

Out of Sight
Re-imagining Graaff's Pool

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of the degree of Master of Fine Art

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
GRADUATE SCHOOL IN HUMANITIES

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I, Justin Ashley John Brett of 21b Upper Bloem Street, Schotschekloof, 8001, do hereby declare that I empower the University of Cape Town to produce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents of my dissertation entitled *Out of Sight – Re-imagining Graaff's Pool* in any manner whatsoever.

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Abstract

This paper attempts to set out the parameters for a discussion of my Masters exhibition, entitled *Out of Sight*. It traces out the progress of this exhibition over the course of two years, attempting to account for the parallel development of my work across the media of sculpture, drawing and figure painting. As such the paper traces out my engagement with the two major thematic concerns of my masters exhibition: the representation of the gay male body and architectural space and site. The latter concerns both my strategies for the re-modelling of the gallery space, and my approach to the representation of the specific site of Graaff's Pool, on the Sea Point Promenade in Cape Town.

I set out to explain how this site, located in a liminal space, geologically, architecturally and historically, becomes a nodal point for the concerns of my masters project. As such, I begin to trace out the themes that intersect in my sculptural re-presentations of the site of Graaff's pool operating within zones of visibility and invisibility. My translation of this site into a site-specific installation in the gallery space intentionally disturbs the viewer's ability to see, in its treatment of scale and surface, as well as obstructs and directs their movement through the space.

This discussion of visibility/invisibility extends to my treatment of the figure in drawings and watercolours, paying particular attention to my working of the surface in order to trouble the act of looking, hence the visibility or presence of the figure. This enables me to introduce ideas around the difficulties of representation in general, but particularly of the gay male body and the expression of a gay male subjectivity. I introduce into my discussion, if cautiously, the ideas of Michel Foucault and Mikhael Bakhtin.

I do not in any way present a synthesis of these ideas, but begin to introduce their thinking as a way of reading specific works in the exhibition. As such, I trace out a possible connection between Foucault's idea of power/knowledge and the invisible operation of disciplinary power as placing limits on the representation of the gay male body, and as such on its visibility.

It should be noted that this paper presents not so much an independent thesis, but rather it functions as a supporting document for a body of work, tracing out the thematic concerns of that work around the constellation of the gay male body, architectural site and sight, as in the act of looking and re-presenting.

Introduction

Out of Sight has its origin at the site of the infamous Graaff's Pool (just off the Sea Point Promenade), best known as a homosexual cruising spot before the wall was torn down in 2005. The destruction of this structure has provided Cape Town with a contemporary ruin within its architectural and natural landscape - one that has been barely acknowledged, and is easy to miss.

My approach, however, is not so much to reconstruct the hidden history of this site as to treat Graaff's Pool as the point of intersection of several themes: the body, architecture, memory and desire. In my work, I attempt to map these complex territories, in many ways as personal as they are general, to the analogous structural complexities of Graaff's pool, a nodal point of landscape, architecture and ocean, which carries traces of an invisible past, both geological and human.



[1] Graaff's Pool as it stands today

A careful consideration of the site has allowed me to imaginatively re-construct a number of the features of its original design, which are now absent. The re-imagining of this space has been prompted, in many cases, by various clues provided by the site itself, such as the traces of where a wall perhaps used to be, the discovery of a broken handrail, or long-forgotten steps down into the natural pool itself. This largely archaeological process has been aided by various oral accounts of the site's substance.

Together with numerous documentary photographs taken over a period of three years from 2006 – 2009, in a vast range of weather and tidal conditions, it is also a recollection of my own memories of visits to the site that has allowed me to reconstruct a sense of its presence. In most cases, however, it is to the absences that one's mind must wander – to the individuals who repeatedly utilised this space, now gone, to those who consecrated it through its constant use, embedding something of their own trace, into and onto its surfaces, whether geological or architectural.

Through a deep reading of the site, I have been able to determine several key spatial relationships inherent in its architectural layout. These spatial relationships have allowed me to think about some of the theoretical concerns around the representation of the gay male body in new ways. In particular, the 'gaze' and issues of visibility and invisibility that are manifest in the curious zig-zag passageway which provided access to the space behind where the wall used to be. This is the primary point of departure or motif for this exhibition as a whole.

The ingenious design of the Graaff's Pool Wall provided a point of invisibility, beyond which the pool itself and those who frequented it were concealed from view. Within the exhibition space itself, it is to a photograph of the zig-zag entry point through this wall, entitled *The Line of Desire*, that the viewer is ultimately led. (See figure [2] below)



[2] JUSTIN BRETT, *The Line of Desire*, 2006.
 (Photograph showing the remnants of the zig-zag
 passage-way through the Wall at Graaff's Pool)

The archaeology of the 'visible' and the hidden (or 'invisible') provided by the site has generated an investigation into the relationship between these binary terms and the potential for conceptual visual strategies that they might allow in thinking about the representation of the gay male body.

These terms are also particularly pertinent to an historical understanding of the representation of the male gay body, or lack thereof. Apart from a small number of instances¹, the representation of the gay male body throughout the history of Western art is conspicuous by its absence. This, in itself, is representative of the fact that in most Western cultures homosexual individuals have been forced to live in hiding for fear of persecution on the basis of their sexual orientation. Thus, the number of images that proclaim this 'aberrant' sexuality, as it was perceived, is minimal.

With the proliferation of gay liberation movements in the United States, beginning in the late 1960s and perhaps provoked by the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, a new era of visibility for the homosexual individual was initiated. The rallying call to homosexual

¹ Cultural artefacts from ancient Greece are well known for their celebration of homosexuality.

individuals by these liberation movements was to 'come out of hiding' and to 'show oneself' for what one is. A number of these organisations initiated public events like sit-ins in community parks or gay pride marches, that intended to celebrate gay identity in highly visible ways. This strategy of an increased visibility for the homosexual identity was specifically aimed at the removal of the shroud of silence and invisibility that kept any expression of homosexuality out of sight.

In South Africa, however, even with the emancipation of homosexuality within the constitutional law of the country, homophobia is pernicious. Although the right to the free expression of one's sexual orientation is formally legislated, many homosexual individuals are still forced to conceal their sexual orientation, in order to avoid persecution within the societies in which they live. This injunction to 'invisibility' is thus still a pertinent feature of the representation of gay male identity within South African society today.

This injunction to 'invisibility' is interrogated through a deferral to Michel Foucault's conception of 'disciplinary power' related in his various treatises on The History of Sexuality. In these volumes, Foucault, French philosopher, historian, critic and sociologist, attempts to define the formation of the homosexual individual as a subject to a network of power relationships that course through society. For Foucault, this network of power is un-locatable and as such, can be thought of as 'invisible' or hidden. This concept is interrogated in a number of works on the exhibition, but defined in relationship to the first drawings presented, namely *Devotion* and *Correction*. Included in the discussion related to these works, is an elaboration of Foucault's invocation of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* prison, an architectural model that serves as a visual analogy to the ways in which this discourse of power relationships operates in society.

The relationship between power and vision is interrogated in a number of the works in the exhibition. Introduced in relationship to Foucault's concept of 'Panopticism' are issues relating to the 'gaze'. Elaborated with respect to my discussion of *The Apartments*, the 'gaze' as a Foucauldian concept is defined as the ways in which the viewer gazes

upon (views) the people presented and represented. (Foucault 1997; 320) Within the context of the Graaff's Pool site, I have attempted to locate the position of these potential viewers, in order to reveal the sightlines that seem imperative to its operation. Through the manipulation of the architectural dimensions of the gallery in which *Out of Sight* is installed, I have attempted to sensitise the viewer in the gallery itself, to the parameters that allow the potential effects of this 'gaze' to operate.

Physical obstructions, like *The Wall*, a massive dividing structure erected across the longitudinal axis of the main gallery space, or the walkway that protrudes from the mouth of the seawall in *The Passage*, are purposely designed to make the viewer's passage through space more anxious. Not only are objects like these physical interruptions (in that they physically impede the movement of the viewer's body through space), but visual interruptions too, disrupting the movement of the viewer's eye as well. Providing and denying visual access to certain spaces in the gallery, through the sightlines that they allow or impede, these elements begin to function in similar ways to structures within the original Graaff's Pool site. Within the gallery space, through an analogical re-interpretation of these parameters, my intention is to sensitise the viewer to the operation of these devices and make the viewer more conscious of the activity of their own looking.

This strategy of making *looking* itself more self-conscious has been applied in my renditions of the figure too. In my watercolours, the figures appear to be located at the very end points of this continuum of perception: bodies are represented in such a manner that the depiction of the surface of the skin that defines the body's limits is the point of erosion of the paper such that its fibres are revealed. In my work, troubling the representation of the body becomes a kind of confession of the power and desire implicit in both the act of looking and re-presenting, a theme that runs throughout the exhibition.

Rather than as 'absolute' states, however, I have been interested in the spaces of knowledge opened up between the 'visible' and 'invisible' as end points of a continuum of perception; and then, in turn, in the potential within this continuum for visual analogies

that begin to intimate the limits of representation of the male body, and indeed the problems associated with its representation as well.

This preoccupation with the act of looking itself, as the title 'Out of Sight' indicates, is the overarching concern of this work; but, like the title's own malign play on words, in this exhibition the very act of looking is intentionally disturbed. For here, the focus is not only on that which is 'visible', or even on that which is 'invisible'; but rather upon those places where things seem just about to disappear from view; in those things that may be there, but are difficult to see, or those that emerge when others disappear. Here, out of the 'site' itself, vision (or its denial) emerges as the defining factor at play in relationship to the ways this place has been used, since it was built in 1870.²

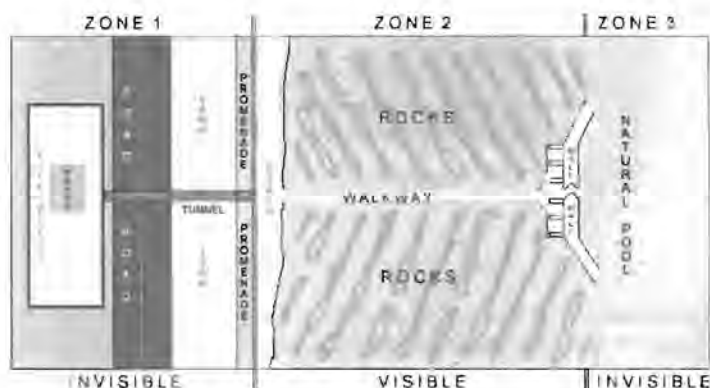
² Graaff's Pool was built in 1870 and was named after the Graaff family who owned it as part of an estate on the Sea Point beachfront. The ground was later ceded to city council. In the 1970s it became a male only facility. However, after 1994, the "men only" signs came down and it became an area that could be utilised by both men and women, but was still frequented almost exclusively by men. (City of Cape Town official website - www.capetown.gov.za)

Out of Site: Re-imagining Graaff's Pool

In *Out of Sight*, I have attempted to translate the salient features of the Graaff's Pool site as I have determined them, into a site-specific installation at the AVA Gallery in central Cape Town. This gallery is idiosyncratic in its layout – a system of gallery spaces created through the remodeling of an original Cape Dutch town house in the 1970s. The principal addition made to the building was the creation of a double volume central gallery space behind the front rooms of the original townhouse, under a parking garage in the building behind, which features a mezzanine level. This mezzanine level allows one overhead perspectives of the ground floor galleries, and indeed, one is able to catch a glimpse of artwork situated on this level, from the ground below. The various sightlines allowed, and denied, by the architectural structure of this gallery have provided me with the potential to re-present similar features of the Graaff's Pool site.

Utilising an investigation into the relationships between what is concealed or revealed at the site by virtue of its original design, I have attempted to make a theoretical plan or layout of the original site. Into this framework or model, I attempt to situate my concerns relating to the constitution and re-presentation of the male homosexual body.

In the following diagram, I have attempted to illustrate the specific territories and their boundaries that have served as analogous to the theoretical terrains that contextualise my project.



[2] Diagram of Graaff's Pool and its surrounding context

The area marked **Zone 1** is a largely constructed one, dominated by multi-storey apartment blocks that line Beach Road and command sought-after sea views. In addition to the four-lane road, a lawned area of variable width and the paved Promenade itself intervene between the apartment blocks and the beach. Originally, instead of the strip of apartment blocks that characterise the seafront area today, a row of stately weekend homes owned by wealthy Capetonians, of which Sir Graaff was one, once ran along this part of the coastline. In most cases these estates also comprised the tracts of land that ran down to (and included) the seashore.³

Marked on my diagram too, is the approximate position of the tunnel that was allegedly constructed underneath Beach Road to allow the safe passage of Sir Graaff's wheelchair-bound wife from their home to a point below the edge of the Promenade embankment, where she would emerge onto the beach.



[3] Detail of bricked-up Tunnel below the Promenade

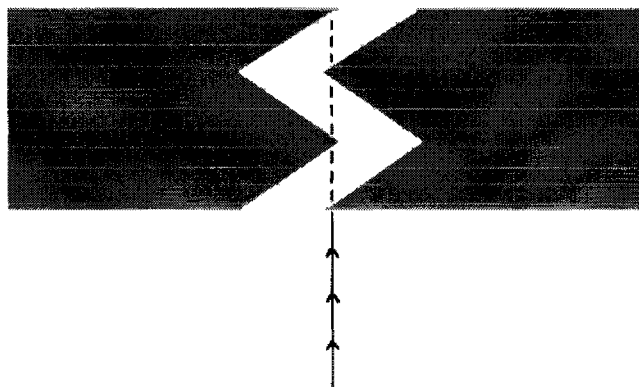
³ It is important, here, to note that my approach towards the gathering of information with respect to this site has been hindered by an apparent paucity of historical documentation of this site (perhaps, exactly because of its history), and where I have been able to find information relating to it, this has in many instances been contradictory. As such, then, I have preferred to rather make a selection of 'facts' gleaned from various sources (mostly primary ones such as individual interviews that are perhaps subject to the vagaries of memory) to reconstruct my own imaginative history of that place.

Zone 2 is that area between the embankment of the Promenade and the remains of the Wall that surrounded Graaff's Pool. This zone is characterised by very curious rock⁴ formations that at low tide, are completely exposed and drained of water, only to be completely submerged again when the tide is high. Traversing this zone between the sliver of beach against the shoring of the Promenade and the Wall of Graaff's Pool is a concreted walkway. At high tide this is completely immersed in water, thus islanding the Wall and the concrete court beyond, and preventing access to it.

It is along this walkway that Sir Graaff's wife was apparently wheeled, out to the natural pool formed in a gully between successive striations of rock, where she could bathe, protected from the gaze of those on the Promenade.

The edge of **Zone 3** is formed by the Wall structure, apparently built to provide the disabled woman privacy while she bathed. The passageway through the Wall presents another very curious structure, having a zigzag pattern in plan. (Please see Figure [4] below). The design of this structure would have quite ingeniously allowed the passage of the woman's wheelchair to the other side of the wall, while continuing to completely preclude her from being viewed from the seashore. Beyond the Wall, a concreted court leads to stairs that allow access to the natural pool. Beyond the pool is open sea.

⁴ Bronze plaques erected in 1952 described these rocks as revealing "an impressive contact zone, of dark slate with pale intrusive granite". While the plaques have since disappeared, possibly into some scrap-trader's melting pot, the rocks were recorded as 'discovered' in 1818 by Clarke Able and were seen to have had "an inspiring influence on the historical development of geology" and even Charles Darwin is said to have visited the site in 1836. According to Professor Maarten de Wit, "This point of contact is called a migmatite zone, caused about 600 million years ago. Sedimentary rock caused by compressed layer upon layer of sediment deposited by shallow sea, was buried between 7 and 10 kilometres beneath the surface. At this depth, magma in the form of liquid granite forced its way in. The intruding granite had a temperature of between 600 and 1000 degrees and the heat altered the sedimentary rock under the prevailing pressures, to form what geologists call a 'shist' or 'gneiss' ". "In later times", according to Professor de Wit, "the earth processes lifted the crust, and the roof rocks eroded away to expose the feature". (Bergman 1989).



[4] Plan View of the Passage through the Wall at Graaff's Pool showing the line of sight obstructed by the Zig-Zag design of the opening

In later years, with the densification of the area, when those privately owned estates were replaced by the apartment blocks that characterise Sea Point today, Graaff's Pool became a men's only swimming area, apparently frequented mainly by elderly men, from the local Jewish community. A sign declared its 'men's only' status and warned that boys younger than 16 years of age were not allowed to utilise the pool. Seemingly, in addition to providing a place where these men could gather together to chat to each other and take a swim, nude sunbathing also took place behind the privacy of the Wall.

At some point then, it seems that openly gay men also made use of Graaff's Pool and the privacy that it afforded. Apparently the space was shared quite amicably, although still somehow demarcated along various 'imaginary' lines of use by the various groups. Sometime thereafter this space became utilised almost exclusively by gay men as a cruising spot, where sexual liaisons could occur, once again in the privacy afforded by the Wall.

Various accounts relate Graaff's Pool as a thorn in the side of the respectable Sea Point community and the greater Cape Town community at large. Repeated attempts were made by the local council to rid the community of the unsavoury individuals and

activities that occurred behind the Wall, but it was not until a few years ago in 2005 that the Wall was finally demolished, albeit partially. That the country's Constitution had already been amended to decriminalise homosexual acts is worth noting. The reasons cited at the time, for the destruction of the Wall, were that various criminal activities that included prostitution and drug-dealing were taking place behind the Wall.

Today, the Wall, which used to reach a height of some 7 or 8 feet, comes up to approximately hip-height and the site has something of the quality of an ancient ruin. Or perhaps it did, until the local council painted the structure turquoise green in December 2007 and then again after a couple of weeks, white. In this strange act, possibly an attempt to clean it up, perhaps more attention has been brought back to the site, than was intended. Undoubtedly, it reflects the council's difficulty in deciding what to do with it.

I, however, have found this site particularly relevant to my concerns regarding the representation of the gay male body, and for a number of reasons. Almost certainly, the most significant one is that this site presents a complex relationship of physical structures in an urban environment that seems to articulate an even more complex set of societal relationships in that same environment.

Clearly, the primary intention for the construction of the Wall of Graaff's Pool was to provide a safe place for a disabled individual, encouraged perhaps to live out of sight on the margins of society, to be able to bare herself (her body and her disabilities) in an environment outside of her own home. This structuring of privacy is the essential feature of the history of its utilisation. The design of the Wall structure, and in particular its convoluted aperture, reflects this intention. Custom-designed to shield any individual who utilised the pool beyond from view by anyone on the seashore, this function is central to its utilisation at later stages in its history, by different communities of individuals.

The communities in question here, interestingly, could all be thought of as marginalised in some way, like the disabled woman: the Jewish men and then the homosexual ones, all

disenfranchised members of a society who somehow all sought refuge at its edges. What is perhaps interesting to note here though, is that during this time (approximately from the 1970s and well into the 1990s) homosexual acts were still a criminal offence in South Africa, and punishable by law.⁵ Thus this space was one in which illegal activities occurred on a daily basis.

What makes this site most fascinating, however, is its situation - just off of the Sea Point Promenade, which is arguably one of the most publicly utilised spaces in Cape Town, and this means that it was common knowledge to the majority of those who lived along the Promenade, or utilised it every day for recreational purposes that these 'criminal' activities were taking place behind the Wall of Graaff's Pool. This fact poses more questions than it seems to answer. What perhaps is apparent here is that the function of that Wall, in its hiding those activities from view, was fundamental to the public's tolerance somehow and that seems to say something rather interesting about vision itself. Did the Wall allow a society to 'turn a blind eye' to these activities in the name of discretion? Surely that these activities took place 'out of sight', so to speak, they were not necessarily 'out of mind'?

In all accounts, what seems to be at play here is a relationship between a 'visibility' and 'invisibility', whether figurative or literal, and I have portioned this site into three zones on my diagram in relationship to these characteristics.

I have marked **Zone 1** as 'Invisible' and used this term here to denote the potential obscurity of the homosexual individual/type in typical society. Within **Zone 1**, there is the possibility for homosexual individuals to live out their lives relatively undetected by those around them. This living in the shadows, hidden for fear of being identified as deviant, criminal or perverted reflects the effect of power within a society turned against individuals who deviate from the norm. Here this power is exercised in multiple ways, in multiple locations, ranging from the most legislated forms of juridical or disciplinary

⁵ Whilst the new Constitution (1996) granted freedom of sexual orientation in its the equality clause (Section 9, Act 108 of 1995 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa) sodomy remained a criminal activity until 1998.

power to the more subtle threat of shame cast by allusions and suspicions within the most genteel (and perhaps liberal) circles of society.

For Foucault, 'juridical' power is not the same as 'disciplinary' power. While the former is legislated (i.e. the law of the state) and as such locatable/visible, the latter is unlocatable and invisible, being tied to knowledge, and the discourses that define the individual within society, so that the 'law' is internalised and its subjects discipline themselves. Foucault's notion of 'disciplinary' power is discussed further in the next section, with reference to *Devotion* and *Correction*.

In this zone, there is also the possibility for the existence of young individuals who have not yet become fully aware of their budding homosexuality. For each perhaps there is some sense of feeling different somehow, but the societal pressure of conformance denies any unencumbered exploration of that different sexuality. This zone then reflects a regulated unconsciousness, responsible somehow for a consciousness that is not yet fully formed.

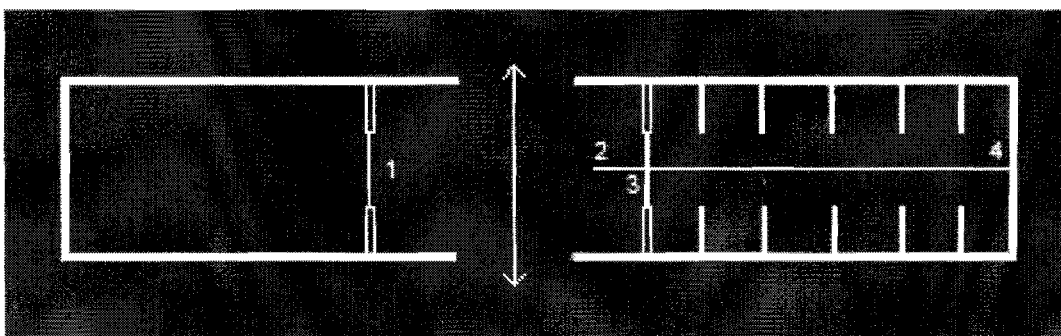
I have denoted **Zone 2** as 'Visible' in my diagram, for it is into this zone that individuals emerge from their relatively unseen existence. Here one can imagine individuals come out into the open, driven by a desire in demand of its own satisfaction and strong enough to override the potential risk of persecution on its account. The journey is made across the pathway, down towards Graaff's Pool, all the while exposing themselves as homosexual (and as such criminal), a confession made in full view of the public. This is in a sense then a contested zone, in many ways much like the geographical one over which it is laid. Like fractured rock formations formed by the eruption of molten igneous rock forced upwards through a sedimentary layer, and exposed through 150 million years of erosion, the process of homosexual individuals seeking the expression of their sexual desire is akin to this rupture, an incredible overcoming of resistance, a threshold maintained by fear.

Zone 3 is again a zone of ‘Invisibility’, here afforded by the Wall’s purposeful concealment of those who utilised Graaff’s Pool. Here, privileged by the privacy that the Wall afforded, homosexual men were able to ‘be themselves’ and this expression, according to oral sources, occurred in many different ways. Here apparently activities ranged from rather innocent ones like sunbathing and conversation, to those of a more explicitly sexual nature.

The Passage

In the first gallery space in the exhibition, I have attempted to give a sense of the relationships between ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’, here by an architectural installation that relates to the Graaff’s Pool site and its surrounding context, which in many senses is the plan of this area made manifest. In a similar way to my diagram, but here through its added dimension, *The Passage* is able by extension and extrapolation, to more fully realise the meanings that I have determined to exist in the spatial relationships between the various elements set out by the original site.

Significantly, this work is installed in a passage-like space in the gallery, a long narrow room bisected by a pathway encouraged between the two doors, situated opposite each other, at the mid-points of the longest sides. (See diagram [5] below).



[5] Diagram Indicating the Relationships of Constituent Structures in *The Passage*

In this installation, **Zone 1** is denoted by *The Apartments*, or rather the apartments here form the outer limit or boundary of this zone. (Marked at position 1 on the diagram). In this work, individual apartment blocks moulded in Plaster of Paris have been used to brick up the opening to one half of this gallery space, denying access to the space behind, while implying the seeing-eye within. (See Figure [6] below) The passageway formed between the two halves of this first gallery space, effectively places the viewer on an imaginative construction of the Promenade itself. In my diagram, The Promenade is situated at the threshold of **Zone 2**, with the Apartment blocks on the one side, and on the other, the view looking out towards Graaff's Pool.



[6] JUSTIN BRETT, *The Apartments*, Detail of installation, 2008

The individual apartments are made out of homogenous white plaster poured into smooth silicone moulds, which renders the surfaces of these sculptures without any of the patina or materiality that one would expect of the building materials that would construct their referents; there is no texture to the concrete or brick, no transparency to the windows that the white plaster describes. Thus, the viewer's eye slips across the surface of the edifice that these apartment 'blocks' construct, desperately trying to find a way into them, or at

least something 'to hold on to'. At the same time as being drawn in to look at their surfaces, one almost experiences a sense of being 'watched' by the numerous vacant anthropomorphic eyes of endless apartments stacked one on top of each other, with no way of telling who stands inside, watching or looking out. This feeling is similar to the one that one may experience at the site of Graaff's Pool, with the numerous apartment blocks and their windows facing out towards the ocean.



[7] JUSTIN BRETT, *The Apartments*, Detail of Installation, 2008

In *The Passage*, I have constructed a three-dimensional rendering of the view that one would have of Graaff's Pool from the raised Promenade embankment, albeit one subject to my own interpretation. *The Passage* shows, in a reduced scale, the seawall or embankment that retains the ground of the Promenade (at position 3 on my diagram), which is constructed in some sections out of rock and others out of pre-cast concrete blocks. The outer limit of the paved pedestrian walkway is delineated by the bollards and balustrades that characterise the Promenade at the Graaff's Pool site.

Piercing the structure of the Promenade embankment and running perpendicularly to the axis of the Promenade, is the concreted walkway that traverses the rocky seashore from its origin on the beach below the embankment and out to a point just before the Wall of Graaff's Pool (at position 4). In my rendition, the concrete walkway has its origin in the visitor's passageway across the axis of this space in the gallery, and it provides a

significant obstruction here for the visitor to negotiate⁶. It then pierces the seawall (at position 2 on my diagram), through a tunnel and emerges on the other side. This tunnel makes reference to the subterranean passage through which Sir Graaff's wife was apparently wheeled.



[8] JUSTIN BRETT, *The Passage*, Detail of maquette

The walkway (or 'gangplank' as I prefer to call it) that traverses the rocky interstitial **Zone 2** is in my rendition raised proportionally to a height of what would be approximately 4 or 5 storeys higher than it is in reality. This I have done, in order to generate a sense of what must have been the extreme precariousness of that passage, for any would-be visitor/homosexual to Graaff's Pool given the risk of public prosecution for a sexual orientation seen as criminal and deviant.

In my version, too, a visitor to the work is posited as the viewer of this terrain and in a sense, the author of its meaning. Here, invited to stand up to the imagined barrier at the edge of the Promenade and to judge what he/she sees, the viewer is posited in a position of power. But he/she is also invited to make an imaginative leap into the construct of this

⁶ This disruption is the first of many that will impede the viewer's pathway through the exhibition. Will discuss further, but perhaps in relation to one of the other areas of disruption.

diorama, and perhaps imagine him/herself walking along the walkway, towering metres above the rocks/rubble below. The perspectival diminishment here, draws the viewer's eye towards the far wall of the installation, through which the pathway disappears, out of sight. It is here that the viewer's visual journey ends. He/she is never allowed access to the space beyond the wall, although his/her interest is piqued perhaps by all the effort made (at least by the visual analogy of the construct) to take him/her to that point.

Zone 3, then, remains one that can only be conjured up in each viewer's imagination, it is the point at which the body (both literally and metaphorically) disappears. In its original state, the Wall, which was about 8 foot high, allowed those on the Promenade to just make out the tops of the heads of those that frequented the space beyond it. Without knowing what those men were doing exactly, but acutely aware that they were there, the wall became a site for the projection of the public's own "worst fears" or "best fantasies"⁷.

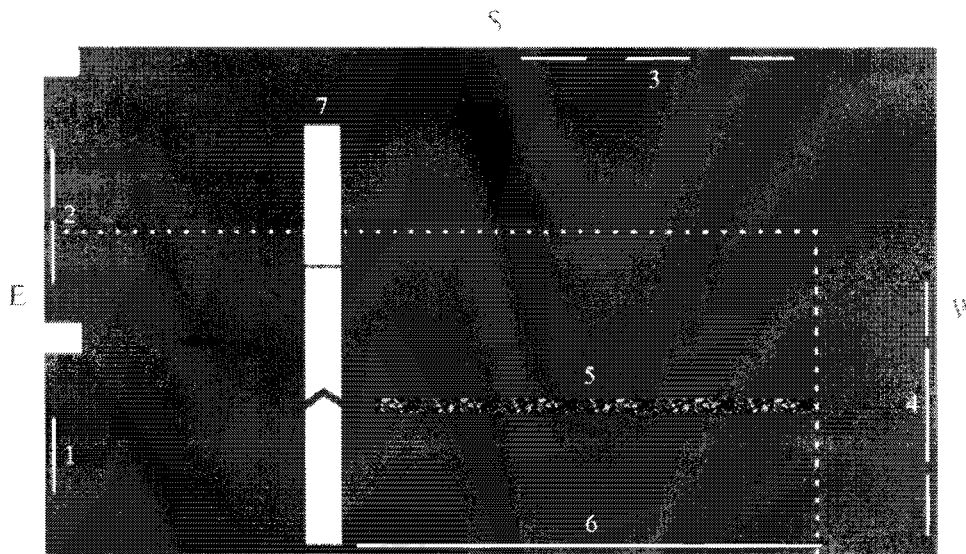
Within my installation, again, the viewer is unable to see beyond the wall, but made acutely aware by virtue of its design that something could lie beyond. Here, in similar ways then, the viewer within the gallery space is encouraged to imagine the content of the space protected by the privacy of the Wall.

The position of power afforded by the raised viewing platform of the Promenade (and to a greater extent by the multi-storey apartment blocks), in relationship to the individuals who in fact made that precarious passage out to Graaff's Pool is interesting in its analogical correlation to the relationship between juridical power and the homosexual subject. Here the law is aimed at the most private of sexual acts and as such ones that through their relative invisibility to general society, should not necessarily be so offensive, especially if between consenting adults. But here, the law is intended towards abhorrent or abominable acts of which its architects must either have had some experience, or the capacity to imagine in vivid detail.

⁷ Taken from "I am your worst fear", "I am your best fantasy", a text that has made regular appearances on placards at gay rights public demonstrations. (Meyer 2002: 18)

The Power of the Invisible

The elaboration of the visual model that the Graaff's Pool site has allowed is continued within the main gallery space of the AVA. Utilising various devices, I have attempted to reconfigure this space to become yet another three-dimensional representation of the Graaff's Pool site, like *The Passage*.



[9] Plan of Main Gallery Space

The most significant of these devices is a large wall divider constructed across the breadth of the gallery on the ground floor (at position [7] on the diagram below). This structure is a re-presentation of the Wall of Graaff's Pool, and through its substance, the zig-zag pathway is cut.

The Wall is articulated to give one the sense that it has been constructed through the laying of massive pre-cast concrete blocks one on top of the other. Its dimensions are determined to block one's view of the remainder of the gallery upon first entering, yet through a number of small glimpses, begin to invite one's curiosity as to what could lie beyond.

Through this three-dimensional reconstruction of the Wall and the passage through it, one is able to gain a better sense of the ingenuity of its design. Through the reflection of light within the passage itself, one is made acutely aware of the confluence of the spaces on either side of the structure, at this juncture. One is also able to experience the efficacy of the visual block created by its design.

With any view of the remainder of the gallery blocked, one's attention is pulled back into the space in which one has been standing, and then to the gallery wall opposite this divider, and to the drawings there hung.

This series of drawings has been rendered in graphite on paper, and comprises a figure drawing, entitled *Devotion*, and two object drawings, entitled *Correction*.

Devotion

In this drawing, (at position [1] in my diagram), the body of a young man is figured, his arms raised above his head, his hands overlapped one in front of the other. The gesture of his body seems to suggest that this figure is poised, as a swimmer might be, as if just about to dive into a body of water. The tone of his musculature and his apparent confidence seem to indicate an athlete whose body is at his own command.

A closer inspection reveals a different picture: a young man in white underwear, attire rather inappropriate for any serious swimmer. This undergarment deposits the figure potentially in a number of contexts: perhaps within a domestic setting, or if not, in a situation in which has been forced to remove his clothes, his hands held up above him in order to indicate his surrender. This is a kind of supplicant figure then, perhaps knelt down on his knees in an act of prostration or prayer.



[10] *Devotion*, 2009

The body is rendered seemingly naturalistically, with great attention paid to subtle gradations of tone across its surfaces. These surfaces have been built up by adding successive layers of graphite modified by erasure one over the next. In some areas the layers of graphite are denser than others, almost occluding the white ground of the paper, and in others, any mark has been rubbed away to return to the whiteness of the ground. As one travels up the body, towards the apex of the arms at its zenith, the densities become less, erasure seems to liberate the figure from its form and in areas the figure and its ground coalesce. This perhaps is a body poised on the verge of its own disappearance or collapse, or indeed, in the throes of its own making.

In some places still, the paper itself has been damaged, abraded by the repeated erasure and re-drawing. These areas reflect the endless period of scrutiny that has been necessitated in their making - these are the areas that have been looked at most often, and indeed touched too. The size that protects the paper here, has been removed through repetitive erasure, and in some parts the fibres of the paper opened up as well, aided in many cases by the newly sharpened points of graphite pencils. In the most severe cases whole layers of paper have been debrided with the help of a scalpel and sandpaper, to reveal virgin surfaces of paper beneath.⁸

If one scrutinises the surface of the body even more closely, one is able to make out strange watery splashes that radiate across the form, their origin seemingly the same as that of the light cast across the form. Here water-droplets have been showered onto the form and in their contact with particular areas of the graphite surface have fixed the graphite so that it cannot be erased. Through careful culture these contact zones have been transformed to resemble tiny nicks/cuts/wounds on the skin.

Correction

In this work, (located at position [2] on diagram of the main gallery), a 'double' pencil sharpener and a pair of erasers have been rendered in graphite on separate sheets of paper. (See Figure [11] below)

⁸ These areas are ones that had been irredeemably clogged with graphite, resulting in an incredibly slippery surfaces, which refused take any more graphite or be reduced by erasure. It is perhaps interesting to note that graphite's industrial use is as a lubricant for machinery parts – graphite powder on the fingers has a deceptively 'oily' nature!



[11] JUSTIN BRETT, *Correction*, 2008

This particular work came to mind in response to an investigation into the artistic practice of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Paying homage to the *Perfect Lovers* (1991) (See Figure [12] below) in which Gonzalez-Torres presents a pair of identical commercially produced wall clocks as a proxy for homo-sexual coupling, I have in a comparable way utilised identical erasers, and the doubled ‘holes’ of the sharpener, to signify a similar intent.



[12] FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES, *Perfect Lovers*, 1991

Like Gonzalez-Torres’s work, which is structured around the absence of the body, the body is similarly implied in mine. Here, however, I have gone further. I have attempted in these drawings to evoke the surfaces of the body itself, in the mucosal or skin-like surfaces of the erasers, and then within the dark orifices of the sharpener. The rendition of these objects as graphite drawings reinforces the absence that the objects themselves portray - the absence of the pencil – an unavoidably phallic signifier. The pencil here too, in the hand of the artist, also represents a tool of his agency.

Overlaid by this reference to the sexual (and in particular the homosexual as connoted by the doubling of the similar), the activities implied by these objects, namely, erasure and sharpening, take on a particularly punitive significance. The title 'Correction' reinforces this. The blades of the sharpener are internal and hidden as is the threat of punishment that prompts the self-censure/erasure of desire implied by the erasers.

Through the process of 'erasure', 'sharpening one's pencil' and 'redrawing' embedded in the making of this work, the drawing of these objects taken out of the context of educational structures, takes on a metonymic significance, by reflecting the process involved in the moulding of the individual within the school classroom and in particular, the regulation of deviation from the norm, or that which is 'correct'. That these activities are self-initiated by the protagonist of their use, again points to the self-correction so poignantly illustrated by Foucault's invocation of Jeremy Bentham's architectural design for the 'ultimate' prison⁹. (Foucault 2000: 70 – 71)

In these drawings, it is a preoccupation with that which is perceivable to the eye and more specifically with those points at which that visibility becomes impaired reflected in the macroscopic focus on these objects at the front of the field of vision, which blurs rather rapidly as the objects recede in space, but seems to be believable/naturalistic. This in turn reflects a self-censorship that is so subtle that nobody realises that it has even occurred. For Foucault, it is the invisibility of techniques of power that operate at the level of the individual (demonstrated by his invocation of the 'Panopticon' as a visual model of the power relationships in modern society) that makes them so effective. It is through this close focus then, on seemingly benign objects that the intersection between private and public forms of regulation is made visible.

⁹ The basic plan of Jeremy Bentham's proposal for a modern prison has the prisoners in their cells arranged around the circumference of a circle that has at its centre a darkened supervisory space in a control tower. The theoretical genius of this model (it was in fact never built) is that it would work equally well in its control of prisoners regardless of whether in fact this central, darkened watch tower was occupied or not. Here then, it is that continuous supervision is presumed that makes this arrangement so effective; individual prisoners begin to correct their own behaviour in relation to a perceived threat of external surveillance and control, and in so doing begin to internalise this control within themselves. It is this architectural model that provides Foucault a visual model for his own notion of 'disciplinary' power. (Foucault 2000: 70 – 71)



[13] JEREMY BENTHAM, *Plan and Cross-section for the Panopticon*, 1791

In its relationship to *Correction*, *Devotion* is a visual elaboration of the processes of self-correction implied in the drawings of the pencil sharpener and erasers. Here, a body is constructed through its own repetitive re-formation, a never-ending process of correction through drawing, erasure and redrawing. Here the effects of this process are inbedded in the surfaces of the skin and paper as a history of minor traumatic events; the scars on the surface of paper and skin are indicative of the pain inherent in this self-discipline.

In the making of the drawing, the process of 'correction' is lead by the eye of the artist, and executed by his hand. It is through the metonymic collapse in this relationship between eye and hand, that looking's capacity for violence is also visualised in these drawings.

In its allusion to the religious penitent/supplicant, and indeed, in the suggestion made by its title, *Devotion* introduces a number of religious inferences that are explored in subsequent works in this exhibition.

For Foucault, Christianity (and in consequence religion) is a fundamental part of those various mechanisms of power that seek to manipulate and control the individual within society, and it is in *Devotion* that those almost imperceptible forms of power figured in some way in the drawings of *Correction*, are given this more specific nature. (Carrette 2000: 31)

Religious discourse, before the legislation of a system of punishments later in an increasingly secularised society, in similar ways, sought to control the individual in society. (Carrette 2000: 19) For Foucault, this 'subjectification' of the individual is "shaped by such mechanisms as confession" in its ability to order, define and control. (Carrette 2000: 39) Here the penitent is figured, down on his knees in repentance for his sins, seeking absolution. Here, this absolution requires a disclosure of self, in particular an articulation and examination of sexual thoughts and actions. Here, if sins of the flesh are confessed, penance is also seen to be of the flesh. Self-correction takes on a particular violent form: the self-flagellation of the religious penitent, as indicated by the flesh wounds on the surface of this body. Here the body wears both the stigmata of desirous looking and the attempts to abolish those same thoughts of desire.

This drawing is then, in a sense at the same time, a confession and repentance of the flesh. In this way "Christianity paradoxically constructs a self in the very sacrificing of the embodied self", where there can be no truth about the self without a sacrificing of the self. (Foucault in Carrette 2000: 42)

In addition to its religious inferences, the potential for a shift in the applicability of the activity implied by the title, in other words *the activity of devotion*, introduces another of the principal themes contained in my work. The 'devotion' in question may refer not only to the spiritual devotion or piety of the individual represented in this image, towards an implied God, but also to the devotion of the author of the work towards his subject. In that the author of the work (or artist) is in this case male, and his subject another male, this drawing involves the male gaze on the male body. Thus, the desire in *looking* that is interrogated in this work (and henceforth in subsequent ones) is one that is homosexual,

and the sin of the flesh involved here, is that which Christian dogma calls an abomination – the love of one man for another:

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination."

(Leviticus 18:22)

Subjectivity and Sexuality – A Contested Terrain

In this section of the paper, I would like to discuss the relationship of my figure paintings to my project and attempt to locate their contribution within the model already drawn out. In terms of my previous artistic practice¹⁰, in which, like Gonzalez-Torres, I had previously figured the body by its absence, painting the figure directly seemed anything but rational – yet I have felt compelled to do so.

As an artistic terrain, 'painting' and in particular 'figure painting, is widely conceived of as obsolete, and perhaps many would have it killed off or disappear completely. Indeed as marginalised, the medium has provided me with an opportunity to tackle territories of homosexual desire for which many may share the same sentiment.

Within painting itself, the use of watercolour is often "discredited as the preserve of amateur artists" and has to a large degree been feminised by its association with middle class female hobbyists. (Mackenny 2007: 5) Watercolour, then, has provided me the perfect material with which to express my own concerns relating to the 'unmanly' desire of one man for another.

No longer encoded for within seemingly benign objects, the embodiment of homosexual desire in images of young male bodies has become an almost political imperative for

¹⁰ *Inside-Out* (2004), my fourth year project at Michaelis, presented the small-scale architectural elements usually found on the outside of buildings, mounted against the interior walls of a room. This inversion of 'inside' and 'out' makes reference to the absence of figures through the use of those architectural elements designed to contain them, and indeed, in the shift in scale between the 'real' and the 'imagined'

me.¹¹ These paintings reflect then a ‘coming out’ of hiding, an emergence out of the obscurity of the shadows in **Zone 1**, in which the young men that they depict are encouraged by society to live in private shame. Occupying the second zone then, these paintings reflect the vulnerability of the body’s exposure (and its desire) for all to see.

The Burn Boys

Cropped at a point just below the knees and above the head, three young boys on the cusp of adulthood are pictured, naked except for their swimming costumes, each standing on a beach with the ocean just behind. (At position [3] on my diagram). The scenes that these paintings depict are common ones in a coastal town like Cape Town: long summer days spent at the beach, at play in a paradise of sun and sea. But if these boys are meant to be at leisure, their bodies tell something different - painted in high-key vermilions, pinks, oranges and reds, their skins show the effects of their over-exposure to the elements - they seem to have been badly burnt by the sun.

It is around this ‘burning’ of the skin that the potential for meaning in these works is hinged. Perhaps on the most literal level, it is the exposure of bare skin to the harsh effects of the sun’s rays that has allowed here an image of the body’s vulnerability within what is, in fact, its everyday environment. Although usually protected by some kind of covering, it is within the specific context of the beach that the body remains largely uncovered - the beach is one of the only public spaces (other than at municipal swimming pools) in which the exposure of most of the body is socially sanctioned.

¹¹ In my last seminar paper, in a discussion about the decision to include Gonzalez-Torres, as a gay man, who died of AIDS no less, to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale in 2007 at a time when the Conservative Right was (as it is still today) so powerful, I suggested that one might ask oneself if that was “an example of the kind of slipping past the gatekeepers in which Gonzalez-Torres seemed to take such delight, or whether Gonzalez-Torres’s work reinforces, however unintentionally, the external threat of censorship to which gay artists have, it seems, always been subjected.” (Brett 2007: 35)



[14] JUSTIN BRETT, *The Burn Boys*, 2009

As spaces that offer individuals the unique opportunity to display their bodies and their attractiveness to others in public, these are also territories of desire. Whether engaged in various sporting activities, on the beach or in the surf, at play or simply in recline, these (mostly) young individuals seem acutely conscious of those around them. This then is an environment in which looking predominates: individuals watch other individuals, and in turn are watched themselves. Conscious of being watched, each becomes more intensely aware of how they are being seen, and in a strange act of inversion, they begin to watch themselves.¹²

In addition to healthy, athletic physiques, a golden-brown tanned skin is most sought after, usually the culmination of many carefully calculated hours in the sun, aided by various sun protective creams. The young boys in these paintings, however, have been

¹² This idea of self-surveillance is the principal feature of Foucault's concept of 'panopticism' and it is also one that John Berger discusses in *Ways of Seeing* (1972: 47).

burnt. Rather than aesthetically enhanced by a suntan, they have rendered themselves conversely less attractive - the opposite of what they had desired. As well as making themselves less attractive to others, they have also rendered themselves painful to their touch – paradoxically ensuring that the union that they sought could only be painful if consummated.

To build up these areas of burn, thin washes have been rubbed onto the skin-like surfaces of the white paper to build up increasingly saturated fields of colour. In some regions, further rubbing has removed the pigment from the surfaces of the paper, rather than adding to it. In these areas, where the skin seems less angry or inflamed, this removal of pigment leaves strange hand marks that seem almost to mimic those adjacent to areas of burnt skin that occur when a sunscreen has not been very well applied. In those others where the pigment has stuck, a sense of a rough handling of the body could also be inferred by the manner in which the paint is rubbed on. Suggesting also, in many cases, areas of abrasion or even bruising, these marks along with the pain inferred by the burn of their skins serve to disrupt a purely pleasurable experience of looking at these bodies.

These bodies then are not posited simply for the viewer/voyeur's own satisfaction, but consciously trouble the act of looking itself. Rather than a smooth rendering of flesh that would render the bodies as if they were observed at a distance, the intensely saturated colour and the facture of its application - the brush marks, the areas where it is rubbed almost raw, and where it is allowed to drip down the surfaces of the paper - place these bodies in a very close proximity to the viewer. It is through this evidence or facture that the viewer becomes very much aware of the absent body of the artist, and indeed the trace of (in this case) his hand on the surfaces of the paintings.

In that these marks correspond to the hand of the artist, and then that hand to the artist's eye and to the activity of looking itself, the viewer is implicated in an act of looking at these bodies that follows the artist's own. In this way, the viewer re-creates the moment of production with every glance. (Bond in Weiermair 2004: 285) It is through this complicity then that the viewer is made aware of the potentially violent desire to possess

that can taint looking itself. (Elkins 1997: 29) In these paintings, the burning of skin by the sun, as the ultimate source of all light and thus sight, stands in as a reminder of the potential for harm that looking can itself possess.

The Sleepers

The grouping of drawings on the East wall (see position [4] on plan of main gallery) is made up of four panels which purposely mimics the traditional altarpiece in its composition. Here the central panel, which is commonly occupied by a scene of the crucifixion of Christ is occupied by a view of the Graaff's pool wall structure as it stood just after partial demolition in 2005. Flanking this drawing which has the appearance of an architectural ruin, are two wing panels depicting figures in graphite whose light and dark values have been inverted. Below the central landscape, in the predella panel, a drawing of a pencil is laid out horizontally, that has been sharpened at both ends.



[15] JUSTIN BRETT, *The Sleepers*, 2009

In the central drawing of the partially demolished Graaff's Pool structure, the viewer is posited along the concreted walkway at approximately the mid-point between the Promenade and the remains of the Wall. The viewer enters the drawing at the bottom edge, its foremost ground and is encouraged by the perspectival diminishment of the walkway ahead to look up and towards its vanishing point. This point is located at the mouth of the passageway that cuts through the Wall structure itself. At this point the threshold of visibility is crossed into invisibility, and what one is able to see is ended here.

Located on either side of the walkway is an imaginative representation of the interstitial space between land and sea, the geological terrain that characterises this part of the Atlantic seaboard. In order to give a sense of the constant changeability of this space the shoreline unremittingly contested by the ebb and flow of the tide, this drawing is constructed largely from various memories of a number of visits to the site, aided by a number of reference photographs taken over a period of three years. These photographs were taken in various lighting conditions, at different times of day, and in different seasons and also depict various changes in the level of the waterline.

In the foreground the rocky terrain adjacent to the concreted path is sharply realised, while in the distance the structure of the demolished Wall and its surrounding terrain seem less sure. Engulfed perhaps in mist, or bathed out in light, the substance of the Wall structure appears fractured, its limits disintegrated by their erasure to the original white ground of the paper. Through these devices the architectural structure is presented with a peculiarly elegiac character – something like that of an Arcadian ruin, perhaps an altar whose function is now long forgotten.

The undeniable romanticism of the drawing has a contribution made also by the particular depiction of the geological terrain of the original site. Here, the artefact of a utilisation of various source images with changing tidal levels, and indeed the traces of the various erasures of the of the rocks as they are submerged by an incoming tide, and their re-emergence again in response to those images, allows the site depicted to occupy

not only space, but time as well. Time from its most infinitesimal to its incomprehensibly geological, is here embedded into the fabric of this drawing, through its making, un-making and re-making, of a site that is being constantly concealed and revealed.

It is in these absences that meaning for the work can be derived, and it is into these blank spaces that meaning can be posited.

Laid out on the floor in front of the lower level grouping is an area of stacked slate that denotes the walkway that traverses this rocky interstitial zone between land and sea. In a similar way to the smashed plaster in *The Passage* installation, the smashed slate makes reference to Hans Haacke's *Germania* installation in the German Pavillion at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Here however the material itself is pertinent in that slate was used as one of the earliest writing tablets. In 18th and 19th century schools, slate was extensively used for blackboards and individual writing slates for which slate or chalk pencils were used. Writing slates that could easily be wiped down and reused were a popular alternative to paper (which was very expensive at the time), especially for young children to practise their writing on.

Flanking this central image are mirrored images of the same male youth, whose dark and light tonal values have been inverted¹³. The rendition of these inverted figures in graphite enhances their similarity to photographic film negatives in appearance. The graphite seems to impart a silvery quality to the drawings - their most densely worked regions (in other words the darkest) reflect any light cast onto them. In a strange way then, the images are inverted again, the darkest becoming the lightest, by virtue of the light that they reflect. In certain conditions, this play on light makes these figures difficult to apprehend. As one shifts from one angle to the next, the forms seem to puff out, and then collapse into flatness. This quality seems to work against the solidity of these forms overall - even though the particular boy featured in these drawings is far more muscular than those featured in any of the other figurative drawings or paintings in the exhibition.

¹³ Interestingly, the term 'invert' was one of the earliest terms for the homosexual. It was thought that there was some kind of inversion of the feminine and male aspects in homosexual individuals.

In this sense these bodies are absences in themselves - difficult to see, sometimes three dimensional, sometimes flat, negatives whose potential is yet to manifest. There and not there.

Here, the cropping of the figure through the peak of the forehead and just below the ankles allows them a structural affinity with the carved figurative columns of an ancient Hellenic buildings. These *telamon* or *atlas*¹⁴ figures as they were known served as architectural supports taking the place of the column in many ancient temple structures. This allusion is enhanced by the various grey shades of graphite that describe their surfaces, which impart a strange stony quality that add to this sculptural effect. In many ways these surfaces are not only akin to the rocks of the shore depicted in the central landscape, but also to the concrete construction of the Wall structure, itself. Here, in their immobile, state of unrealised potential, these figures function as silent witnesses to the the Graaff's Pool complex and the history of its use.

The Façade and The Supplicants¹⁵

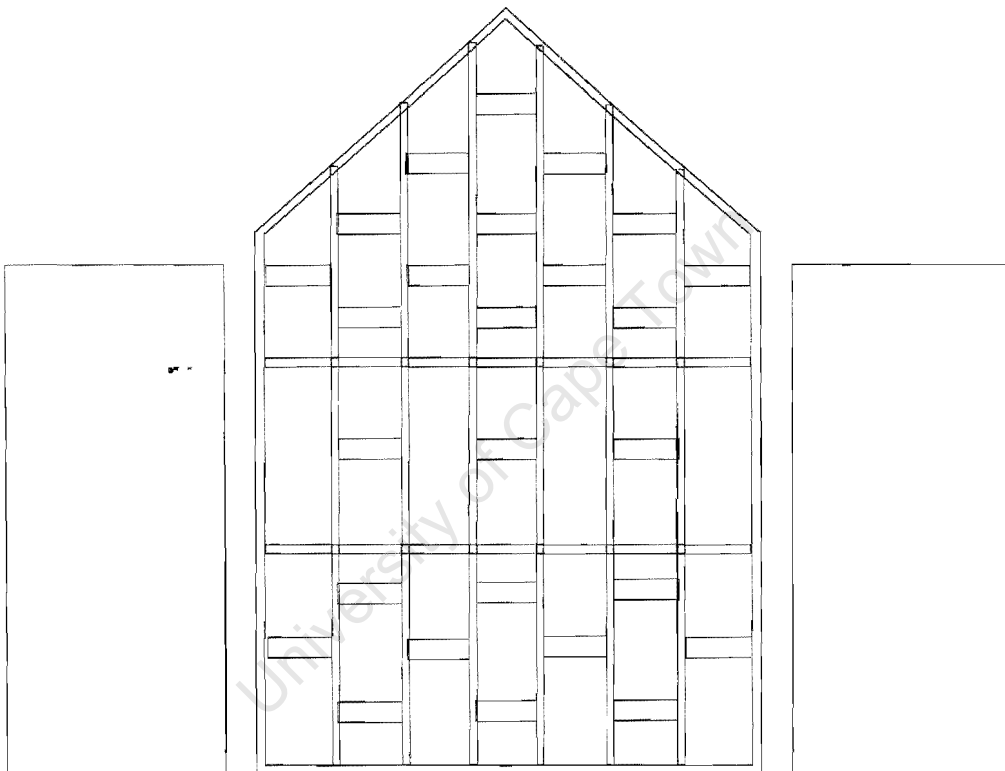
This grouping of work comprises a central sculptural panel, flanked on either side by two figure paintings in watercolour. The overall effect of this triptych is of whiteness.

The central panel, called *The Façade*, is a relief sculpture of extremely modest means. Like *The Apartments*, in this sculpture the façade of some kind of building is rendered through a very shallow manipulation of space, and light. Through the restrained use of subtle shifts in sculptural depth, the three dimensionality of the work as a whole is generated predominantly by the light and shadow that falls across its monochromatic surface.

¹⁴ The name refers to the legend of Atlas, who bore the sphere of the heavens on his shoulders.

¹⁵ I have not included images of these artworks as they do not reproduce satisfactorily.

The overall form in this case, however, is in a sense, the simplest diagrammatic representation of the idea of a house, perhaps even one would have drawn as a child. A kind of lattice work across its face begins to pull against this simple notion of a home, portioning the façade of this structure into a grid-like pattern. The rectilinearity of this grid, punctured in a systematic fashion by strips of inset apartment windows, allows this work its structural affinity with *The Apartments*, and posits it into similar conceptual terrains.



[16] JUSTIN BRETT, Diagram showing the spatial relationships between
The Façade and *The Supplicants* on either side

Here, again, access to the implied space behind the windows is denied by virtue of their rendering in opaque materials, the content of each apartment hidden from view. Like *The Apartments*, with *The Façade* there is also that sense of being watched from behind its blanked out windows, which seem like numerous anthropomorphic eyes in its own face.

The overall design of this work references a 1950s church window of a Dutch Reformed Church in the town of Ceres, situated in farmlands just outside of Cape Town. In this form the faint echo of this sacred architecture remains, the minimal geometric arrangement of the window strips themselves organised seemingly according to a higher logic.

The watercolours on either side of the central panel are collectively entitled *The Supplicants*. These representations of the male figure are the most minimal in respect to what they seem to show – just two pairs of knees isolated by the surrounding white ground of the paper on which they have been painted. A closer inspection reveals a surface that has been heavily debrided, in most cases with the help of an orbital sander. Layers of the paper have been literally stripped from the surface in order to expose the virgin white surfaces beneath, not yet sullied by the artist's touch. In some cases, so much has been debrided that just a thin tegument of the paper remains, thin enough to transmit light through it. Paradoxically, these areas take on a bluish-grey appearance, and resemble shadow more closely than they do light. What ensues is an uneasy negotiation of this relationship between what is light and what is dark.

The isolation of the knees themselves focuses the viewer's attention on these parts of the body for the first time. Here, the knees are rendered as sites of great contestation, seemingly bruised, perhaps grazed, but incredibly raw. The reasons for their isolation here becomes apparent through a consideration of the title of the paintings - *The Supplicants*. A 'supplicant' is a person who makes a humble request, the word derived from the Latin *supplicare* – to kneel down. More commonly, a supplicant is one manifests devotion to a deity in order to seek forgiveness for their own sin.

In these paintings then, the knees are figured as representations of a kind of devotion that is very similar to that figured in the graphite drawing entitled *Devotion*. Self-correction here takes the form a suppliant sinner begging for the forgiveness of his transgressions. In similar ways to the self-correction referenced in *Devotion*, this process is punitive – a self-flagellation of the flesh meted out to restore its purity.

In *The Supplicants*, the manifestation of this masochism is read at the level of the knees – as damage to their fragile cutaneous membranes by virtue of their repeated use. The knees are the contact zones between sinner and ground that bear the brunt of that sinner's weight, and in turn, the sin itself.

Within the context of this exhibition, an interrogation into the notions of the homosexual subject, this sin is the act of homosexual sex itself. The supplicant in this case is the passive homosexual partner, and the one who submits himself for anal penetration. The supplicant's knees again take the brunt of this act of prostration, and its potential for violence.

In these paintings then, both the acts of submission to a higher authority, and to the power of the active homosexual partner, are collapsed into a single zone of contact – the delicate membranes between the hard bones of the knees and the surfaces that they rub up against, uncushioned by much subcutaneous fat.

The Lost Boys

In a related series of figure paintings in watercolour, entitled *The Lost Boys*, a similar composition of the figure is utilised. Again cropped at a point just below the knees and above the head, and wearing what could be swimming trunks, these young men however remain isolated within the white field of their ground. While all identical in composition, some adopt more masculine poses: hands behind back, or slightly forward, bodies turned a little towards the side, at once defensive and protective. The others are slighter, more neutral, awkward.



[17] JUSTIN BRETT, from the series *The Lost Boys*, 2009

In its particularity to skin, the watercolour on rough paper draws the viewer's attention to the level of surface: the membranes of skin and mucosa that delimit outside from in. In these formulations then, skin and paper become the contested terrains that define the limits of subjectivity. Contested, like the drawing of the erasers, these figures are painted and washed out, repainted, and erased, until the bodies that remain evoke the stains that might sully once-clean cloth. There and not there, the fragility of those membranes (an artefact particular to the edges of pooled watercolour) threaten to dissolve the figures, or to burst at any moment, the light shining through them, promising to dematerialise them all together.

For Mikhael Bakhtin, Russian philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician, the recognition involved in being looked at or being seen, is a form giving activity necessary for the production of one's own sense of self. The body for him is something not "self-sufficient", with only the inner body having been given to each human being. (Bakhtin in van Alphen 1993: 115) Each person is trapped within an entirely inner sensation of self, and thus dependent for wholeness on the gaze of the other. Jefferson goes even further:

Since the body is what others see but what the subject does not, the subject becomes dependent upon the Other in a way that ultimately makes the body the focus of a power struggle with far-reaching ramifications.

(Jefferson in van Alphen 1993:114)

‘Lost’ in a liminal space, an interstitial space of being, or a purgatory on the way to becoming, without the wholeness that only another can provide, these boys seem destined to live within their own undefined sense of self. If not, is a union with another necessarily a productive one, and perhaps as idealistic as Bakhtin suggests? (van Alphen 1993:123) Or does the illusion threaten to vanish when one gets too close? Does crossing the threshold of desire and diminishing the distance between, promise to dissolve the membranes between self and other, or rub them out all together?

The Line of Desire

The Line of Desire is both the beginning and the end-point of this exhibition. The initial discovery of this feature at the Graaff’s pool site provided the impetus for this project by its invocation of the faculty of vision as a key concern with respect to the history of the utilisation of this site. Its particular use by individuals that can be thought of as disenfranchised, has allowed me to infer that the notions of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ invoked by the Graaff’s Pool site, are integral to an understanding of the power operations at play in the definition of these types of individuals.

By providing various incarnations of its curious design, initially within *The Passage*, and then later in its guise as *The Wall*, I have attempted to sensitise the viewer, through his/her passage through the exhibition as a whole, to the issues of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ invoked by its particular form. I have also endeavoured to draw these

concerns into an interrogation of the representation of the gay male body given by my drawings and watercolours.

Brought to the end-point of the exhibition, by this passage, the photograph of the zig-zag pathway is finally revealed to the viewer. The photographic evidence of the existence of this structure removes the exhibition as whole from the realm of the fictive, and places it firmly within a specific site, namely, in that of Graaff's Pool¹⁶.

Conclusion

In *Out of Sight*, I encourage the viewer to become a site-seer, but here more conscious of their own experience of seeing. Alongside traces of the site's past, evoked if only as a memory, or as myth, the difficulty of representing the body is figured - within the limits of media as delicate as pencil, graphite and watercolour, but also within those limits we place on our own desire, in and out of sight.

¹⁶ While modern methods of digital manipulation could have manufactured the image, the viewer, one could argue, would be inclined to believe in its existence, by virtue of its photographic nature.

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