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Recommencing Reality: the Intersection of Public and Private Identity in
Performative Contexts

A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfillment* of the requirements for the
award of the degree of MA in Theatre & Performance (Theatre Making)
(DRM5018W)

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any
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dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has
been cited and referenced.

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Date: 13 October 2009

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the convergence and cusp of colliding realities in private and public identities in performative contexts. It draws heavily on a Socio-Anthropological system of the self and fictive personas within these constructs – as well as the person/persona/personality trichotomy inherent in self-presentation and preservation. It is written in subservience and supplication to the practical component of the University of Cape Town's MA in Theatre and Performance (Theatre Making) which is also documented and archived with supplementary photographs as part of the research.

The paper addresses notions of collective identity (such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, socio-economic and socio-political group clusters) with a peripheral focus on the South African, middle-class, Caucasian identity and a particular focus on a female, hetero-normative orientation (as it forms the premise of many concerns presented in the practice of the inquiry: the artist as still life, the subject as object).

It suggests a methodology towards aligning the research and its actualisation in performance through a series of installation-based works presented on and around Hiddingh Campus, Cape Town between May 2008 and September 2009. At the time of publication, the culminating project of the degree was in its pre-production phase.

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Mums: "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (Walker: 1990 pg. 240).

You have the green fingers in our family – you've always been able to make anything grow. Thank you for what you've encouraged in my (and Annemarie's) life. I love you very much.

**Recommencing Reality: the Intersection of
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University of Cape Town

Introduction to the Public and Private Identity

“Hell is oneself, Hell is alone, the
other figures in it:

Merely projections.”

T.S. Eliot¹

¹ Eliot, T.S. 1978. *The Cocktail Party*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company

1.1 But why, Penelope? You used to be such a Happy Little Girl!

The site of this investigation is primarily located in the self. The self as perceived by oneself, and by others. Having studied an undergraduate degree at the University of Stellenbosch in acting, and then an Honours degree in Directing, I decided for myself that I was going to enroll for a Masters degree at the University of Cape Town. Moving to Hiddingh Campus has played a pivotal role in my understanding of the proposed concepts in this thesis; not only because of the cerebral stimulation and motivation provided through the academic requirements of the institution... but because on the very first day of my very first class I realised that nobody knew who I was. I had come as an unknown variable, and could become whatever I wanted to be now that I was here.

The idea of shifting-selves was something I had only entertained peripherally in my cognitive years: I went to one (same-sex) school from sub-A (at the age of 5) to Grade 12 (age 17) where there was little grace for the unformed construct of identity. We decided who our peers were as we went along, and they, generally, duly became those people. Of my class of 80 females, 68 of them went to the University of Cape Town. I knew I didn't want to go to Johannesburg or Pretoria; and I couldn't abide the thought of another stint in Natal (where I grew up). So I packed my bags and move to Stellenbosch where I learnt a new language and became "arty" in juxtaposition to the "Suzy-high-school, jolly-hockey-sticks" character I'd just escaped. I enrolled for the Drama degree and acquired an artistic boyfriend: I imbibed a persona that, I thought, conflicted with the stereotypes that defined my unhappy adolescence (bookmarked by acute annorexia, self-harm and mild depression).

With time, a strange phenomenon occurred: I found that I enjoyed theatre. And was relatively "good" at it. I thrived on the attention and success, and conformed to the construct my socialization provided. I became "hard-working" and "studious". I became a "writer" and a "composer". I became "trustworthy". I became "intelligent". I became an actor.

I am these things because people believe them, and I maintain the relationship between thought and actualisation through my acknowledgement of this exchange. I did this without thinking until I performed $CH_2 - OH - CH - OH - CH_2 - OH + 3R - CO_2 - Na$ (*the chemical composition of soap*) in 2008 and people started talking about me being a "Performance Artist"; and I thought to myself: "I wonder what my Mum would think about all this?" And I instinctively knew what her reaction would be. She would raise her eyebrows, purse her lips and then draw them into a straight line of disapproval and say (doggedly): "My Pen, I don't know why you 're focusing your energy on all this nastiness. You used to be such a happy little girl." And then she would cry.

1.2 The Initial Construction of the Self

When forming a "reality" for oneself to which one would want to subscribe, the most common point of origin is one's own identity in that construction. Identity is soldered through many

provisions, provisos and prerequisites: and because physical identity shifts to the greatest degree in one's childhood as the body matures – the first strong sense of an anchored identity is often associated with one's name: the formation of the self is the child's first major creative effort (Martin 1990: 140). My name was the first word I was taught to write; and the first thing I was instructed to tell an adult should I find myself lost and far from home or my mother. It's still a password used to function in and amongst recognised society on an everyday basis; and surmises the composite connotations of my collective persona(l) decisions.

A name, however, in and of itself does not precipitate immediate information concerning its bearer. The person I am is not fully described by my name, since it gives little information about my physical being. Similarly, my name says nothing about my psychological identity. In fact, the connection between who I am and my name is a matter of convention and language. I am "Penelope" because my parents registered that name with Home Affairs, along with the particulars of my place and date of birth; and others have agreed to use it when referring to me (Holloway, Kane, Roos & Titlestad 1999: 7).

To locate the "self" within a certain frame of reference is to rely on the concept of a stagnant identification method. Most societies place emphasis on allocating fixed identities. We are often asked to prove that we are who we say we are. In many everyday situations we produce proofs of identity such as student cards, driver's licenses or ID documents. Such documents connect the "identity" we claim for ourselves to a unique set of physical characteristics (usually represented by a photograph) and to a name; and then to a governmentally allocated code or identity number so as to impose order on the mass of individuals that constitute a given society. In certain respects, then, identity is connected to control and to the exercise of power within society (Holloway, Kane, Roos and Titlestad 1999:11). Identity documents, however, have to be regularly updated as physical appearances change over time; as first observed in the Sociological work of Erving Goffman: the associated actor is (with or without her or his own knowledge) consistently reinventing, and recommencing, roles.

To extrapolate on this point, performers offer us

...glimpses (or more) of "themselves" as living, breathing beings, standing literally or figuratively naked before our eyes. The theoretical attention paid to these bodies seen on stage produces a body of knowledge that testifies to a growing awareness of the way bodies are involved in meaning. The acknowledgement of bodies on stage and of the way these bodies are seen are the products of culture rather than natural givens. (Bleeker 2008: 4)

Freud acknowledges that our experience of self is always circumscribed by and derived from the body. He claims that the ego's outline is a psychic map or projection of the surface of the body that provides the basis of the subject's assumption that it is coextensive with the whole

of its body. This idea of taking up the body as its body was later developed by Lacan, who uses the opposition between tactile and kinaesthetic information (which yields the fragmented image of the body in bits and pieces) and visual perception (which provides the illusionary unity of the image as an ideal image or mirror for the subject) to explain the genesis of an always alienated ego. What these two theorists and their theories have in common is that in both, as Elizabeth Grosz remarks: 'the ego forms itself around a fantasy of a totalized and mastered body, which is precisely the Cartesian fantasy modern philosophy has inherited' (Grosz 1995: 86).

Having said this, individuals would like to imagine that their "identity" operates outside of the accumulated facts that constitute their acknowledged physicality: it is in accommodating this concept that questions around "character" and "reality" inform the dialogue of individuality and an elected Reality (the emphasis by use of capital letter first utilized by Slavoj Žižek). A sense of personal identity affects the interactions which make up our life experience: who I am today is not simply a matter of who I was when I was born (if this were so I would still be an infant in St. Augustine's Hospital, Durban, South Africa); my background, the home in which I grew up, my education and the experiences I have had all contribute to my identity now. "Character" – inferring the assumed role one plays on an everyday basis, as well as the 'aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of a person' (Schlenker 1980: 16) – therefore, cannot be constant. Character changes according to circumstance and we cannot refer to character without taking into account the context in which we see a particular individual "act". As inadequate as a name appears to be when containing the sum of parts that our being constitutes, so is our naming of that state of being insufficient. Language fails us: we cannot name, cannot contain what it is that we are. There is a disconnect between the person, the persona and the personality that precipitates a loss of personal identity; a deliberate and, often, adolescent disregard for socially prevalent reality constructs which leads to a 'romantic rebellion against dependence on both people and things...The individual is obsessed by the obligation to act as a function of "the other," obsessed by the obligation to exhibit himself in order to be able to be' (Vergine 2000: 7, 8).

1.3 Shut Your Trap!

The mouth is responsible for much of our daily functioning: it is the '...moist hole at the centre of our faces' (Blocker 2004: 20) that provides and sustains us with breath, food and speech-based communication. An erogenous zone of the body, the mouth draws parallels with the vagina in form and function and in these similarities one could even say that the two are potentially symbiotic in terms of the denigration inherent in certain connotations involving their perceived construct. Because of the inhibitions of female verbal articulation in a patriarchal society, that which is released through breath – from the emotive sigh to the spoken word –

comes under direct scrutiny; and, as such, can be used to trap the performer/initiator into analytic digression from the initial expression.



Archival Photograph from *Bokkie III* – a Live Art piece commissioned by Lourens Joubert for his *Abdication* exhibition at Salon 91 Gallery, Cape Town, September 2009

My sense of having too much to say – of being guilty of feeling or *being* too much – was an immediate reaction to my upbringing and world view; and its from this point that I began to work creatively towards the idea of the body as a 'portal' for this expression – as opposed to the written word (Blocker 2004: 30).

As Lecoq exhorts, 'the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant' (Callary 2001:4). The body becomes a point of (literal) contact between the membranes of the everyday (an assumed "unperformed" space), the performative everyday (where expected role-play is elicited to avoid social blunders) and the performance (where a recognised relationship is formed between spectator and actor in a mutual and willing agreement).

1.4 The Fictive Personality

Contemporary personality theorists have argued that meaningful life narratives provide a sense of unity and purpose to subject's lives. As McAdams (1988), drawing upon Erikson's canonical work on identity development, first proposed; individuals fashion a "life-story" that consists of archetypal characters, ongoing ideological assumptions about the fairness and security of their surroundings, significant self-defining episodes, and expectations about the outcome of the story's chapters and of the story as a whole. Each of these components contributes to a complex and evolving answer in narrative form to the question of 'Who am I?'

and 'Who might I become?' (Singer, Singer and Zittel 2000: 352). In this sense, narrative structures like autobiographical episodes, motivational strivings and archetypal characters play a pivotal role in self-definition and identity formation.

We are subject to external factors including, but not exclusive to, globalization, free trade, post-colonial expression and current social philosophy, gender, race, occupation, social rituals, lifestyle, language, religious faith, economic class, political beliefs, educational background, family relationships and our environment. 'We can never see reality just as it is... Any act of seeing is an interpretation: a process of giving meaning to what we see' (Holloway, Kane, Roos and Titlestad 1999:169). As a female. As a South African. As a white, female, South African. As an elitist member of the stark minority privileged to have access to tertiary education. As a child of a two-parent home and an adult with parents who are still married (and who hold conservative world views). As the sister to a psychologist; and a dead sister who I never knew. As "Penelope Joan Youngleson". As all of these facets and their associated fabrications. There is no end to the construction that informs and deforms me. And it is not without trepidation that I write these binaries down – in an age of intentioned political and historical tolerance it seems almost inconsiderate to claim certain categories for myself. By implication I am choosing to exclude others. But if I don't begin to classify myself and if I'm not a white, female, South African, (born in Durban) Cape Townian – then what and how and who and why can I claim to be?

The Recommencing Reality – how the Body sees itself and the Narcissistic Implications of the Subject as Object

Between chores –

hulling strawberries,

answering letters –

or between poems,

returning to the mirror

to see if I'm there.

Denise Levertov²

² Levertov, D. 1970. *Searching for Words*. New York: New Directions

2.1 Seeing the Self in a 'man-made' Mirror

The Fictive personality is clearly a substitute formation, in which 'characters from fiction or mass-media (instead of living persons) become the mirror that reflects identity'. Fictive mirrors offer grandiose, highly unrealistic images in which the self can "see" (and often "mis-see") itself. 'A fictive mirror almost always results from the fear that without a sublime mirror, the person will disappear, have no reflection at all' (Martin 1990: 140).

Ann Hamilton's installation *aleph* (1992) was constructed at the List Visual Arts Centre at MIT. As part of the installation the viewer moved through the work on a floor covered in steel so that her or his presence resonated through the space. On the one side of the room over thirty thousand books on technology were stacked in rows, between which were occasionally squeezed horizontal bodies made of muslin and stuffed with sawdust. In the centre of the work a performer sat at a table removing mirrors from a pile on the table, and one by one rubbed off their mirrored backing. At the end of the room one encountered a video image of Hamilton's mouth filled with small stones against which she struggled to speak. '... the body, like the wrestling dummies in *aleph*, is squeezed by the heavy tomes in which the mind stores its knowledge... being literally buried by the weight of the vertical climb of knowledge... Similarly... language routinely humiliates the body from which it emanates' (Blocker 2004: 35, 36).

As *She her Mouth Opens to Speak* (a theatre piece devised, performed and directed by Alude Mahali on Hiddingh Campus as part of her University of Cape Town Masters Degree) clearly references this dilemma. As well as addressing issues of cross-continental loss of identity and culture – and its nostalgic reconstruction through memory – there was a particular moment in the piece where Mahali approached the audience, her mouth gaping open and her tongue flattened against her bottom teeth (inhibiting her speech) and announced that she was unable to speak because '...they've cut out my tongue. My Mother's tongue' (Mahali 2008). Her body was clearly imploring for some sort of help or acknowledgement that her tongue could not formulate in a way that others could understand. And yet her appeal was unanswered, and unattended, as the audience was separated from the performer by floor to ceiling burglar bars and a padlocked gate.

'There are significant parallels between the attributes that Elaine Scarry (1985) ascribes to pain and those often ascribed to the feminine: both pain and women are natural, primitive, somatic, and passive' (Blocker 2004: 32). Neither pain nor woman has a language with which to communicate and/or express.

It is rather commonplace to think of women's performance art as having a more diaristic, personal quality and of men's performance art as transcending the narcissism of personal reflection. Lea Vergine wrote in 1974 (the first edition of *Body Art and Performance: the Body*

as *Language*) that because 'they [women] could not surmount the charge of being "diary-like", because they could not aspire to universal meaning or conceptualisation, women's performances were more often seen as personal, narcissistic, specific, base, tedious, transient, noncommodifiable, and intransitive' (Vergine 1974: 22). What is the body if not these things? What is the body if not personal?

Our society is composed according to the belief that the self is fictive, society is theatre, and events have no meaning beyond their performances. Anyone can be or become anything, because all is fraudulent and everyone is an impostor. What we are "seeing" is the transformation of the individual and society through the fictions infused into both. Fictive personality is the psychology of our time. Fictive social relations dominate our culture (Martin 1990: 229).

In Ray Bradbury's science-fiction novel and play *The Martian Chronicles* (1980) an old couple's son is dead and buried – but appears to them, mysteriously, not long after their mourning process. When his parents doubt his authenticity, he responds by saying: 'Why ask questions? Accept me!' When the boy is forced to appear in public, he disappears. When a local girl is found to be missing shortly afterwards, it is discovered that the shape-shifter is now the little girl. She was "Tom" when the old couple's desire shaped her so; now she has an identity that responds to another's desire. Eventually, the whole town pursues the figure. Each person's desire and dream poses a new identity on the Martian until 'the swift figure... [means] everything to them – all identities, all persons, all names, an image reflected from ten thousand mirrors, ten thousand eyes, [a]... running dream' (Martin 1990: 232).

2.2 Beyond Reflections – Invitations to my Red, Heavy, Stinking Mess of Entrails

The postmodern invitation for spectators to read performed events as inhabiting the realm of the "real" – or more accurately the peculiarly real/not-real – can function alongside the centuries-old tradition that strips performed events of social consequence. Aristotle's notion of theatre as the imitation of an action does little to prepare contemporary spectators for an encounter with Ron Athey's crown of syringes or Kira O'Reilly slicing into herself with a surgical scalpel, much less for the invitation to spectators to make their own cuts in her flesh.

John Edward McGrath writes in response to Ron Athey's work:

The theatre with its insides and outsides is left on the side. The skin, the boundary between inside and outside, becomes the only real place. In literalizing this boundary without sides, I would suggest that Athey disrupts a theatricalization of the space of death itself, disallows an imagery of death which creates its space as special, over there, beyond the line. (McGrath 1995: 29)

Adverse reaction to my scenes of cutting my arms open whilst taking a bath in *CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na* (the chemical composition of soap) led some audience members to disengage from the work, or even actively remove themselves from the performance space. The use of the body in performance is an old device; one not exclusive to any culture or country – and the desensitization of observers with regards to the exposure of the “private” self has infiltrated mainstream consciousness. It may well be the case that we blink once, if at all, when we witness body modification (or adornment, depending on perspective) in “life”, whereas we blink hard and look away when the same act or image is presented to us within the frame of art. It is precisely this framing of art which makes the things we see often so difficult to bear - because the frame both provides and demands a focus; it is for this reason that an image in a gallery can be both difficult and shocking in ways that are absent when we encounter the same image in a newspaper. Content means nothing to us without context.

The audience member (or spectator) is confronted with the responsibility of ethics when defining what constitutes performance. It is only their continued attendance that elicits the definition in the first place. What, then, is the “grotesque” – and what is “watchable” – in performance? And why do the seemingly repellent states of mind possess, for some, an abiding attraction? Although we each exist subjectively, and can only relate to and with experiences within the prism of the self, this “subjective reality” is inaccessible (and therefore mysterious and “unreal”) to others. The arts of the grotesque, in a more technical sense, are related to Expressionism and Surrealism in their elevation of interior (and perhaps repressed) states to an exterior manifestation. Even if we were not aware of the postmodern deconstruction within contemporary performance; psychologically and anthropologically we should be able to sense through the opaque nature of constructed theatre the presence of the simultaneously “real” and “unreal” – and this evokes, likewise, a constant attraction and repulsion regarding the work (Oates 1994: 306).

Whilst binaries of “lies” and “truth” are no longer ones which we have any uncomplicated, critical and cultural faith in, the very impermanent nature of the relationship nevertheless continues to make sense. The wheel allows us to travel faster and further than the leg, without being ‘true’ to the essence of legs (Freeman 2007: 58). It is an imitative lie that tells the truth of movement. In a similar way ‘text for performance is a lie that seeks to bridge the gap between the “as if” of constructed writing and the “is now” of reconstruction through performance’ (Freeman 2007: 55). Autobiographical performance functions around the “I” on the page and the “I” on the stage: one is a paper construct, the other is personal and neither can be regarded as wholly true.

It is with this in mind that I created a series of “machines” for 1, 3, 5, 7, 11 (not 9) – my thesis production – that allude to an extension of the self. Some of these include a perpetual-motion machine (a water-fountain made from cracked crockery), a space-time continuum machine (a filing cabinet filled with found objects), a dream machine (designed by Ian Sommerville in

1969, it is a stroboscopic flicker device that produces visual stimuli) and a kinetically conservative flight machine (a pair of Icarus wings).

2.3 The Hydra-Headed Monologue

According to Ancient Greek myth, the Hydra was a nine-headed sea-serpent who was so fiercely poisonous even “her” breath could kill you. The monster would famously grow two heads in the place of one, should you attempt to cut a head off; but the weakness of the Hydra (and unknown to her enemies) was that only one of her heads was immortal (Graves 1992: 469, 471).

In conversation Spalding Gray wondered:

Could I stop acting, and what was it I actually did when I acted? Was I, in fact, acting all the time, and was my acting in the theatre the surface showing of that? Was my theatre acting a confession of my constant state of feeling my life as an act?... Now there was the new space between the timeless poetic me (the me in quotes, the self as poem) and the real-time self in the world (the time-bound, mortal self; the self as prose). The ongoing ‘play’ became a play about theatrical transcendence

(Callens 2004: 118 – 119).

Gray openly admitted to, at least partly, creating his work in front of his audience during the seminal series of monologues. He made numerous references to the fact that the words he performed were not always pre-written, and that he composed the performance onstage as a form of oral-writing. The life-art continuum, however, because of its symbiotic nature, makes it impossible to distinguish the extent to which this is a reliable fabrication or not. Gray’s performance was a theatre of identity, of a personal politics premised on the unearthing of stories that had hitherto seemed too lacking in significance to be told to paying strangers.

In my practical work there has been a deliberate dislocation between the constructions of identity within “real” time and the succumbing to escalating rapidity of the physical, emotional, spiritual and sensory unravelling of the self and identity. The juggling of these two states is a common ailment amongst performers outside of the “modernist” matrix – and cannot, alone, merit my dilemma as worthy of being watched. Instead of stagnating in the “why” I chose to pivot my position around the “how”: the three “containers” used for the purposes of personal explanation are the “person”, the “persona” and the “personality”. Deliberate distancing from the axis of the “self” is notably explored in both *Fray* and *CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na* (the chemical composition of soap) through the use of video projection, auditory supplementation, sculpture and photography. Autobiography, or ‘autoperformance’ (Freeman 2007: 95), does more than provide artists with the opportunity to make themselves subjects to be seen by spectators; it allows them to see themselves in the process of being

seen. Lacan described a state wherein 'the visible me is determined by the look that is outside me' (Lacan 1977: 49). A questioning of self through self's construction, the self as subject does not, we see, amount to the self as given. Autoperformative identity is under constant challenge from selective memory and an oscillation between self-mirroring, self-questioning and self-inventing – and there are distinctions between the terms 'identity', 'person', 'self' and 'autobiography'. These forms deny "truthful" communication precisely because their methods are so innately artificial. Barthes writes about this as the 'self who writes, the self who was and the self who is' (Barthes 1977: 56). Likewise, Peter Brook asserts that 'in everyday life "if" is a fiction... In everyday life "if" is an evasion, in the theatre "if" is the truth' (Brook 1968: 157).



Archival Photographs of *Fray* (Penelope Youngleson 2008)

The Socio-Anthropological System of the Self

The "facts" in the traditional autobiography can be likened to the bones of our personality.

A.R. Bruhn³

³ Bruhn, A.R. 1995. Ideographic aspects of injury memories: Applying contextual theory to the comprehensive early memory scoring system – revised. *Journal of Personality Assessment*. 65:195 – 236

3.1 The Person, the Persona and the Personality

per-son [pur-suh n]

- A human being, regardless of gender (as opposed to an animal, organism or inanimate object).
- In terms of Sociology: an individual with reference to his or her social relationships and behavioral patterns as conditioned by his or her culture (implying a degree of rational consciousness).
- The body of a living human being and the body in its external aspect.
- A character, part, role or assumption made by the self or others.

per-so-na [per-soh-nuh]

- A person
- The mask or façade presented to satisfy the demands of a situation or the environment and not representing the inner personality of the individual; the public personality (as first cited in the works of C. G. Jung)
- A person's perceived or evident personality (often in the capacity of a public role)

per-son-al-i-ty [pur-suh-nal-i-tee]

- The visible aspect of one's character as it impresses others
- A person as an embodiment of a collection of qualities

(Person, Persona, Personality. Oxford Dictionary 1990)

The "Person", "Persona", "Personality" containers serve as receptacles and indicators as to my current (projected) status. The performance should not aim to reflect one state in exclusivity: as much as our daily lives are in unrest so the performance oscillates between that which we perceive to be perceived as "real" and that which is quite evidently not. Actors often refer to the "real" ideal as being "in the moment" or "on" when recommending and recommencing a role, character or identity to and for their audience. This could also be seen to have parallels with the observed "unperformed" participants of everyday life experiencing a moment of unexplained emotion.

3.2 "To Prepare a Face to Meet the Faces that We Meet"

Our ability to distinguish ourselves from others must be acknowledged by those very same "others". Therefore our personal unity, which is produced and maintained by self-identification, rests on our membership in a group and on our ability to locate

ourselves within a system of relations. No one can construct her/his identity independently of its recognition by others. Every individual must assume that her/his otherness and uniqueness is constantly acknowledged by everyone else, and that this recognition is based on intersubjective reciprocity ('I am for You the You that you are for Me') (Melucci 1996: 29).

There are two main motives that govern self-presentation. One is instrumental: we want to influence others and gain rewards. There are three instrumental goals. The first is 'Ingratiation', when we try to be happy and display our good qualities so that others will like us. The second is 'Intimidation', which is aggressively showing anger to get others to hear and obey us. The third is 'Supplication', when we try to be vulnerable and melancholy so as to manipulate people to the point of sympathy and active response (Schlenker 1980: 37, 167, 169). Employment of supplication in *No, that's not it...at all* could be seen to engage the spectator by using the device of constructed vulnerability to maneuver the desired interaction. However, repeated exposure to pain (physical, emotional, psychological) numbs the observer and the transition is made from the "person" to the "persona" without the observer, necessarily, detecting why their trust has been broken. It is for this reason that audience members at the Guggenheim Museum could walk away from Marina Abramović's seven-hour performance of *Lips of Thomas* (whilst she was busy alternately cutting a 5-pointed star into her stomach with a scalpel and self-flagellating), have a meal or a cup of coffee and resume observing her self-inflicted ordeal at their convenience. It is not "real" to them on a visceral, immediate level. This would seem to contradict my earlier statement concerning the chasm separating newspapers and galleries; and how "art" can, often, affect people more than commonly accepted "reality". In actual fact, these two statements supplement each other and rely on a tenuous understanding of constructed and symbiotic "realities" in order to be digested. An example of this would be Guillermo Gómez-Peña's 1994 performance of *The Cruci-Fiction Project* where the artist and a companion were placed on wooden crosses, with a crowd of roughly three hundred witnesses and audience members. Programmes were handed out, encouraging onlookers to free the performers from their martyrdom – Gómez-Peña had expected to be released within the hour. Over three hours later (by which time Gómez-Peña's right shoulder had become dislocated and he had lost consciousness) they were released by a small group of sympathetic observers. As Gómez-Peña recovered and regained consciousness he heard a number of spectators shouting: 'Let them die' (Gómez-Peña 2000: 64). The complexities of the actor-audience relationship rely on the premise that the actor is in control of the performance – this is where the distinction, dichotomy and, ultimately, the decision is made when comparing theatre to live (or performance) art: in a "play" we would be remiss to walk onstage and stop the action for fear of the actor's life. Because we know our place we keep our seat – and should she or he die in the process... it's an unfortunate symptom of our involvement.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

...There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea...

(Eliot 2005: 10) emphasis not in the original

The second motive of self-presentation is expressive. We construct an image of ourselves to claim personal identity, and present ourselves in a manner that is consistent with that image (Schlenker 1980: 37). If we feel like this is restricted, we exhibit reactance. We try to assert our freedom against those who would seek to curtail our self-presentation expressiveness.

Concerning the strategies followed to establish a certain impression, the main distinction is between defensive and assertive strategies. Whereas defensive strategies include behaviors like avoidance of threatening situations or means of self-handicapping; assertive strategies refer to more active behavior, like the verbal idealization of the self, the use of status symbols or similar practices (Schlenker 1980: 189).

In all of my pieces I have reached a heightened emotional state that, almost, unstintingly results in a collapse into tears. The Latin root of the word "emotion" stems from *emovere*, an active verb composed of *movere* (to move) and *e* (out). It speaks of a moving force. Emotion is then about a moving out, the transferring from one place or one state to another, from what we feel to what we see and from what we see to what we feel. The word "feel" is an exchange that is both emotional and tactile; and feelings affect us physically, just as physical feelings affect our emotions. Because emotion is of the heart and of the mind and of the body, passive watching is as oxymoronic as passive hatred or passive love: it has to elicit some form of active engagement.

Scarry surmises:

To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience

into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself.

(Scarry 1985: 6)

The clear use of a combination of defensive strategies and supplication goals align my work with the "persona" of a 'disadvantaged other' (Schlenker 1980: 192). This allows the spectator to relate to my experience more freely as they may assume an authoritative analysis, or an empathetic assurance of recognition as they feel an affinity for one or the other. It is, in fact, the "othering" of the self that encourages and explains the endearing monstrosity of my predicament. By using the body as an object of ridicule or remorse within the subject of "othering" I have leverage to encourage the spectator not only to empathize with my situation and build relational trust with me as the performer; but to examine me as the object critically within and without this relational aptitude.

3.3 Dramaturgy as an Ethnographic and Socio-Anthropological Endeavour

Erving Goffman saw all forms of social interaction as phenomena to be viewed in performance terms, as relationships shaped at all times by one's environment and audience, constructed and endlessly modified to provide others with impressions of a complete and coherent "self". For Goffman this is consistent with the desired goals of the actor, and it is for this reason that Goffman makes the use that he does of a terminology which, prior to his work, was rarely employed outside of the theatre. In this sense, Goffman is an ethnographer of the self; and analyst of ordinary people in everyday life. His focus is on circumstances in which our combined efforts to create and sustain creditable selves are largely successful and, when successful, go relatively unnoticed and unremarked. 'Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way' (Goffman 1978: 13). Goffman emphasizes the extreme importance of mutual understanding and common definitions of situations within any given interaction, so as to lend the interaction coherency. In interactions, or performances, the involved parties may be audience members and performers simultaneously; the actors usually foster impressions that benefit their credibility and cumulative social image, and encourage the others, by various means, to accept their preferred definition. Goffman acknowledges that when the accepted definition of the situation has been discredited, some or all of the actors may ignore the interruption of "reality"; if they find this strategy profitable to themselves or wish to placate their co-actors and spectators. For example, when I presented the notion of having "forgotten my words" in *Fray*, and subsequently couldn't remember 'what it was I was supposed to say to make you feel more comfortable' in *No, that's not it... at all* the audience members supported this device as a means of setting the constructed "reality" in relief to its "theatrical" context. They assisted me by choosing not to infer my foolishness in supposed ill-preparation to the task, but rather

recognized the application of an inversion of Goffman's technique in exploring how holistically this concept has permeated our conditioned sense of society. Goffman insists that this type of artificial, willed credulity occurs on every level of social organization, independent of hierarchy or education; and that we perform these acts whether we are aware of doing so or not. In this strain, we see the representation of experiences pro-offered in a format that invites empathy, engagement and faith from audience members – one needs to subscribe to the given reality despite being unsure as to whether this reveals or obscures the performance persona. An extension of this perception would lead the audience member to recognize that one's adopted identity constantly shifts and realigns itself with any number of variables: but the characters one plays tend to remain stable. Thus, in the performative everyday, adopted roles for specific circumstances reflect the fractures in our make-up.

3.4 Collective Identities

Identity Studies have evolved and grown central to current sociological discourse. Microsociological perspectives (social psychology, symbolic interactionism) focussed primarily on the individual dominated work published through the 1970s (a time noted in post-modern feminist theory of performance as being saturated in new forms of exploring female identity and being "seen"). Sociologists occupied themselves with the formation of the "me", exploring the ways in which interpersonal interactions mould an individual's sense of self. But identity research of the last few decades proves antithetical to traditional concerns; a shift largely fuelled by three important trends:

1. Social and nationalist movements of the past three decades have shifted scholarly attention to issues of group agency and political action. As a result, identity studies have been relocated to the site of the collective; with gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class forming the foundation of this discursive field (Appiah, K.A and Gates, H.L. Jnr. 1995: 3). Writings attend, in particular, to that which constitutes a collective and the political implications that result from collective definitions.
2. Intellectual concerns with agency and self-direction have re-energized the study of identification processes. At the level of the collective, scholars are examining the mechanics by which distinctions are created, maintained and changed.
3. New communication technologies have freed interaction from the requirements of physical co-presence; these technologies have expanded the array of generalized others contributing to the construction of the self. Several research foci emerge from this development: the substance of "I", "me" and the generalized other in a milieu void of place, the establishment of

“communities of the mind”, and the negotiation of co-present and cyberspace identities.

The Nature of Collective Identity

Collective Identity is a concept grounded in classic sociological constructs: Durkheim’s “collective conscience”, Marx’s “class consciousness”, Weber’s “Verstehen” and Tönnies’s “Gemeinschaft” (Cerulo 1997: 386). So rooted, the notion addresses the ‘we-ness’ of a group, stressing the similarities of shared attributes around which group members coalesce (Cerulo, K.A. 1997: 386).

Social constructionism informs much of the work on gender identity. Such studies challenge essentialist dichotomies of gender and dismiss notions of gender’s primordial roots. Constructionists conceptualise gender as an interactional accomplishment, an identity continually renegotiated via linguistic exchange and social performance. From this stance, researchers also explore subjective definitions of femininity and masculinity, attending to the symbols and norms that initiate and sustain either/or classifications. While such studies reflect numerous intellectual traditions, all are concerned with the ways in which socialization agents organize and project the affective, cognitive, and behavioural data individuals use to form a gendered self. An important outgrowth of gender constructionism rests with works that problematize the gender-sex link. Researchers dissect the differences in male and female biology – the body and reproductive system in particular. By questioning the meaning of biological distinctions, scholars expose the social rituals, symbols and practices that transform such differences into social “facts”. In so doing, this literature demonstrates the inscription of gender on the body (a concept revisited in this paper under the construction of performance methodology). In highlighting the subjective nature of gender, constructionists do not de-emphasise the effects of gender categories. Rather, they argue that socially defined maleness and femaleness severely constrict human behaviour. Subjective definitions imprison individuals in spheres of prescribed action and expectation.

National Identity

Socio-historical work on commemoration, narrative and symbolization chart the ways in which actors, particularly elites, create, manipulate and dismantle the identities of nations, citizenships, allies and enemies. Benedict Anderson (1991) approaches national identity as a socio-cognitive construct – one both spatially and temporally inclusive, both enabled and shaped by broader social forces. He documents key moments of identity construction, times during which cultural and social factors convene in a particular historical moment, effectively remaking collective images of the national self. Anthony D. Smith (1991) adopts a middle-ground approach to national identity, linking social constructionism to more essentialist views. He defines national identity as a product of both “natural” continuity and conscious

manipulation. Natural continuity emerges from a pre-existing ethnic identity and community; conscious manipulation is achieved via commemoration, ideology and symbolism. Smith compliments this duality with a social psychological dimension, citing a “need for community” as integral to identity work. In Smith’s view, this tri-part combination distinguishes national identity, making it the most fundamental and inclusive of collective identities.

Building on from the premise and foundation of compartmentalised identity, postmodern identity scholarship deconstructs established identity categories and their accompanying rhetoric in an effort to explore the full range of “being”. Works in this tradition call into question models that equate discourse with truth; they expose the ways in which discourse objectified as truth both forms and sustains collective definitions, social arrangements and hierarchies of power. In the interest of further research, not appropriate for the format of this discussion, noted pioneers in this school of thought include Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

3.5 Culture and Context

Culture is a collective process of ascribing values generated by cognition. When we behold a thing or idea, we do nothing less than construct an image of it in our minds that is in tune with our way of seeing things. The supposed appreciation of the world around us is always simultaneously a display of our ignorance.

(Ernst. C, Harmsen. L & Rösler. A 2006: 13)

Adopted culture creates a commitment in attitude and behaviour to values, ethics and morals – despite the disparaging discourse surrounding the connotations of these words; which has a direct influence on changing individual identity.

The socio-political, economic and historical composition and climate of a country is cardinal in the formulation of its creative manifestation. The homogeneity of this endeavour is directly proportional to the collective or communal concept of culture within a given society. Simply put; culture is a society-dependant, tradition-based and value-binding ritual and reflection canon (Ernst, Harmsen and Rösler 2006: 11). When examining circumstance-specific communities like Cape Town, South Africa (engaged in the cognitive complexities of reasserting a creative identity and autonomy outside of the inhibitions and excuses of a reformulated, post-colonial, post-Apartheid identity) there’s an alluded subscription to social conformity or “niceties” that informs our understanding of popular culture (or its counter culture in pluralism and pseudo-hybrids) and, by extension, the artistic reflection of that society as distilled through the performing arts and the mediated membrane of congruent dialogue.

A practical example of this predicament would be *Exile*, a commissioned piece for the Infecting the City Festival, as part of the Spier Contemporary, which took place in February

2009. The work was located in Adderley Fountains in Cape Town and was created in response to the notion of "exile" precipitating the expression of loss and, conversely, the manifestation of memory in our accumulated history. The group (comprised of Alfred Hinkel, Michael Lister, Mary Manzole and myself) addressed the pervading impact of exclusion, separation, distinction, deportation, banishment and "othering" as exacted on social and ethnic groups in South Africa (and particularly Cape Town) since the first recorded cultural differences distinguished the Khoi from the San. Our National Identity is composed of a creolized, cobbled and complex cross-pollination of influences and, without exception, not one of us can claim to have *always* been here (even the concept of "here" implies that there is a "there" – and inevitably infers movement or flux between the two states of being): geographically, socially – even spiritually. Humans are nomadic by nature and are constantly in search of more accommodating circumstances; and when they leave all that they have to anchor themselves and their identity in a new location is their memory and perception of the world, their assimilated experiences.

The material problem concerning memories is their immateriality – they are ethereal, despite being almost exclusively associated (on some level) within human experience. A memory differs from a dream in that it infers a 'reality' of sorts, a cerebral relocation of an event. One can easily share the evocation of a memory but it is impossible to literally share a memory: no two people will share the exact same experience even in identical circumstances – and therein lies the peripheral potential for an additional state of exile, for both performers and audience members.

Through the generous permission of the company we were able to use Jazzart Contemporary Dance Company members (with choreography by Alfred Hinkel) to evoke the dislocation and loss of dignity endured by those we had met in our orchestrated orientation with asylum seekers and refugees, as well as disenfranchised South Africans, over the introductory period at the beginning of the residency.

The post-modern search for identity is based, in my opinion, largely on the acquisition of cultural codes; and because of cultural nomadism and transitory and transcendental identities, theatre makers and audience members alike create for themselves a patchwork identity composed of fragmented facets accumulated through various stimuli.

A recent collaboration of mine, *wAnderland*, attempted to address this "unravelling patchwork" through a deconstruction of Lewis Carroll's celebrated novel (*Alice in Wonderland*). The piece approached the identity-strata of the non-linear female construction in contemporary literature. It was heavily influenced by the works of Carl Jung and Pieter Handke.

One might even say that the absence of the 'real' is the motive for culture – and for the resistance to culture's regulatory norms. This motive is recurrently figured in Western thought

as the darkness of Plato's cave, St Augustine's restlessness, fear in Hobbes, Freud's civilized discontent or Lacan's unconscious desire, the causes of change.

At the same time, the word "place" represents the space a body occupies; and so the Universe is a place (Spliid 2003: 9), and therefore merits its own collective noun – and identity.

University of Cape Town

The Latent Potential of the Performer – When the Private is posited as Public in Performance

"Public lives are lived out on the job and in the marketplace, where certain rules, conventions, laws, and social customs keep most of us in line. Private lives are lived out in the presence of family, friends, and neighbours who must be considered and respected even though the rules and prescriptions are looser than what's allowed in public.

But in our secret lives, inside our own heads, almost anything goes."

Robert Fulghum⁴

⁴ Fulghum, R. 1993. *Maybe (Maybe Not): Second Thoughts from a Secret Life*. Random House: Toronto

4.1 The Empty Vessel

La Cruche

Cruche d'abord est vide et le plus tôt possible vide encore.

Cruche vide et sonore.

Cruche d'abord est vide et s'emplit en chantant.

De si peu haut que l'eau s'y précipite, cruche d'abord est vide et s'emplit en chantant.

[Jug at first is empty and as soon as possible empties again.

The empty jug is sonorous.

Jug at first is empty and fills itself while singing.

However small the height from which water throws itself into it, jug at first is empty and fills itself while singing.]

Francis Ponge

(Schwenger 2006: 35)

We all make use of fictions. 'Our first fictions are fantasies about our parents, our body, the self, other humans in the environment, and finally, strangers' (Martin 1990: 151). All of these fictions leave a particular mark, for every person will come to possess her or his own constellation of fictions with their special meaning. Each individual gathering of fictions or fantasies offers opportunities for identification, imitation or counteractivity. Seen in this light, fictions are an essential element in the process of growth and change. They are fundamental to maturation, since they provide a necessary arena for 'trying on' identities and 'trying out' relations to others (Martin 1990: 151).

Some of these so-called fictions are perceived as "good", while others are "bad". "Good" fictions are variously named: "play", "experiment", "improvisation", "imagination", "hypothetical thinking" and "creativity". "Self-deception", "delusional thinking", "impairment of reality testing" and "illusions" are the terms by which we characterise fictions that hinder or stunt growth and development. "Good fictions" are called "healthy" and "adaptive" because they tend to prepare us for action, compensate for loss, or make flexibility and inventiveness possible. "Bad fictions" are termed "neurotic" or even "psychotic" because they lead to isolation, denial or grandiosity; they make loss inevitable and block spontaneous experimentation. The basic questions in the development of personality revolve around the issue of boundaries. The crucial questions are: 'what is the Me?' Later, 'where does the Me stop?' Still later, 'What is the not-Me?' Next: 'how do I relate to others?' and 'how am I different?' Finally, 'how do I achieve intimacy and sharing while still maintaining a sense of self?' (Martin 1990: 152, 156).

Christopher Lasch (1978) characterized contemporary society as the "culture of narcissism". Narcissism – a developmental deficit resulting from inadequate early mirroring – is causally in the background of our culture, but it is a derivative and not the informing drive of the culture itself. Narcissism is merely one way of describing a personality that has become fictional to itself and seeks reflections in every glass (Martin 1990: 228).

Employing the metaphor of consciousness as a theatre, personality may be considered to be the play to be performed – the overarching text that ties all the activities of the players and the crew together into a coherent whole and gives them both a sense of meaning and value. When the spotlight of consciousness comes on to a given actor, the self (as conceptualized through a narrative framework) is also lit. This self, which is more than sensory awareness of immediate stimuli, may contemplate its story by turning back in time, evaluating its current status, or contemplating its future prospect (Singer, Singer and Zittel 200: 353).

In an extensive contemporary research program, Higgins (1987), working within a social cognitive framework, has operationalized some key elements of what might have been called Freud's superego into the so-called self-guides of the actual self, ideal self, ought self, and their relationships. Thus, the actual self-ideal self discrepancy (measured by scoring respondent's descriptions of each self-representation) identifies the degree of gap between a currently perceived, functioning self and an ideally-desired personal representation. All of this research suggests that one aspect of the theatre of consciousness is to compare various representations of the current self to past expectations and future aspirations as a way of evaluating the quality of one's own life story (Singer, Singer and Zittel 2000: 360).

Discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self is, indeed, linked to Neuroticism, anxiety and depression. Self-esteem, as measured by the Rosenberg scale, was also negatively linked to discrepancy; the closer one's actual and ideal selves were matched, the more positively one felt about oneself (Singer, Singer and Zittel 2000: 360).

4.2 The Purposed Practical Process

The body is part of every perception. It is the immediate past in so far as it still emerges in the present that flees away from it. This means that it is at one and the same time a point of view and a point of departure that I am and that I also go beyond as I move off towards what I must become...

Jean-Paul Satre

In my recent post-graduate works (*wAnderland*, *CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na* (the chemical composition of soap), *Fray* and *No, that's not it... at all*) the subjects of the pieces pertained largely to myself and my perceived, prescribed and pro-offered identities. *CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na* (the chemical composition of soap) solicited the subterranean identity of rudimentary function by using site-specific performance art – the piece was located in a public toilet – wherein the predicament of hair, skin, blood and excrement was proposed. We are immediate: our bodies, our lives, our constructions; our understanding and exploration of this dilemma denote an emphatic immediacy. 'People sometimes become puzzled by the notion of personal identity on being told that during any seven year period (or so) all the molecules in a human body are replaced

by different ones' (Shoemaker. S 1963: 5-6). I live with the weight of my acts of piety and obscenity, with my red and impure intestines, with my taste for decadence and expiation. 'Entrail by entrail, feature by feature' we are hung, drawn and quartered for the entertainment of the milling locals (Borges 1974: 58).

In *Fray*, the research broadened through a mapping process to encompass lineage and didactic DNA – the idea of pre-ordained personalities and identities; and the dubious threads by which we weave our literal and metaphorical coverings so as not to expose ourselves in public. The One-Person show, *No, that's not it... at all*, acted as an epilogue to *Fray* in that it dealt with the same uncertainties; but placed it very firmly within a 'dramatic' context. It was my first piece at UCT located in a traditional theatre space, and made extensive use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, as well as contrived and constructed lighting and specific "showing" of character and identity.

My extended grapple with this subject matter is, perhaps, best explained by an extract from my experimental writing for the medium project, *Fray*:

I'm a Minotaur: stamping and snorting and devouring virgins. I'm stuck, struck, in the middle of a maze with no end and no beginning.

There's no foreseeable end and no justifiable beginning. I'm trapped in a throbbing, strumming, slamming, stabbing polygon of noise and riffs and spliffs and placebo pretension devoid of precision. A Rubik Cube with no answers, corners or questions. Just slackened muscles and bent elbows. And marauding expectations. I rip my ideas limb from limb. I have a Carnivorous Gob; I'm dribbling out in incoherent beast and man in perpetual motion.

The uncertainty of self is not a new subject and its unpacking does not denote ingenuity. It is, however, a very present problem; one that continues to resonate with audiences and art-appreciators. That it achieves this is not spectacular – but rather *how* it achieves this. How can we still be fascinated with the body and its limitations? How can we still want to see Marina Abramović performing what is, essentially, self-harm? Why does the voyeuristic appeal of watching a human being emotionally or physically disintegrate still draw attention? Perhaps because it translates so tersely within our own understanding of the "reality" of everyday existence.



Archival Photograph from *Bokkie III* – a Live Art piece commissioned by Lourens Joubert for his *Abdication* exhibition at Salon 91 Gallery, September 2009



Archival Photograph from $CH_2 - OH - CH - OH - CH_2 - OH + 3R - CO_2 - Na$ (the chemical composition of soap) (Youngleson 2008)

Connotations and Associations – Using Breton to investigate the Identity I was projecting without Consciously Commencing with and Committing to do so.

There prevails in one's mind, according to Freud, a total absence of contradiction, a release from the emotional fetters of repression, a lack of temporality, and the substitution of external reality by psychic reality obedient to the pleasure principle and no other. Automatism leads directly to these regions.

Andre Breton⁵

⁵ Breton, A. 1965. The Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism. Richard Hurley (trans.) in *Surrealism and Painting*. No. 3: 26 – 36

5.1 Private (freely) goes Public: the overflow of the soul when the self isn't enough

Andre Breton defined automatic writing as the absence of critical intervention in the creation of text. Automatic writing was thus able to proceed not on the basis of narrative sequence or systematic description, but rather in accordance with the random interplay of word and image associations. The etymology of automation is “chance”; and in his theory to write randomly and without specific intention would lead to monologues ‘spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which is, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*’ (Grace, Sherill and Wasserman 2006: 76) (emphasis in the original). In Marina Abramović’s *Freeing the Memory* (1976), she uses free association to “purge” herself of all the words and acquired language she can possibly remember. After an hour and a half, she seems to have succeeded: she has no more words to say and the performance is over. *Freeing the Memory* is part of a series of performances in which Abramović attempts to purify her body and mind and disengage her consciousness. The concept of purging is a thematic choice of mine: the “vomiting pre-Raphaelite” seen in *Fray* on the second television screen lies in comfortable repose – so calm she almost appears expired in her reverie. The ten-minute video ends with a sudden convulsion and expelling of vomit into her carefully laid-out hair – but the technique of looping the clip ensures that, in a matter of seconds, she will return to her angelic form and the evidence of her humanity and inability to “contain” is erased. This installation was juxtaposed with the “Minotaur” – a dynamic portrait of my face and a red thread being pulled out of my mouth, ending in a gagging cough as the spool is accidentally jerked free of my teeth. The two videos were in dialogue, each of them accusing the other of their frail inadequacies: and alluding to the shortcomings of our constructed containers. Language is not enough. The voice is not enough. The body is not enough – we are not enough to express what needs to be noticed, documented, contained, explained and refrained from repeating. It’s the construction of containment that is in direct conflict with the overflow of the subject it contains.

5.2 A slimy, slithering Mess of a Human (Be)ing - the inscription of gender on the body

Sartre associates the feminine with the ambiguous hybridity of slime:

I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me, it sucks at me. Its mode of being is neither the reassuring inertia of the solid nor a dynamism like that in water which is exhausted in feeling from me. It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking, it lives obscurely under my fingers, and I sense it like a dizziness; it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me (Sartre 1956: 609).

Twenty-three years later, Carolee Schneemann reiterates the unfortunate truism that this point posits (and her frustration with the indoctrination and engendered notion of the female understanding of the self in performance and everyday life):

The living beast of their flesh embarrasses them; they are trained to shame... blood, mucus, juices, odours of their flesh fill them with fear. They have some abstracted wish for pristine, immaculate sex... cardboard soaked in perfume. Many of them imagine that in giving birth they abandon themselves to flesh life – drugged and desensitized as they may be. But they've been taught that here is their physical worth... let the gift of the child ennoble and redeem the intricacies of their bodies (Schneemann 1979: 58).

The female form has often been seen as "troublesome" precisely because of its untidy boundaries, its ability to grow another form within it, the processes of menstruation and lactation that link the inner body to the outer world (Jeffries 2007: xii).

In *Fray* and $CH_2 - OH - CH - OH - CH_2 - OH + 3R - CO_2 - Na$ (the chemical composition of soap my portrayal of the female form was dressed in pure white and rich red respectively. A distinct attempt is made at making the appearance of the performer attractive – particularly through the use of the over-emphasised female silhouette (a tailored waist, "sweetheart" neckline, and full skirt). In *Fray* I made overt references to the sewing machine in the "shrine-space" given to me by my Mother for my 21st birthday. It forms part of a rite of passage particular to my family, and it was on this sewing machine that I constructed the dresses conceptualised to construct the image of the female in the theatrical construction. We are reproducing, re-engaging, recommencing ourselves constantly. As part of this preparation there is allocated time given to the ritualistic cleansing of the body (through purging (verbal, as mentioned above, and bodily), physical hygiene (as seen in $CH_2 - OH - CH - OH - CH_2 - OH + 3R - CO_2 - Na$ (the chemical composition of soap) and crying (the literal washing-off of emotion and facial expression)). The body is stripped bare, scrubbed, washed and redescribed in an extreme attempt to acquire the right to a rebirth back into the world. It is a critical process even though it is frequently inspired by an aestheticizing nostalgia for the "real" relationships one has now become incapable of. In Greek mythology Narcissus protests (and thus finds gratification) through the agency of himself. The feeling of the diary becomes (once again) fundamental: the souvenir, the search for the impression lost and protected in memory, the reconstruction of the span of time in which certain events to be re-evoked actually took place: the association between image as stimulus and image as reaction.

How the Everyday Informs our Recommencing Reality

“... I live myself as something fragmented, destroyed and desecrated. Your participation in my exhibition of this dismemberment creates the magical moment in which, in reality, I ask you to put me back together again. It is possibly your looking at me and your participation in this death that is within me that may perhaps bring me back to life. I have the impression of the... subtle hope which represents the need for the reconstruction of the ego. One lives the dismemberment of the ego just as one presents it.”

Diego Napolitani⁶

⁶ Napolitani, D. 2007. The Imaginary in Psychoanalytic Metapsychology. *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*. 25.2.

6.1 Towards a Methodology of Work

The body is the cause of sensations. It is more than an instrument of action: it contributes to the life of consciousness and memory in a psycho-physical parallelism of processes that assume meaning and relief only when they are connected.

Tape recorders, movie cameras, photos, measurements and graphs drawn on maps are some of the means that are used in order to freeze a number of episodic moments. And thus the artist becomes her object – the object as subject; in essence: a dynamic still-life. One's own life, the proofs of one's existence, and the entire sphere of everything "private" are used as repertory material.

Anything and everything can be purloined: 'any action or moment of any day, photographs of oneself, x-rays, or medical test-graphs, one's own voice, reconstructions of one's past or the theatrical representations of one's dreams, the inventory of the events of a family history, as well as violence towards the body' (Vergine 2000: 38).

Gina Pane presents work that is connected to antecedents or memories that are symbolically re-evoked in each of her pieces. Thus, she manages to liberate herself from charges of repressed affection in a manner so clamorous as to come close to the edges of the pathological. The degree of excitation achieved finally reaches trauma. She presents situations of such great emotional discharge that one wonders if she's liberating herself from the weight of the traumatic event or trying to bring it back to life so as better to be able to hold onto it. Frequently her themes have to do with filling up some unsupportable emptiness – an emptiness that is also a kind of mourning.

The consensus of the spectator is essential if the artist is to find "confirmation" in her work. The work is the artist, and her narcissism is no longer invested in an art object but allowed to explode within her own body. The relationship between the individual and the external world is continually disturbed; every single stimulus upsets our equilibrium, but all of us have mechanisms that can re-establish it and that contribute to self-preservation.

In terms of this imposing return to the co-ordinates of bodily experience – we're no longer exclusively dealing with the romantic and cultivated narcissism of the seventies, and instead are confronted with the fables of brutality, a longing for violent trauma, a delight in the atrocious, a pain that smacks of sacrificial rite to hold at bay the Great Fear of the Collective Death. We are living in a present-day Gothic genre: a genre of hallucinations and majestic infantility that discovers its vocation in oratory, couched in a syntax of delirium. It might also be a staging of the human being's loss of the dimension of childhood. In that case, the appeal of the deciduous and the dream of a menacing creativity could be read as expressions of the difficulty of accepting one's own identity, of the conflict between being and becoming, of the inability to be what one knows one ought to be, which is to speak of the maturation of a psychological and social identity (Vergine 2000: 59 – 67).

Among the bodies of this nature that is reduced to what belongs to me, I discover my own body. It can be distinguished from all other bodies because of but a single particular: it is the only body that is not simply a body, but also my body. It is the only body that exists inside of abstraction and that I have chiselled into the world in which, in accordance with experience, I co-ordinate field of sensation in various ways. It is the only body that is immediately at my service, just as its organs are at my service.

Edmund Husserl

An interest in this kind of ritual also depends upon a diminution of the capacity to distinguish between what is "real" and what is "unreal". These ritual actions seem absurd to anyone whose sense of reality is integral. Their horror, thus, must be sufficiently fascinating and brutal to break apart what they suffocate – in this case the intolerable tensions that exist within the self and that are therefore attributed to others.

The hyperreal defines postmodernism's proliferation of simulacra – signs without signifier; the copy of a copy that negates any meaningful notion of the real itself...which functions to flatten meaning and destabilise notions of truth and authenticity (Stupart 2008: 29)

The need to search out painful and humiliating situations, the mime of performing justice upon oneself, the compulsion to self-punishment that can even go to the limit of suicide, and the self-humiliation of the alienated individual are nothing more than the most absurd and terrifying examples. The situations presented almost always exhale a stink and exude panic.

6.2 Reality (with a capital 'R')

Abjection in art produces rejection, disgust, repulsion and severs the identifiatory bonds between the viewer and the image. The Disneyfication of culture provides us instead with a steady stream of bland, second or third-hand experiences; sanitized and hygienic entertainment that can be easily and absent-mindedly consumed.

(Grunenberg 1997: 162-168)

Surrealism can be linked as much to style as to system. Rimbaud's appeal to the systematic derangement of the senses was the instigator for Masson's deliberate implementation of disorientation as process through a blend of sleeplessness and starvation; aligned to the consumption of alcohol and narcotics. These attempts to subvert traditional notions of competence and polite artistic behaviour would be developed through the decades of endurance-based performance work that would begin in the 1960s and would include such projects as Abramović and Ulay's walking the Wall of China for *The Lovers, Great Walk* (1990), Teching Hsieh's *Thirteen Year Performance* (1986-1999), and Stelarc's *Sitting/Swaying: Event for Rock Suspension* (1980).

These would co-exist alongside mind and body-state alterations such as Abramović's swallowing of medication for depression and schizophrenia in her 1973 performance *Rhythm 2*, Gina Pane's bloody ascent of a razor-stepped ladder in *Escalade Sanglante* and Bruce Gilchrist's sleeping mindscape-as-performance *A Way of Asking for Reasons* (1994). The Wooster Group's infamous use of hallucinogenic drugs as part of their rehearsal for the 1984 performance of *LSD (...Just the High Points...)* amounted to the strategic incorporation of disorientation within a production, which gave the illusion of random behaviour at the same time as it was at its most precise. This approach, which is not so much 'automatism' (Freeman 2007), or its performative twin improvisation, as it was a form of imitative behaviour so rigorous and deliberately rehearsed as to read as the "real"; is paradigmatic of postmodern performance.

In such a way this work lends gravity to the cultural function of commissure which indicates a submitting of trust into another's care, control or charge. The word "commissure" is derived from the Latin "*commissura*" to join together or connect, and is the place where two bodies or parts of one body meet as a joint, seam, closure, cleft, juncture. In this sense, the act of spectator involvement allows for a modicum of intersubjectivity and emotional alchemy to take place in the exchange between the observer and the observed.

What seems to be "just there to be seen" is, in fact, rerouted through memory and fantasy, caught up in threads of the unconscious and entangled with the passions... seeing appears to alter the thing seen and to transform the one seeing, showing them to be profoundly intertwined... (Bleeker 2008: 2)

One of the direst faults of *Fray* was the reliance on the spectators to amuse themselves while they were not actively "entertained". The performance took place in several rooms in the Rosedale Building on Hiddingh Campus (Cape Town), separated by a fire escape incorporated as a DNA double-helix. An expectation was initiated for an engagement with me (and the material) that couldn't constantly be gratified: the divided groups were too large to control and the partitions of literal and deployed time made for a shoddy show. My attempt to address this problem by using the figurehead of a "Stage Manager" to distract uneasy members of the public seemed to aggravate their sensibilities and several people commented that they felt "fobbed off" or "patronised" by the pretentious format of the piece. I had not imagined this kind of response in my planning of the work – I predicted a gallery-like reverence for the rooms and a protracted exploration of the possibilities of the spaces. But I had not intimated this to the public: I had relied on a common "reality" and perspective.

Growing awareness of the inevitable entanglement of vision with what is called visuality - the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience – draws attention to the necessity of locating vision within a specific historical and cultural situation (Bleeker 2008: 1)

Whilst this Socio-anthropological faux pas proved counter-productive for the piece it was of exponential value to my research. The spectator's dissatisfaction is the exact point of

dissection between the bone and the marrow of the body of my discourse: our perspective is *not* communal and I cannot expect it to be. The unsustained character that lapsed into a presented mask instead of a “believable” role; the incoherency and seemingly unstructured format of performance; the awkwardness of it all – I was performing the inconsistencies of a daily grapple with dissatisfactory mortality... and it was so “real” in its mundanity some found its indiscernible nature to reside in the mediocre.

‘We are so entangled in the webs of mediated realities that we can no longer distinguish referential from simulated modes of experience because both are perceived as “real” (Hiller 2000: 65). It is the ‘cleaving’ of subject and object, spectator and performer, circumstance and environment, personal and national identity that pixelates our discernment when discussing these concepts.

University of Cape Town

A Body of Work from which to Work

“There is no meaning without some dark spot, without some forbidden or impenetrable domain into which we project fantasies which guarantee our horizon of meaning.”

Slavoj Žižek⁷

⁷ Žižek, S. 1997. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London and New York: Verso

7.1 Installation-involved Performance Art

The very nature of installation-driven performance works on the implication that what is being presented is just one part of an environmental totality. The subject of the centre of the perpetual frame is not necessarily the object of central importance. The perceptual experience of spectators becomes inseparable from the relation of the event and its location, and also from the movements that spectators may be making around and through the space. By collapsing many of the seemingly clean distinctions between the presence of space and the (re)presentation of events, installations deny the faux-purity of performance (Freeman 2007: 70). Rather than being prescribed and pre-determined in rehearsal, spectatorial perception emerges as a result of 'the tension between the haptic and the optic, the located-in-space and the space itself, the adscititious and the accidental' (Freeman 2007: 70).

The work is present, as is the space and as is the spectator; and text for installation is not about the evaporation of presence so much as its re-evaluation. The notion of "presence" is shifted away from something that is ascribed to the performer acting 'in the moment' and 'in the light' (Freeman 2007: 70). It is in turn relocated in the interplay between the watchers, the watched and their negotiation of the type of space occupied; as well as the manner of that occupation. Installations shift the focus of concern away from modernist preoccupations with theatrical 'thereness' to questions about the constitution of the event and the ways in which it implicates the spectator in the 'hereness' of place and event, in the shared space of the work. The installation artist's intention, such as it is, is rarely equated with the meaning of the work. What we find in its place is that the radical decentering of authorial intention creates an opportunity for 'inexpressionism' (Freeman 2007: 72).

The body (and, by extension, the self) has been utilised by a steadily growing number of significant contemporary artists – this is evidenced in the work of practitioners such as Stelarc, Orlan and Franko B. This practice has been articulated since the 1960s and 70s where the body was used as a site of protest and a declared opposition to those ideological constraints imposed by dominant culture as demonstrated by Carolee Schneemann, Chris Burden and Vito Acconci.

On 31 December 1999, on his 49th birthday, Tehching Hsieh concluded his 13-year performance that was never presented to the public. Like his April-April *One Year Performance* of 1980-1981, all that the art "contained" was the body of the artist. His aims were to create a piece that was no longer 'simply a performance, but life' (Freeman 2007: 81); and he chose the 12-month period because a year is the longest (common) natural unit of time. Hsieh states that his work is about 'wasting time and freethinking' (Shaviro 2008). Our trust in the artist's integrity is what separates art from artifice: not a suspension of disbelief so much as a conscious act of belief. In body art (recognized as a term for work that locates the body as subject, object, focus and site) the self is problematised. It is often doubled, idealized, made subject to acts of transgression and obsession, transformation and duration.

The artists' bodies are regarded as matter, as the raw material of their work. This raw matter is in some way transformed, made strange. The body strives for articulation through exhibition, even when this is the exhibition of absence; it strives for difference – even when this distinction reframes the humdrum and everyday. The self has become active currency in art; and this currency is the currency of tangibility. The body as Real, the body as non-illusion, the body as evidence of its own being.

In theatre, as well as in everyday life, we construct our own reality, proceeding from our perception of more or less the same kind of material. In any case, reality is the product of a subjectively conditioned and performed process of construction... Whereas in everyday life we construct reality without being aware of it and without reflecting on it... in the theatre the focus of our attention shifts to the very process of construction and the conditions underlying it.

(Fischer-Lichte 1996: 103, 104)

In *Fray* there was a sense of the constant state of collapse; not being able to explain where, why, how or who I was and the instability of identity as a performer – to the point where even the performance itself was precarious in its form, content and structure. When writing for the pieces there is little consideration as to the demonstrative flexibility of the physical expression of my work, but rather an obsessive act of acknowledgement of the asinine nature of my articulation thereof. My insecurities as an artist (and a human being) became the means to manifest my enquiries of research. Practice as research indeed. Guillermo Gómez-Peña's one-man performance of 1992, *a performance chronicle of the rediscovery of America/by 'The Warrior for Gringostroika' aka Guillermo Gómez-Peña* contains a line that encapsulates this: 'my art is indescribable therefore I'm a performance artist' (Levy 1992: 127). Works like *CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na* (*the chemical composition of soap*) and *Fray* (defined loosely as live or performance art) are more part strategy than part practice. There is a conceptual relationship with the unfinished, the unpolished and the hybrid – a nudging at the edge of the acceptable – that maintains the facet of flawed humanity.

7.2 It is Woman who gives shape to Absence

Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction... (Barthes 1978: 13 – 14)

Both *CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na* (*the chemical composition of soap*) and *Fray* directly references the etymology of my name – Penelope – and the lineage that forms part of my identity. Penelope, wife to Odysseus, waited for her husband to return from his travels for many years, delaying the persistent suitors she acquired by weaving a burial shroud for her husband's father, Laertes, and undoing her work every night (Graves 1992: 734 – 738). Her name is often associated with faithfulness, industrious activity and creativity – and it is from this historical heritage that I began my exploration of Ancient Greek Mythology,

with particular reference to the Minotaur, Penelope and Daedalus (the craftsman who designed the Minotaur's maze, and was imprisoned by King Minos when he gave Ariadne (Minos' daughter) a clew of fibrous thread to help Theseus (Minos' enemy) defeat the Minotaur and escape the maze. He was also the father of Icarus and crafted the wings they used to flee Crete (Graves 1992: 313). Icarus is famous for his hubris and resulting death when he flew too close to the sun). These three characters form the kernel of my exploration of the stereotypes of the persona, the person and the personality respectively; and it is from these three characters that I was able to recognize that I could, effectively, have been born and labeled to wait for my hero to sail over the horizon and give me purpose (the kind of feminine theory referenced in contemporary artists like Sophie Calle and Tracey Emin); or become the hero myself, kill the Hydra and craft my flight mechanism so that I could flee that stereotypical role. Neither story completely fulfills my fictive fairy-tale, and I remain unsatisfied by the prospect of postmodern compromise. There is an absence of release and relief in the limbo a female performer inhabits. But that absence needn't be a disadvantage: our amorphous "inconsistencies" make us immune to the wretched wrenching and retching of an unwilling shape-shifter.

University of Cape Town

My Thesis Production

But still there's a dappled distance to be accounted for. There are worn-out, used up, emptied, depleted, excreted yesterdays: and yesterdays are begotten of affairs between meals and clothes and shoes, and walking and kindness and kisses and... I'm afraid of the dark.

Penelope Youngleson⁸

⁸ Youngleson, P. 2009. *No, that's not it...at all*. Performed in the Arena Theatre on Hiddingh Campus, Cape Town

8.1 Prime Numbers – Mathematical Sequences that add up to my Logic

My thesis production *1, 3, 5, 7, 11 (not 9)* refers to mathematical sequences called prime numbers. These numbers are only divisible by themselves and one. Nine is commonly assumed to be a prime number (because it is odd) – but is, in fact, divisible by three. In relation to the work, this relates to the person, persona and personality (and that the body cannot be divided only by itself – according to the personality and identity theories discussed above) and the way humans like to make sense of things through associative groups (series of objects, collective identities (gender/sexuality, ethnicity/culture and class) and compartmentalised identities). The fact that the initial numbers are “Prime” – emphasised, elevated, esteemed – implies a preference (particularly because of the emphatic rejection of the divisible number: “not 9”). In actual fact, the title refers to the theoretical and practical search I’ve undergone in sifting through assumed and assimilated identities; finally realising that the only possibility that I have hitherto ignored is that we can be all of these things – and more – simultaneously. This also refers to the Hydra monster mentioned in Chapter Two: the nine heads continue to re-generate and multiply, but only one of them is immortal – and Hercules was forced to cauterise the stump of each neck he had decapitated from the beast so as to discover its “true” identity and, therefore, weakness by a process of elimination.

Mathematical sequences feature throughout the piece; they recur, recommence, resurge and remonstrate both performer and audience member through endless lists, floor-patterns, entrance passwords, filing systems, binary languages, genetic codes and numbered steps. Logic is a boundary enforced by (and re-iterated through) a collective sense of common “reality” shared with other individuals. It is a denominator that the performance uses as a device to occupy the audience members and employ them actively with encoded riddles that release tangents in the work.

8.2 Numb-ers – Imagery used in *1, 3, 5, 7, 11 (not 9)* and Informing Factors essential in a review of the Piece

Items repeatedly used in my work include thread (ravelled and unravelled), garments, coverings or mantles and the practice of needlecraft. These can be directly related to the sense of self as female derived from my maternal role model (as discussed in Chapter Five) and the emphasis she placed on “home-making” in my upbringing. The threaded DNA double-helix on the stairwell makes direct reference to the sense of self made from layers and strands of genetic code; how we are never one thing, and what we are is usually a knotted mess. However, the “fraying” of the threads, spitting out of the spool and “speaking” of the threads through the use of the mp3 players show recognition of the disengagement with the preconception of this premise to be as valid as an affirmation of it. The sense of expelling something from the system (a “purging”) features throughout the performance: we have too much inside of us; our bodies cannot contain the divergent realities that collide in our

cognition. Along with this expulsion comes a “feminine” need to restore balance and simultaneously create. I use the word “feminine” here with the connotative purpose of referencing a hetero-normative, patriarchal perception of what constitutes “feminine” behaviour.

Penelope, in Greek mythology, unravelled her tapestry nightly so as to remain loyal to her husband and avoid infidelity – in both her marriage and her duties to society in that context. This is encapsulated for me, most strongly, by the sewing machine. My family, traditionally, gives their daughters a sewing machine as their coming-of-age rite. I was taught how to use a machine as a young girl by my Mother, and have my first memory of hating her with my foot on the tread-peddle of her Bernina and her leaning over my left arm – inspecting my work. It was a hot, splayed-fingered anger: she was evaluating my work and suggesting I start again from the beginning, my seams were wrong and therefore the garment would not hold together. It would be fundamentally flawed. I did not listen to her, I would not listen to her; and I carried on sewing. I was capable, I would redeem my seams. The straggly, misshapen garment was never worn. I keep it in the back of my cupboard for a month or so and then gave it away to someone less fortunate than myself (context dependant) at the first opportunity when *she* couldn't see. My seams were incorrect – the division and coalition of what held my covering together did not correlate.

This story defined how I saw myself creatively for a long time, I could not forgive someone else for being right and I could not forgive myself for being wrong. This is Eve's curse in the Garden of Eden (one of the most prevailing examples in literature for hetero-normative standards in Western society), and the reason she and Adam made “coverings” for themselves. But I couldn't even get the curse right. The concept of creativity or “craft” (which is a term that has lost its status over the past 600 years, it used to be a compliment but now exiles one to the realms of decoupage and scrap booking – decidedly “feminine” past-times) aligns itself with Daedalus and the ability to escape a given set of circumstances. The use of needlecraft and hand-stitching is also a skill my Mother taught me, and a habit that was encouraged during my early teens so that I could make embroidered cushion covers and give them to my teachers as thank-you presents at the end of each academic year.

The earmuffs and photographs of my ruptured skin speak to isolations and violations of the body. To the private becoming public by exposing its vulnerability. When one watches the video footage with the earmuffs on, one's world becomes insular, self-involved and detached. One focuses on a single pursuit – observation. The zooming in on the photographs achieves the same goal, but stimulates a different sensory function. This perspective pull and attention to emphasis is also evident in the dynamic portraits projected onto the wall of one of the rooms. The whole premise of a portrait is that it is a lifeless representation of a subject (in this case, a human being). In all ways it should appear to be human in appearance (provided that it is a realistic portrayal, of course) except the lack of breath and voice to animate the “talking head”. Again, the idea of the Hydra is intimated through the poison(ed)-breath resulting in its

absence and the decapitated heads giving life to other manifestations of the self. The dynamic portrait also allows for a literal framing of the subject as object; where one can look at the Self being looked at. One of the "Selves" dissolves into tears (and is, incidentally, much closer to the camera in composition than the other) and it is our proximity to the rupture of the face, the gaping mouth (that moist hole of Chapter 1) and the crumpled eyes that disturbs our distancing from the subject. Likewise the body-casts (impressions of my body) are addendums to my anatomy – as the wheel is an extension of the leg so machines are a tangent of the brain. These body-casts are also mini-perpetual motion machines; their kinetic energy lies in my body – but they hold the latent potential of the artist: 'Cruche d'abord est vide et le plus tôt possible vide encore' (Schwenger 2006: 35). The irony being, that unlike the jug, the casts are not made to carry liquid. Because they are made of plaster of Paris, if they tried to emulate the jug and 'fill itself while singing', the structure would collapse and render itself a pre-embryonic, leaking mess. The kind of mess that Carolee Schneemann speaks about, the kind that is not "feminine".

I also incorporate filing cabinets filled with data, conversations, text messages, letters, scripts, ideas, x-rays – the scraps of the everyday. The bread-tags found in the bottom drawer precipitate the notion that our sustenance is actually derived from our daily interaction. The economic crises of the past year and a half has seen basic transactional needs like bread, milk and electricity rise in price by as much as 37%. There is a transaction of data taking place in our converging realities, our conversations, our intersections of the private and public sectors. We need to be fed by each other; and we need to value this interaction as important as meeting our biological needs. Denying our emotions forces a subscription to an outdated sense of self outside of the holistic examination within a postmodern framework.

In the same room as the perpetual-motion machine and the body casts, the performer "puts on" the Icarus wings, and repeatedly attempts to fly straight into a wall. We are repeating the mistakes of our Mothers (and Fathers); we cannot transcend this paradigm because of our ignorance of any other to inhabit. The performer also journeys to the Rosedale Quad, where she tries desperately to remember what it was she wanted to say. The superiority of the audience in peering down at her, willing her to remember is emphasised through the perspective-pull. In that space she is surrounded by light bulbs on hanging, knotted, dangling and fraying threads – but, try as she might, she just can't think what it was that she wanted to articulate.

The dream machine (in the smallest room) is best "viewed" with one's eyes shut. In this room is a bar fridge, beverages and a comfortable armchair. Audience members are encouraged to go inside and relax, to allow themselves to engage in their subconscious. This room is constructed to reference the isolation of watching television in one's home: the real/non-real cusp that encroaches our sitting rooms. On the walls are photographs I've taken of myself – or parts of my body – over the past 6 months (in preparation for the performance).

The performer in the room across the hall from the dream machine is dancing on a moated box covered in x-rays of my body. She's stuck by the physical boundaries of anatomy and space, like a music-box ballerina. There is also footage of me sewing her costume – again inferring the idea that coverings are constructed, and that we recommence and redress the notion of where our construction begins and ends.

The concept of books as passwords into rooms is quite obvious. As a Masters student and practitioner my grapple with this subject matter is supplemented by the theoretical works of seasoned intellectuals in my chosen discipline. Every postgraduate student is familiar with the concept of poring over books to find answers to questions that you've already decided upon. To find references to substantiate things you want to say but lack the academic status or know-how to posit yourself. And every academic can acknowledge the extreme pleasure of reading an opinion that causes one's own to wriggle, look around and re-establish itself with fresh perspective. The passwords aim to do this. Audience members may not enter a space until they have solved a riddle (with kudos to Daedalus and the Minotaur, as well as Hercules and his Twelve Tasks – one of which was the Hydra), the answer to which is found in the books outside of the space. Should they be unable to do so, they will not see that facet of the performance. There is always more research to be done, and always someone who has said what you have said... but put it more succinctly. It is then, sometimes, better not to go into the room; but simply imagine for yourself what might have been inside.

**In Conclusion (like an Oompa Loompa sailing
down a river made of hot chocolate in a boiled-
sweet boat. In the pitch dark.)**

“There’s no earthly way of knowing
Which direction they are going!
There’s no knowing where they’re rowing,
Or which way the river’s flowing!
Not a speck of light is showing,
So the danger must be growing,
For the rowers keep on rowing,
And they’re certainly not showing
Any signs that they are slowing...”

Roald Dahl⁹

⁹ Dahl, R. 1998. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. London: Penguin Books

In conclusion, our preoccupation with the patchwork nature of our culture and our constant foraging for identity denotes an obsession with the “found objects” from which our existence is comprised. As South Africans our experience is both infinitely unique and internationally commonplace – dependant on our adoption of and adaptation to collective culture.

Our identity is informed by such a divergent collection of influences that it is possible to be simultaneously engaged in multiple personality actualizations (both in performed interactions and “unperformed” conventions) – and for these realizations to be simultaneously “honest” in their discourse. My personal history, geographic location, hybridization and disposition have equal share in the formulation of my work; and it is through the exploration of the self in my work that I realize more and more who I have decided that I am – and often, more importantly, who I am not... and, therefore, what my new work will constitute.

Kristine Stiles interviewed Marina Abramović and asked her: ‘Who are you?’ Abramović answered, ‘I don’t know; I learn about myself through work, not through my life’ (Biesenbach, Iles & Stiles 2008: 69).

Although the work is difficult to digest because it does not “sit” well in a genre, style or set of ethics; it is precisely because of the slippery irreverence of the subject (my ‘slimy’ self) that I feel it would be of material benefit to the cross-disciplinary scholarship of the Humanities faculty as an example of contemporary identity-exploration and culturally-located matter in the pretext of a person/persona/personality female performer.

It is with this framework in mind that I look forward to the explication of my enquiry through the final practical project. At this point in my research there’s ‘...no earthly way of knowing/Which direction they are going...’ – the extrapolation of the inquiry through the expounding of *Fray* as central to the new work denotes a settled core. However, the arranged marriage between my academic premises and my practical actualisation is required to culminate in my final piece. And how that will, ultimately, transpire, transpose and transport my inclinations into manifestation is anyone’s guess.

This is the “Recommencing Reality” I’ve been aspiring to throughout my process; this is the tautology of performance: where we look for ourselves (and recognisable versions of ourselves) in an infinite series of repeated patterns and logic. We look for comfort and safety. And we find it in numbers.

Appendix 1

$CH_2 - OH - CH - OH - CH_2 - OH + 3R - CO_2 - Na$ (the chemical composition
of soap)

I'm just like anybody. I cut and I bleed.

And I embarrass easily.

Michael Jackson

1.1 CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na (the chemical composition of soap)

The premise of CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na (the chemical composition of soap) is the convergence of simultaneous and symbiotic realities: a microbiotic and macrobiotic experience of the same space, place and time; where a collective, critical mass is formed (critical mass being the point where a certain number of molecules constitute a shift towards a new composition of matter). Therefore, how a group identity denotes an entirely new identity, connotation (or interpretation) for the individual piece or person. The site of the women's public toilet on campus provides an opportunity for strangers to meet on fairly intimate terms daily.

The Four Areas of the Human Body I have chosen to exhibit are: **Blood, Hair, Skin and Excrement** – and our daily confrontation with them. The audience was asked to wait in the entrance hall (and supplied with surgical hygiene masks) which contained a condom-dispenser filled with scrabble pieces and an inventory list of everything contained in the space. Inside the bathroom was a hospital tray on wheels with 2 litres of red-dyed guava juice, 12 shot-glasses, 12 pill containers full of shortbread crumbs (in proportional ratio to the amount of skin cells shed per day by the average human being), Protea flowers made from metal pot-scourers and razor blades, and place-cards inviting audience members to “eat me” and “drink me”; and thanking them for coming. Suspended above the tray was a clock that had stopped, on the back of which was a toilet roll that I had written on and then rolled up again (my cerebral excrement in the form of journaling), and hanging from the clock was a key given to me by my Mother (it is the key for the oldest cemetery in Durban – she was, for a time, on the Church council and therefore a custodian of the site). On the one wall were the sinks and soap dispensers which I methodically cleaned throughout the performance with a combination of bleach and disinfectant. On the opposite wall I displayed 45 toilet rolls that had been written on over the months preceding the event. Audience members were invited to read these, as well as my Story Strategies book (in which I wrote everything from shopping lists to academic references). The bathroom stalls were blocked with rostra, which I covered in red cloth and converted into shrines: the object of worship on each pedestal was a bar of Lifebuoy soap. Playing on one of the shrines was footage of my daily rituals of cleansing, shown on a field monitor (likened unto a security camera). Whilst this was shown, my usher (dressed in a hospital gown) played the pre-recorded voice-over (see 1.2) on a mini-CD player. I continued to clean the space around them (which they continued to defile, by being in the space) until the audience members had all left.

1.2 Voice-Over Script for CH₂ - OH - CH - OH - CH₂ - OH+3R - CO₂ - Na (the chemical composition of soap)

Hello. It's rather awkward, me being here...I've never done anything like this before. I know you probably hear that all the time, but you must understand that for me it really is rather intimidating. You see, I struggle somewhat when it comes to getting my feelings across...which isn't a very good thing to be suffering from. Not in this kind of relationship anyway. You could say we have a relationship, couldn't you? You listen to me while I tell you everything about myself. What I'm feeling and experiencing. How I see things. I see things in a very particular way. I suppose you could say that's why I'm here. You must have a dandy old time, mustn't you? I mean, seems like everyone's a voyeurist these days; that's how reality TV makes all its money. We love to poke our noses into every available little hole and sniff around: we adore the hunt of finding someone who's slightly more crazy and slightly less endearing than ourselves. A nation fixated on the nonsensical, the ludicrous, crass,

incoherent desperation of the masses. The mask of reality that justifies the dilapidated yoke of oppression. The sea of dysfunction that capsizes the refuge of civilization.... That was one too far, wasn't it? I was doing rather well up until then; had a certain majestic ring to my turn of phrase. But a 'sea of dysfunction overpowering the refuge of civilization'??

I have a lot to say, you know.

And anyway, it was a rather appropriate turn of phrase because I happen to love water. I do, I love water. It's so cleansing, isn't it? So clear. Well, it would have to be, wouldn't it; it's see-through. But you know what I mean; it's got purity about it. There's nothing I enjoy more than a piping hot shower.

Sometimes I put the hot tap on so fully that my skin itches and shrinks against the punishment... and steams off its indignation. I can stand there for hours, slowly cooking away the mottled translucence of my skin; forcing pink blood to the surface. Washing away the day's dilution of myself and boiling off my fatty ostentation.

One of the most unexpected joys in an unassuming day is the smell of freshly washed hair as you pass someone. The fresh, crisp crunch of cleanliness and hygiene is incomparable to most other treats. Delightful in its simplicity yet infinitely rare in its application.

I avoid bathing. You're basically sitting in your own filth, trying to rub the foam off of your every surface, orifice; nonetheless the dirt and the dust and skin cells waddle determinedly upstream to wedge themselves amongst the follicles. We are not alone. No matter how clean we are or how healthy we feel, we carry around on our bodies billions of microbes—microscopic one-celled organisms called bacteria and viruses. Although they cannot be seen, microbes hide under fingernails, lurk between teeth, and live in hair. There are more than six hundred thousand bacteria living on just one square inch of skin, and an average person has about 200 grams of bacteria in and on his or her body at any given time. This is equivalent to almost half a block of butter. There are more microbes on a person's body than there are humans on Earth. One could almost say that there is more unseen life than seen.

Viruses and bacteria are responsible for some of the deadliest diseases in history, such as AIDS, the plague, and flu. And yet bacteria perform the most important roles in maintaining life on this planet. All life on Earth depends on their activities. Bacteria are the planet's recyclers, plant nurturers, and undertakers; without them, we would be knee-deep in blood, hair, skin and shit.

Which is why it completely defeats the point of what I was trying to say about water if you bath in it.

PAUSE

Can you hear that gentle humming? It's very soft, you must listen attentively. Hazzarding a guess, I should say it's your blood: pulsating from the arteries to placate the cells and satisfy their, well, blood-lust. Sorry, but you have to admit, it's worth a giggle. The thought of cells waiting around tarted up in feathers and yearning, staring through the plate-glass plasma like some teenage Amsterdam prostitute. Just waiting for the blood to impart an ancient exchange. Electrolysis, alchemy, really. The substitution of metals. Iron for gold, blood for survival. Yes, it could be your blood you're hearing. I hate to be the one to say it, but you are part of this whole extravaganza. You thought you were an apathetic observer, I know. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, you probably would've wanted to spruce yourself up a bit. Maybe even put on another shirt. Yes, you my dear. But never mind... I'm sure you'll do your very best tomorrow. But, you have to admit, the element of surprise is somewhat endearing. I know it helps me a great deal to know that you're not expecting anything from me. Well,

actually, there's rather a lot of pressure, performance wise and all that, but because you're in the dark I can formulate my attack somewhat succinctly.

PAUSE

I cut my arms open with a steak knife yesterday afternoon at thirty-seven minutes past 1pm. It seems appropriate and relevant that it was lunchtime. The knife cost me R12, 99; and I first used it to cut free my 2minute noodle packet, because the air-tight sealant makes it impossible for human hands to open. Bad planning if you ask me... the kind of people who's target market are those who want to eat food made by pouring hot water over dehydrated carbohydrates should be supporting the "instant gratification" lifestyle. Not inhibiting it. If we had the time it takes to open those packets with our bare hands, our opposable thumbs, our human biology, we could just as well have made some proper food. No one chooses to live like this.

I don't know, but maybe if I could've just ripped the noodles open I wouldn't have had the knife in my hand, and I wouldn't have thought that I might feel better if I could put the focus somewhere else.

The first few were just scratches; they raised confused junctions on my skin. Conjunctions. Joining what can't be undone to what I'm tempted to do.

The next cut is honest. My flesh sighs open. My lungs gasp out.

There's a half-open reality when you hold your own blood...We carry it around all day. 4 litres, 2 big Coke bottles, 16 glasses. It's in us and through us and around us. But taken out of context, out of where our conscience thinks it should be; it changes everything. The difference between an artery and a vein is that the blood in a vein is deoxygenated. Old. Used up. The point of blood is to bring oxygen to the cells in various parts of the body. To sustain the body and, by extension, life. The life is in the blood. Leviticus. What does God think about this? I know He wouldn't want it. I feel guilty that I need to do this to feel better; that I can't find the solution where I know it should be. And I feel guilty that I don't feel guilty enough to stop myself. And my parents. My parents and my friends. What if they found out? If they knew that reality and truth as defined by the parameters of my perpendicular existence are not the same.

I'm really hungry. I forgot to eat my noodles...they're probably cold by now.

I cut my arms into a horoscope yesterday afternoon. I joined the dots with a dirty steak knife. And it's proved that I am normal, that I bleed, just like everybody else.

And it took forever just to get through my skin.

PAUSE

It's not that I mind sharing soap. Well, actually I do. But the point is that it's not about the soap itself. Per se. It's the principle behind the soap. The fact that I have to share my percentage of entitlement to the soap with an unspecified number of people and their hands is upsetting. That's why I'd rather risk bladder infection and kidney strain (and the possibility of adult diapers unless I practice my pelvic floor muscles) – I'd rather risk all that than go to a public bathroom. I don't know where they've been or what they've been doing; I mean, I just don't feel I know them well enough to be sharing liquid cleansing mediums. Especially because those dispensers always have touch-pads that you *know* someone else has been fingering

before you. I understand that it's a normal part of everyday life. But I don't understand why my life has to include people whose names I don't even know. Especially on such an intimate level.

I shower twice a day. I worry about the lack of water and sustainable forests and the ozone. But I do shower twice a day. I also recycle glass, newspaper and my plastic bank cards (every five years or so when they expire) to make up for it. I know it's an unbalanced exchange, but it's the best I can do right now. So take back that accusatory stare, it's searing my conscious. I can feel all the little neurotransmitters curling up and in on themselves, burning up and withering under the heat of your pity and arrogance. If you carry on they'll feather away all together, little white, filigree thoughts, drifting on a breeze of nothingness...

What was I saying? I know I had a point. It's your fault I forgot it. It's your transference of emotion onto me, your projection of failure and hurt; everything your life has thrown at you that you think you can just toss in my direction because of my gentility of nature and susceptible spirit...What?

PAUSE

My flatmate's boyfriend slept over last night. Again. And this morning he used my soap too. Now I'm not an anal retentive person, and I don't (generally) obsess about the insignificant. But three people sharing one bar of soap and not the same DNA is not normal. Do you think I'm being unreasonable? Do you?? Because I don't. If I wanted to share in the intricacies of his every nook and cranny I would've invited him over. Instead of enjoying the muffled experience through thin walls.

PAUSE

Soap is divided between molecular binaries: $\text{CH}_3(\text{CH}_2)_{16}$ forms the hydrocarbon component and $\text{CO}_2 + \text{Na}$ forms the ionic base.

Non-polar molecules (such as grease and dirt) attach to the polar molecules of soap and can be washed away in a de-scaling fashion with the aid of a dissolving agent (such as H_2O) and moderate use of kinetic energy in the form of friction.

PAUSE

Did I just have this conversation? I feel as though I did. I was sure we had a connection, it wasn't just cerebral. It was more than words. I feel as though I know you, and you know me. Do you like spending time with me? I know I'm a little strange; but, really, in this post-modern world you'll struggle to find someone who isn't. Why do I feel as though you can't see me. Can't hear me? Have my lips been moving? And if they have, has there been any sound coming out? Can you lip read? That would help me infinitely, I'm never sure if the sound is coming out or not – I tend to hear things that aren't really there, so I disregard a lot of the hum around me. If you can lip read, I think we should spend more time together. We'd both benefit. I would share all that I've learnt, my philosophies, explorations, discoveries. And you could be my mouthpiece, my muse. Think about it. Think about me. (I'm sure that was a line from a movie, I distinctly recall hearing that somewhere before. I can even hear the voice in my head. It's a sad, soft woman, pleading to be loved and acknowledged. Actually, she could've been a prostitute. I can't remember. It's irrelevant to what we're feeling, right now). You do feel something, don't you? I have touched you, on some level, at least. Or have I just been staring at you for the past twenty minutes?

I can't think what I wanted to say. My initial impulse. I know there was one thought, an epiphany I wanted to share with you. Something that could be just ours, our moment of sunshine.

But I can't remember it now. And the more I try to, the more I think about Chernobyl, and shopping lists and double A batteries and Kirstenbosch proteas and staplers and deodorant and shortbread and razor blades. I don't think you did hear me.

1.3 Inventory List

Waiting Room:

Green Floor

Pink Walls

1 x Door

1 x Condom dispensing machine

100 x Scrabble Pieces

1 x Window

1 x Light (operated from outside)

2 x Light Switches

1 x CD player

7 x Audio Tracks

12 x Visitor's Badges

12 x Programs

6 x Rostra (2 x white and 4 x pink)

Undetermined number of superfluous Rostra dependent on Performer's muscularity and inclination

Public Toilet:

Green Floor

Pink Walls

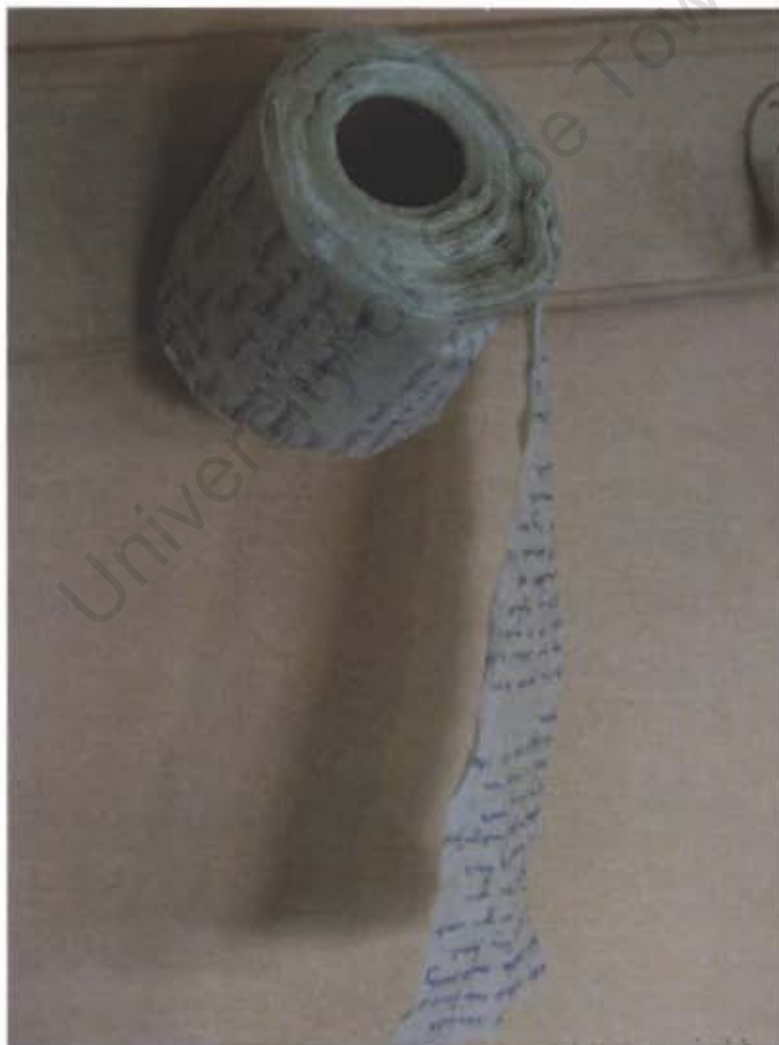
1 x Rubbish Bin

2 x Mirrors

3 x Windows (with 13 panes each)

2 x Soap Dispensers
1 x Field Monitor
Film Footage
4 x Bars of Soap
8 – Seater Bench
32 Fat Hooks
10 Thin Hooks
5 Toilets (Black with Steel Chains)
1 x Sanitary Bin
Undetermined number of Sanitary Bags
6 x Lights
22.5 x Tiles above the Sinks
1 x Metal Trolley
12 x Greek Shortbread
12 x Plastic Pill Containers
1 x Container Guava Juice (with red food colouring)
3 x Non-Tactile Protea
12 x Plastic Shot Glasses
1 x Story Strategies Book/Journal
30 x Toilet Rolls (detailing Journal entries)
Undetermined number of Toilet Rolls in cubicles (subject to ablutions of the department)
10 x Rostra
5 x Red Tablecloths
Undetermined amount of Bleach
Undetermined amount of I.C.U. Disinfectant.

1 x Performer



Archival Photographs from $\text{CH}_2 - \text{OH} - \text{CH} - \text{OH} - \text{CH}_2 - \text{OH} + 3\text{R} - \text{CO}_2 - \text{Na}$ (the chemical composition of soap) (Youngleson 2008)

University of Cape Town

Appendix 2

No, that's not it... at all

2.1 No, that's not it...at all Script

The performer is on stage in a large packing box. The "Click" refers to her snapping the metal hinges in place that seal the lid of the box after she's climbed out of it. Each "Click" is associated with a name she's been called and, essentially, seals part of her identity. She starts the play crouched inside, with the lid on the box, and the hinges on her person, so that she can get out. A Voice Over is played, to which she responds, but does not actually hear (in terms of dialogue).

V.O: I'm adrift. There's a lapping, a yapping, a snapping, a slapping around my ankles; around my ribcage; around my head. There's a tap, tap, tapping that reminds and rewinds me. I mustn't get too comfortable. I must stay awake. I must stay away.. I must stay awake.

I mustn't get too comfortable. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; and poverty comes like a prowler.. and need comes like an armed man.

But still there's a dappled distance to be accounted for. There are worn-out, used up, emptied, depleted, excreted yesterdays: and yesterdays are begotten of affairs between meals and clothes and shoes, and walking and kindness and kisses and...

Penny: I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid of the dark.

V.O: Don't be afraid. There's nothing to be afraid of. I've checked underneath and on top... there's nothing there. And the dark is simply when there's no light... nothing more complicated or scary than that.

Penny: Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please. Please.

V.O: Now come on. There's no need to make such a fuss. There's nothing out there. Nothing to be afraid of!

Penny lifts the lid off, head pops out (like an ID photo)

Penny: Birth name: Penelope. Inherent meaning: Industrious weaver and faithful individual. Connotation: Creative spirit. Reaction: Whenever people call me Penelope I immediately assume I've done something naughty.

Picks lid up, puts it on her head.

Hi. I'm Penny – like the old coin. See a penny, pick it up.. *(put crate lid on floor)* all day long you'll have good luck. If one more schmuck thinks it'd be a charming little ice-breaker to pluck me off the floor while prattling off this inane rhyme I will perform a frontal lobotomy on the unfortunate cretin using only a dull teaspoon and my front teeth. *(Click, click)*

You could also call me Pen (that's the abbreviated, affectionate term). It led to several unwanted nicknames (like Nibs and Parker) in my gung-ho, jolly hockeysticks, all-girls school. I bloody hate that Enid Blyton and Anne of Green sodding Gables for peddling the propaganda of this sort of blatant bigotry.

(Click)

My Grandmother died when I was 14. She'd been in hospital for 5 months but I didn't even get a chance to say goodbye because my father wouldn't let us visit her towards the end. He said she was a dignified lady and didn't deserve to be remembered as an emaciated skeleton. She was convinced the nursing staff were trying to steal all her worldly possessions and poison her: so when she became bed-ridden and couldn't lock them out anymore she took to the missionary position with an umbrella – which she wielded at anyone and anything she didn't like the look of. She particularly hated the doctor. She said that for someone who made all of his money out of anatomy he really couldn't tell his arse from his elbow.

When I was in Grade 7 all the other girls in my class started ice-skating on a Sunday (visiting day) and I asked my dad if I could give Granny a skip.

I'm not an actual Jew. It travels down the Mother's line, and she's a Christian. And even my father is only a Jew by Birth, not practice. Although he lived at home until he got married at 39... so that's probably Jewish enough to make him a Rabbi – I don't know. I consider myself a quasi-Jew. So when I asked if I could miss out on the weekly trips to see my Bubbe, I had no idea what I was doing. My father took off his glasses. Bad sign.

(Spoken with a Polish accent) "Your Grandmother survived the German occupation." *(Spoken without accent)* He hasn't actually got this accent; it just lends gravity to the whole Eastern-European, Yiddish-plight thing. *(Accent resumes)* "She survived Kaiserwald and the death trains from Latvia to Poland. She survived years of hardship and pain. And do you know why she did that? So that she could sit in an Old Age Home on her deathbed and watch paint peel? No. She did that so she could live to see her family and be appreciated by them." *(Accent relinquished)* Shakes out his newspaper. Adjusts his glasses. Resumes reading in a disgruntled fashion.

I took this as a no and threw away my pictures of crown-toothed Americans in sparkly figure-skating outfits. And on the 18 March 1998 it first occurred to me to hate my Father for being unfair. And to hate my Grandmother for having unrealistically high expectations of me vindicating her life and for not letting me become Nancy Kerrigan (before Tonya Harding took a baseball bat to her left-pivot knee).

I hated being Jew...ish even more when I wasn't allowed to pierce or tattoo anything (Leviticus 19 vs 27-29) – and I still can't wear earrings because clip-ons give me a pressure headache. So I pierced my left nipple to vindicate my dreams in Grade 10, just so I could feel how it would feel to sit down at the breakfast table with my Dad, eating eggs and bacon, and know that even if I couldn't ice-skate I still knew that he couldn't see, but I could feel, that I had a big, fat, piercing under his nose.

I took it out the next day because it was fucking sore.

Mariette started calling my Pennikins in 2004, and the cast of *Twilight* picked it up in 2008. How more than one person could conceive of this monstrosity is beyond me. I would maim and disfigure small woodland creatures to be shod of it. *(Click)*

My sister kept me humble throughout our childhood with nicknames that ranged from the obscene to the obliquely tender to the obtusely awkward. Ponk remains my favourite because of the way she traps the "N" up in the attic of her hard palate and then smacks the "K" out from behind her front teeth. The onomatopoeia of the word always reminds me of beach bats – the kind where the one side of the paddle is covered in Velcro – and how the ball is bandied about amongst the retching and wrenching of its conversation between hits. *(Click)*

And Lauren (another crafty Jew, as we like to call ourselves) gave me the name "Squirrel" in our first year of Varsity. I was acutely anorexic in school; and at my thinnest weighed exactly

half of what I do now. When I went to Stellenbosch instead of becoming more ill (as predicted) I put on weight. A lot of weight. Lauren and I euphemistically referred to this as our hibernation insulation. And we pretended we were squirrels and badgers gathering supplies for the winter. I used to call her Badger, and she still calls me Squirrel. I should get my stomach stapled. *(Click)*

Where do you think the light goes that isn't light anymore? I mean darkness is not quantifiable; it's merely the absence of a source of illumination. Regardless of size or intensity, light is a fact. It's undeniable. Where there is light there cannot be darkness. It flees. So if it's fled (fled – is that a word?) I can definitely have peed.. but fled? Fled! So, once the darkness has... gone away, what happens once the light goes out again? The darkness come running back! But how does it know? And is there ever a drag? A delay? I tried testing it the other day. I constructed a relay of matches, candles, a bedside lamp and overhead lights. I ran around for over an hour trying to beat the darkness; I turned on everything all together, then I turned things on one at a time, then I left the dark for a while (let it think it'd won) and then I slammed my hand against the light switches, struck three matches and singed my skin brown. But I forgot to time it. I think I might've been slightly behind the last time, but I'll never know for sure. And I wouldn't want to be a liar, especially not against the Universal Laws of Physics.

Ian started calling me Penneth while drunk and doing volunteer work (not simultaneously) in Worcester. He had the epiphany that if Kenny was short for Kenneth... *(Click)* There are still some students at the Worcester School for the Visually impaired that refer to his friend Penneth. And he hasn't the heart to tell them it's not my real name because they're blind. Handicapped. I mean, disabled. I mean differently abled.

I stood naked outside your door today. Not literally naked.. just, you know, in a state of vulnerability. And I waited for you; and willed you to open the door. And to see me. And to see me for what and who I am and not just what our acquaintances would like us to be. And you awkwardly offered me a seat, and you had no idea what to do with me. And I smiled too much and breathed too hard. I might've even flared my nostrils when I smiled at you, I can't remember. I tried reconstructing it later, but you were looking at me from above, so I can't be sure of the angle and extent of the nostril flare. Should dilation flaration have occurred... to any extent.

I'm standing naked outside your door. And you're sitting on the other side of it.

My mother has an inexhaustible love for alliteration. My very first nickname was Penny Pumpkin Pie. P, p, p. I love alliteration. *(Click)*

Performer steps into a spotlight, centre stage

One. Just one, single, pure, simple thought ought to be available to the semi-intelligent, literate mind. A destination of purpose; it can be mulled over, mused, mortifying. I really don't care. Cleanness of thought. Not the ramshackle, run-down, rash, recoiling, remiss, rebelling, ravaging reproof of splintering thoughts piercing the delicacy of the conscience.

Did I just have this conversation? I feel as though I did. I was sure we had a connection, it wasn't just cerebral. It was more than words. I feel as though I know you and you know me. Do you like spending time with me? I know I'm a little strange, but really in this post-modern world you'll struggle to find someone who isn't. Why do I feel as though you can't hear me? Have my lips been moving? And if so, has any sound been coming out? Can you lip read?? That would help me infinitely, I'm never sure if the sound is coming out or not so I tend to disregard a lot of the hum around me. If you can lip read I think we should spend more time

together. Think about it. Think about me. You do feel something, don't you? I have touched you on some level, at least. I know there was one thought. An epiphany I wanted to share with you that could be just ours. Our moment of sunshine. But I can't remember what I'm supposed to say.

By this time she has moved her way into the audience and found an audience member she feels an affinity for. She gestures toward the person with the final hinge, inviting them to take it onstage and click it into place. Once the persona has stood up, she usurps their seat, and they seal the performance by naming her "performer" – only to find that it is they that are onstage. And she begins to clap.

(Click)



Archival Photographs of *No, that's not it...at all* (Youngleson 2009)

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