of local black women as domestic workers, whose ‘uniform’ clothing indicates their status as servants. The abusive and restrictive relegation of women to the confines of the home also translates through to South Africa’s excessive statistics of domestic violence – another aspect of society that gradually but constantly slices away female identity.

As well as traversing private, closed-off spaces of incarceration, similar assaults of violence disquiet public spaces – the city, workplace and mass media. These threatening battlefields that women enter daily – places of male domination – restrict female freedom through aspects of inequality regarding financial compensation, working hours, the relentless negotiation between family and career, and the hostile realm of the still-patriarchal corporations. These complex paradoxes as contested by the post-African woman artist are showcased here in the selected artworks.

By playing with the notion of visibility and invisibility, controlled locally by means of the uniform as a marker of race and status, Mary Sibande contests this specific tactic of oppression. As an alternative, the artist expresses female identity in her work through the subversive act of unstitching that which is intended to remain invisible, while making visible her subject’s larger-than-life reclamation of space. Descended from generations of female domestic workers, Sibande has constructed her alter ego, Sophie.

Sibande offers a fantastical re-imagining of the self – or Sophie – through her sartorial enhancement of the standard maid’s uniform. The royal blue sleeves of elaborate folds, the multi-layered taffeta and cotton skirt, and the delicacy of the *broderie anglaise*¹² added to the collar, headscarf and apron are reminiscent not only of the excessive impracticality of the Victorian gown, but also of the ballgown ultimately granted to Cinderella.

Sibande’s mnemonic deployment of Victorian signifiers by objects such as the umbrella in *I’m a lady* (2009) (Figure 73), distinctly alludes to “[t]he wife’s labor of

¹² *Broderie anglaise* originated in France and refers to the delicate needlework technique featuring embroidery, cutwork and needle lace that adorned dresses during the 19th century, particularly in England.



Figure 73: Mary Sibande, *I'm a lady* (2009). Digital print on cotton rag matte paper, edition of 10, 90 x 60 cm. (Goniwe 2013:22).

leisure and the servant's labor of invisibility served to disavow and conceal within the middle-class formation the economic value of women's work." (McClintock 1995:164). It is through Sibande's re-appropriation of such signifiers that her identity becomes constructed, extreme in both its denouement of the self through referencing colonialist and apartheid restrictions, and in her re-imagined, larger-than-life fantastic identity.

The artworks shown in third video exhibition, *Of sleeping beauties and thorny 'pricks'*¹³, investigate the bestriding of the post-African female self in her defiance of the parochial views of women seen in the European tale, *Sleeping beauty (Briar Rose)* by the Brothers Grimm (2011 [1884]:178-180). Here women are presented as passive and docile objects, signified by the curse of a “deep sleep of a hundred years” placed on Briar Rose (Grimm & Grimm 2011 [1884]:178). The death implicit in the voyeuristic scrutiny of women, and the passivity conferred through the colonially-inscribed male gaze, is contrasted in this exhibition by overt female acts of subversion, jesting, and performance, as they masquerade as larger-than-life *prima donnas* or archetypal *femme fatales* to pierce and devour patriarchal imaginations. This act of returning or challenging the gaze – an “oppositional” or “critical gaze” as hooks (1992:115-116) names it – mobilises post-African female identity as these princesses deliberately refashion their bodies as an artillery of writhing, bulging “hedge[s] of thorns”, to resist objectification and to render a local female identity equipped with agency and intent (Grimm & Grimm 2011 [1884]:179).¹⁴

In considering the realm of contemporary consumerism and excess, Goodman's collocated artistic practice negotiates a vital sense of self by drawing on the binaries evident within *The Sleeping Beauty (Briar Rose)* fairy tale. On one hand, she reveals the narcissistic female compulsion to consume products that allege to boost an unattainable sense of beauty; while on the other, she transforms these very attributes of the feminine to subvert voyeurism and the male gaze. Goodman's creative arsenal includes materials that exude women's desire to conform to the meek conventions of femininity: *faux* eyelashes to enhance doe-like eyes, fake nails to present a well-manicured disposition, beads and sequins to bedazzle with feminine mystique, and make-up to pin on eternal youth. However, it is through Goodman's critical re-appropriation of these goods of commerce that her practice evokes post-African female identity as a willful sense of self, able to resist the consumer pressures around the conventional notions of feminine beauty that are constantly drilled into the female psyche, and which ultimately lead to the demise of womanhood.

¹³ The word 'prick' is employed with all its ambiguity implied – firstly, as a denotation of women who willfully 'kick against the pricks' in their retaliation against male domination; and, secondly, its vulgar employment as a slang reference to a man's penis or, the colloquial use when referring to a patronising and contemptible male.

¹⁴ hooks (1992:115-116) suggests that the “oppositional gaze” undermines monolithic and colonial ideologies, where the right to gaze was denied to the other. The interrogating gaze is viewed by hooks (1992:115-116) as a site of resistance for colonised subjects, and similarly invokes the “critical gaze” as “one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional”.

Goodman's nail sculpture, *Black beauty* (2014) (Figure 74), is comprised of an arrangement of false nails – a larger-than-life *prima donna* accessory – that covers fashion shoulder pads in abstract yet manicured, pattern-like formations. Shoulder pads were an iconic feature of the female 'power-dressing' trend during the 1980s, intended to physically broadening the shoulders of the female silhouette, and here, they are used in a conceptually similar way to create a form of power dressing of the self. This serves as an ironic take on a form of embellishment which simultaneously contests the conventional assumptions about female beauty that women so often follow blindly, while fabricating the illusion of grandeur and status these 'tools of the trade' confer upon female identity. Goodman's repetitive use of nail-formations draws associations with obsession and consumption, and conflates the distinction between adornment and the female body.



Figure 74: Frances Goodman, *Black beauty* (2014). Acrylic nails, glue, resin and shoulder pads, 55 x 46 cm. Image courtesy of Frances Goodman.

A terrible beauty and the beauty of terror concludes the exhibition's series of videos, and here the theme is generated by the Xhosa tale *The maidens of Bhakhuba* by Jordan (1973:57-98). The "customary game of *ukwnzisa*, whereby each young man pointed out the girl he considered the prettiest of all" (Jordan 1973:59), signifies the prevailing ideals of traditional female beauty (from the male perspective) which measure her appropriateness as a woman. Femininity as sublimity, passivity and etiquette is, however, greatly at odds with the post-African woman's inability to comply with these clearly advertised conventions. As such, women's noncompliance is often met with misogynistic actions and castigation. This may be seen through a patriarchal contempt and prejudice, extending to practices of curative rape to beat women into conforming to acceptable feminine traits. The princess in this part of the exhibition oscillates amidst the crevices yielded between these binaries – aspects that remain prevalent in South African society.

Concerned with the terror that lurks beneath, Siopis extrapolates – in visceral, fleshy layers of caked pink oil paint – that which remains unspoken. The series of *Pinky pinky* works (2002 – 2004) "attain a horrifying fleshiness, as if [...] the viscosity of paint was literally transmutating into a creature from popular South African folklore" (Baker 2009:108). Pinky, as shown in the mixed media painting *Who is pinky?* (2002) (Figure 75), is a local urban legend of inconclusive variants: the elusive Pinky Pinky is generally understood as a mythical creature of indeterminate gender that mysteriously inhabits girls' school bathrooms. In terms of this belief, it usually identifies itself through an alluring song, followed by a demand for its target's pink accoutrements, and is particularly interested in pink panties. Siopis (in Oliver 2014:139) explains that this creature, much like the slimy one in *The maidens of Bhakubha*, beset imaginations – "it's a fiction, but you can project onto that myth, or even enact through it, all sorts of fantasies."

The pink palette used by Siopis throughout this series extends beyond racialised connotations, and instead alerts to a strong feminist intent. Flesh pinks flow into shades of candy, blush, rose, fuchsia and bubblegum, colours which denote strong feminine undertones suggesting vulnerability and girlishness. This resonates with a variant of the myth, where the creature is focused on harassing pubescent girls and thieving their pink panties. Siopis' process of constructing and deconstructing the surface, metaphorically piercing the conventional skin of femininity, serves to disrupt the sexualised female body, and give rise to a grotesque self, pregnant with fears and anxiety.

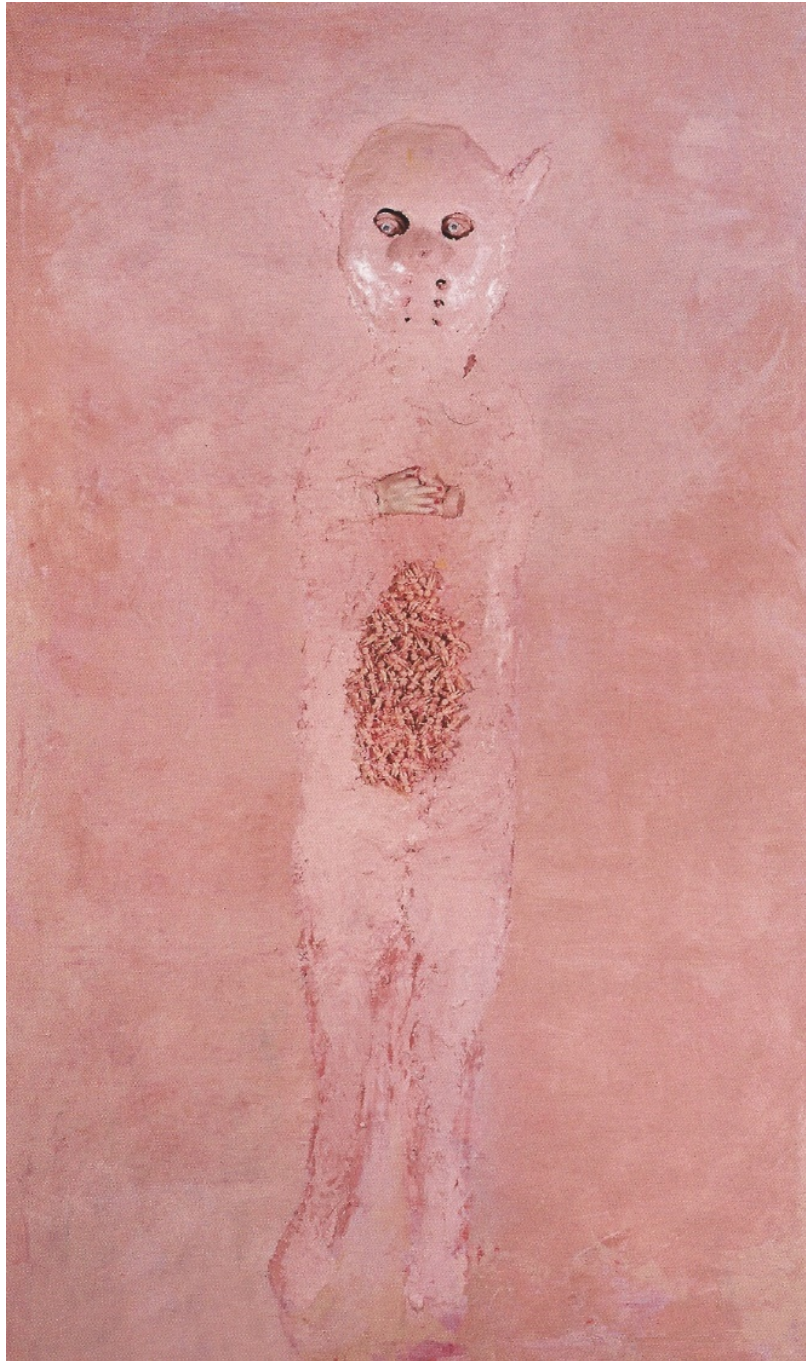


Figure 75: Penny Siopis, *Who is pinky pinky?* (2002). Oil and found objects on canvas, 152 x 91 cm. (Olivier 2014:147).

This constant awareness of apprehension, terror and angst becomes embedded within the female self, confirming Gqola's (2007:121) understanding, that *women* should adjust *their* behaviour to survive in a society driven by violent masculinities, where they are mostly at the receiving end of male anger. As grotesque anxieties infiltrate the exposed pristine façade of femininity, a sense of dread both inhabits the

female psyche and shapes sexual identity. This becomes a cyclical process which – through the constant issuing of public safety warnings to women by police, parents and spouses – merely serves both to reinforce clichéd notions of women’s vulnerability, and to strengthen and reaffirm conventional beliefs regarding the feminine. This fraught negotiation of the self begins to relegate post-African female identity to the space in-between the sublime and the abject, in an erratic occupation of simultaneous spaces of beauty and terror.

This chapter explored the methodology and practice of my curatorial strategy for *The princess in the veld*, to theorise a counter-site that could allow liminal readings of local post-African women’s identities. I considered the confines of conventional museum and gallery practice, and explored alternative spaces of ordering through both the politics of play, and the metaphor of the heterotopian laboratory. I also laid out the possibilities that the medium of video holds for my curatorial project, and indicated my purpose in using fairy tales to develop the video exhibition themes, which is expanded on in the four exhibition catalogues. The chapter concluded with a brief introduction to the four video exhibitions and their themes.

CHAPTER SIX

CLOSING THOUGHTS ON AN 'UNDONE' PRINCESS STORY

in the beginning is seeing
seeing for ages
filling the head with ash
no air
no tendril
now to seeing speaking is added
and the eye plunges into the wounds of anger
seizing the surge of language by its soft bare skull
hear oh hear
the voices all the voices of the land
all baptised in syllables of blood and belonging
this country belongs to the voices of those who live in it
this landscape lies at the feet at last
of the stories of saffron and amber
angel hair and barbs
dew and hay and hurt
(Krog 2000:95-96).

Redress remains an urgent task that should echo the “stories of saffron and amber, angel hair and barbs, dew and hay and hurt” of women that were previously disconnected from the narrative of local art history (Krog 2000:96). As such, the closing thoughts outlined in this chapter remain tentative, unsettled and indefinite – rather a form of *un-doing* the narrative scripting of contemporary South Africa.

To draw ‘final conclusions’ in relation to the aims explored in the context of this thesis refutes the threads of liminality woven throughout my research. On one hand (as would be expected), this chapter provides closing thoughts in response to the aims and objectives of my research. Yet on the other, we see evidence that post-African female identity is a prevailing process of becoming and ongoing negotiation, which promotes the kind of slippery and fluid interstices generated due to the dominant binary oppositions still striving to contain women.

Similarly, my aim to institute a South African feminist trajectory remains an unending project. This requires continued revision and a constant search for the polyphony of voices able to address the gaping holes of absence, which expose an inability – or even reluctance – to account for *all* previously excluded women artists, and their subsequent contemporary repositioning, re-organisation and repossession. Such a

project extends far beyond the parameters of this study, but I hope that the research produced here serves to highlight the need for continuous investigation.

What follows is intended as an open-ended ‘closing’ of ideas positioned, liminally, amidst the larger local and global art historical canon and identity politics. The word ‘closing’ is used deliberately (even willfully) despite the ambiguities, tentativeness and paradoxes I propose. My quest is to raid the local curatorial archive with the aim of highlighting the category, women. So far, I have found here an incomplete history which presented itself tangentially as a meagre collection of disparate local curatorial instances, precariously balanced on the margins alongside the reigning racial politics. This foregrounds the exigency for the theorising of an alternative, feminist curatorial methodology.

A critical interrogation of Morineau’s exhibition in Chapter Two revealed her overall curatorial stance to be almost ‘counter-feminist’ in nature, due to the exhibition’s exclusionary output and her inability to account for the complexities inherent in South African feminist practice. Despite the limits imposed by the museum collection she worked with, Morineau did not make any apparent provisions to increase the number of artwork produced by non-Western women. This casts a shadow on her stated desire to update the history of women.

Unfortunately, this curator’s negligent use of the appellation, women, to indicate a universal term excludes the differences of non-Western women. Morineau’s prioritising of artists and themes rooted only in a tradition of Western feminism does not allow for any interpretation of the lived experiences of women that fall outside the parameters of the West. In my opinion, this results in an exhibition that ironically reinforces exclusion. Such a limited exhibition scope falls short of accounting for artwork produced by African (and other non-Western) women and, particularly in the context of this study, local women enmeshed in the hybrid, fluid *milieu* of the South African landscape – its politics, multiculturalism and history.

My interrogation of *elles@centrepompidou*’s conventional notions of curating and display is extended further through a revisionist reading of other key local and global exhibitions which reference women’s identities.

In Chapter Three, I explore women’s art production during the apartheid era from the 1980s up to the advent of democracy. I highlight the valuable contributions of women curators, artists and writers who assisted in both opening the debate around women

in South Africa, and promoting specific works by local women artists that instigated a local feminist trajectory. I reflect on both the difficulties imposed by the local multicultural dispensation, and on the constraining factors of apartheid politics that made an inclusive, feminist practice almost impossible.

Aspects such as Western-focused debates around the categories of fine art and craft, the exclusion of black women artists from mainstream galleries and museums, and the significant gaps in information around them and their work, have all served to complicate curatorial projects and publications centred on local women. Despite these limitations, numerous projects during this period succeeded in highlighting some pertinent feminist issues that began to shape local female identity.

I continue the historical investigation in Chapter Four by exploring certain exhibitions that appeared during the post-apartheid period by considering the impact that apartheid policies had on the local, contemporary art market, which included creating vast imbalances. This may be seen not only in the lack of representation of artwork by black women in local museum collections and exhibitions, but also in the shortage of black women curators, artists and art theorists. I indicate the slow pace of redress that afflicts much local curatorship, but at the same time, contributes to the discourse around women in South Africa.

The critical analysis of the exhibitions discussed in Chapters Three and Four informs my theorisation of the exhibition model for *The princess in the veld*. The curatorial strategy I offer aims for pertinence in its ability to account for liminal expressions of local female selves, through suggesting themes appropriate to post-African women's concerns. The relevance of my curatorial stance also applies to its establishment of a heterotopian curatorial space that offers alternative readings of South African female identity. The proposed model is intended to simultaneously allude to and reject Western feminist narratives, to avoid the implicit othering of artwork produced by non-Western women.

To address the local multicultural dispensation, I propose a post-African female identity as liminal – an aspect I trace through a revisionist re-reading of key exhibitions that showcased female identity, while exploring, synchronously, Van Gennep and Turner's theorisation of liminality. The institution of a local alternative feminist trajectory (traced from the 1980s to the present) would traverse the becoming of post-African female identity, the so-called rite of passage of the princess. This commences with women artists' exclusion from various ideologically-

inscribed local and global contexts, and their subsequent contestation of the racial and gender borders cast around them.

In Chapter Five, I argue that it is the post-African woman's positioning in-between prevailing socially, culturally, and politically informed binaries that renders her identity liminal – a position currently embraced by her ludic and willful occupation of this intermediate space, which Turner (1974:58) describes as liminoid. It is here where the willful princess is now actively involved in the continuous shaping of her identity through her unrelenting contestation of delimitations. This aspect of dynamism is highlighted both by the selection of artworks comprising the curated exhibition, *The princess in the veld*, and by the demonstration of a feminist curatorial strategy.

My advancement of a feminist curatorial strategy able to expose local women's concerns through the works of contemporary South African women artists depends on a number of factors: the setting-up of an alternative, curatorial, spatial configuration able concurrently to allude to, and resist, the orthodox practices and narratives traditionally used to display female identity; the prioritising of post-African female identity as liminal; and the formulation of suitable, locally-inscribed themes that both foreground feminist concerns rooted in the embodiment of the South African landscape, while simultaneously reflecting and clouding Western feminist assertions.

For *The princess in the veld*, I propose an alternative site of curatorial ordering, drawing upon Foucault's (1986:24-25) theorisation of heterotopia: counter-sites that mirror and reject the very "space in which we live". Here, the disparate sites – the traditional white cube exhibition space juxtaposed against the South African landscape with its harsh realities and utopian politics – would seem "themselves incompatible". This subversion of order and structure entangled within the fabric of society posits the alternative, feminist-infused curatorial space claimed by this study as an elsewhere-space, where alternative practices of ordering or anti-structure become constant guidelines.

To emulate this counter-space, I use the medium of video to recreate an exhibition space that simultaneously visualises the conventions of traditional museum practices, and the real/virtual local spaces that women inhabit. This fluid space corresponds to Foucault's theorisation of heterotopia, set up to encourage the participation of post-African women artists in ways that enable them to engage with discourse, as well as to assert themselves as the theorised performative, willful

princesses who continually contest their identities through ongoing liminal negotiations against the persistent boundaries inflicted upon them. These binaries are exposed within the experimental heterotopian curated frame of the video. They manifest as potential, since the capacity to reimagine the post-African female self through more authentic experiences would allow for liminal female agency.

The theorised feminist curatorial praxis moreover places its emphasis on devising themes that are uniquely informed by local women's concerns, as opposed to a reiteration of Western-informed feminist topics. These themes are drawn from four fairy tales, each chosen due to their focus on the female protagonist's coming-of-age, their prevalence of stereotypical renditions of female characters, as well as their allusions to the challenges women face because of parochial views that "hold us hostage" (Gqola 2007:122).

In this chapter, I also explore the fairy tale narrative as related to Van Gennep's tripartite process of an individual's transition from childhood to adulthood. Here I argue that the protagonist's deliberate transgression of boundaries, and her subsequent crossover into forbidden spaces, exemplify the liminal stage. It is in the ungoverned expanse of the veld that the heterotopian curatorial stage is set, and where the post-African princesses willfully position themselves as liminal subjects, their newfound agencies purposely challenging the conventions and structures which govern their identities.

A last thought: during the research process – traversing a multitude of historical texts, catalogues and exhibitions – my awareness grew of the vast gaps caused by the apartheid regime's delimitation of black women artists – and specifically here within the South African art arena. This recognition has cast a burgeoning shadow around my own identity as a white, Afrikaans-speaking woman. It is an undeniable fact that the rudimentary detail of my skin colour has predetermined for me a position of privilege; and although my constantly guilt-ridden conscience pairs with ongoing condemnation of a system from which I regretfully descend, the score will not settle, and my own voice had begun to drown out.

However, my engagement with the rich plethora of the creative voices of contemporary local women artists, curators and writers, as well as the theorised transformation of the post-African princess that I interpret within the artworks selected for *The princess in the veld*, has inspired me to articulate my thoughts without apology, but once again with confidence. This is the voice that I add to

Becker's (1999:69) castigation of self-endorsed, patriarchally positioned individuals such as Enwezor, who merely seizes an opportunity to assert *his* "paternalistic [...] need to protect the [black] female" while blatantly implying her status to be that of the 'victim' through her apparent inability to take a stand for herself (cf. section 3.3.2).

However, this is *not* a voice that lays any claim to usurping or even understanding black women's consciousness or experience. Nor do I wish to reify these powerful women as 'different' either by casting local female identity into one universalising box – as Spivak (1990:141) points out that others have done – or by regarding them as monolithic victims, as Mohanty (1988:84) warns against (cf. section Introduction).

Perhaps empathy too, is a barrier that prevents one from crossing over the threshold to another's experience. Muffling the sound of my own voice will not support the demand for examination and analysis necessary to expand discourse through art around South African women's identities. Mine is a voice, settled in-between the nefarious (dis)chord of my ancestral past and the rich timbre offered by the future – a voice that claims, as Krog's (2000:97) does, "for one brief shimmering moment [that] this country [...] is also truly mine." Mine is a voice that trusts in the belief that soon, our voices will meet elsewhere, in-between.

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