

**ARTIST AS SUBJECT : SUBJECT AS
OBJECT**

Volume I

WILMA CRUISE

ARTIST AS SUBJECT : SUBJECT AS OBJECT

Volume 1

by

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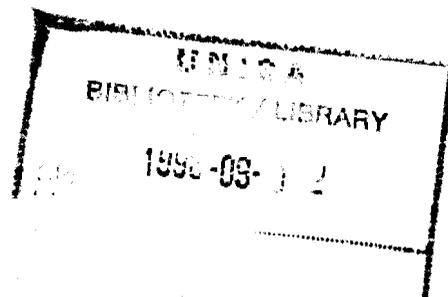
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Summary:

The artist uses herself as the object of study. Her subjective position is validated within a theoretical framework provided by feminism, existentialism and Freudian theory. The three world views provide the context for an analysis of sculpture produced between the years 1988 and 1997. Three one-person exhibitions held in 1990, 1993 and 1996, are examined in terms of their iconographic emphasis and their theoretical bias. The rôle of the unconscious in the genesis of the sculptures and the problem of author/reader dichotomies in interpretation are dealt with as thematic threads throughout the dissertation.

Key terms: Subjectivity, Feminism, Existentialism, Freud, the unconscious, dreams, art, reader/author interpretations, sculpture, critics.

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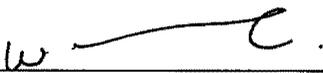


DECLARATION

I declare that

Artist as subject : subject as object

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



W CRUISE

1 SEPTEMBER 1997

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Freud's greatest contribution was placing at the very centre of his thought the idea of the existence of the self apart from culture (Trilling as quoted in Spector 1973: 187).

PREFACE

An MAFA dissertation is a type of hydra; a two-headed creature whose parts war each with the other. The objective and dispassionate head is represented by academic research. The other part is the creative project which is neither objective nor dispassionate. The conflict between the two seems irresolvable; creativity with its illogical and intuitive mode appears to be permanently at war with rationality, logic and cool reason.

I have attempted to deal with this paradox in this dissertation. My creativity will come under the spotlight of academic research. I am therefore both the researcher and the object of research. I am the distant and objective observer of the intuitive, subconscious process of my own creativity.

Rycroft warns of the danger when subject and object attempt to coalesce at a single moment:

If the self tries to observe itself while creating, it inevitably fails, since the self-as-agent must willy-nilly become located in the observing, introspecting self and not in the part of itself that it is trying to observe; ... (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 315).

When I was writing the bulk of this dissertation during the winter of 1996, the inclination to make art failed me. Perhaps the process of observation, as Rycroft has suggested, prevented me from behaving unselfconsciously (that is, unobserved). But, on the other hand, to accept Rycroft's premise is to admit to the failure of this project before its inception. Instead I have decided to adopt the model suggested by Leo Bersani's analysis of the psychoanalytic project. It is as follows:

Psychoanalysis is an unprecedented attempt to give a theoretical account of precisely those forces which *obstruct, undermine, play havoc with the theoretical accounts themselves* ... [It is] a threatened rationality [which] formulates the process of its own inevitable collapse as a perhaps historically tragic, but ontologically reassuring conflict between imagination and reality, or between subject and object ... (my italics) (Bersani 1986: 4).

Thus this dissertation will acknowledge the threat of collapse while accepting a degree of ambiguity. It will take on an intensely personal, even autobiographical approach in the hope of bringing closer together the academic and the intimate. This is a study of subjectivity by the object of the study who, for a short and perhaps impossible time, is the subject in the research project.

My approach will be open-ended rather than closed, fluid rather than fixed and creatively expansive rather than analytically reductive. I have adopted the phenomenological approach recommended by E H Spitz who says, *apropos* psychoanalysis, that a multiplicity of meanings is an advantage rather than a liability; truth can then be experienced as complex and multivalent, not absolute (1985: 170).

INTRODUCTION

The subject¹ is a thinking feeling entity, a mind, the ego and the conscious self ... (from Concise Oxford dictionary. Sv "subject").

The subjective bias in my work became clear to me in 1995 when I began a series of sculptures entitled *John's Wife*.² I started with the existential proposition (Blackham 1961: 119), that the body of the artist is the site of experience and therefore is a valid vehicle for the exploration of meaning. I wanted to investigate the nature of existence; the body and its language were to become a metaphor for a state of being.

While searching for ideas and images for the sculptures, I came across some of my early drawings that had lain hidden for years in the bottom of a drawer. I discovered that my own image had in fact been a constant area of exploration throughout my years of work. The earliest self-portraits dated from 1967. While drawing has been consistent throughout the years, sculptures too made their appearance; first as images on tiles, later as small sculptures and still later as life size figures.

My discovery of the drawer of self-portraits confronted me with the fact that one way or another my interest as an artist had always revolved inward. This was not so much a discovery as an admittance to an artistic egocentrism. However, the concern with self (I like to think) goes beyond the vanity of the ego and the self image as physical portraiture. The discovery confirmed that the image of the human figure in general and the self-portrait in particular, functions as a metaphor for other concerns of a metaphysical, emotional and psychological nature. The art works thus function as mediators of meaning. They act at the interface between consciousness and the world-out-there. Art serves a subliminal but crucial function; to define meaning in an inchoate world.

My interest in the character of subjective experience was established early in my life. During my school years my father, driven by his own

interest in the nature of consciousness, introduced me to Freud's theories. In the sixties I pursued this interest into a formal study of psychology.³ In my postgraduate years I turned away from the study of abnormal psychology and focused instead on the field of animal behaviour (ethology). My rejection of psychoanalysis was dictated by the behaviourist doctrine dominant at the University of the Witwatersrand during the sixties. Behaviourism itself was governed by a philosophical position of aggressive positivism. But my renunciation of the study of subjective experience was also a refusal to accept my father's teachings which had reinforced the misogynist aspects of Freud's theories. At this stage my infant feminism was already in rebellion against the perceived phallocentrism of Freud's approach.

For a student of the sixties reading of existentialist novels was *de rigueur*. Although my interest never materialised into a formal study of existentialist thought, Sartrean concepts were influential in shaping my world view. Sartre's life-long companion and co-thinker, Simone de Beauvoir was instrumental in the development of my ideas. Not only was she a translator of Sartre's thoughts, which were often incomprehensible to a young student but, perhaps more crucially, she shaped my early feminist ideas.

Thus the constellation of concepts represented by psychoanalysis, existentialism and feminism, as they were framed in the sixties, provided the crucible for the development of my ideas and coloured my world view. And, although my thoughts have shifted and developed over the years, the fundamental bias as defined by these areas of discourse has been maintained. It is in this context that my art has evolved.

What is critical to note is the emphasis that these broad and diverse

areas of thought place on the nature of subjective experience.⁴ The centred-self as defined by my approach has therefore always been the focus of my artistic research. The formalisation of my practice in academic terms in this dissertation reinforces the bias of that singular [*sic!*] concern with a personal and experiential view of the world. The egocentric nature of the investigation is reflected in my choice of title, *Artist as subject : subject as object*.

In the following pages my art and its genesis are discussed within the context of the formative influences of Freudian, existential and feminist ideologies.⁵ The determining aspects of these doctrines are analysed within the frame work provided by sculptures, drawings and text which I produced between the years 1988 and 1996. Most of these works were exhibited at three one person exhibitions held during 1990, 1993 and 1996,⁶ although work done between these core shows is also discussed where necessary. The objects constitute the raw material of the research.

The focus of the discussion is on the creation of the works, the ideas that provided their impetus as well as the rôle of the interpreter in investing the works with meaning. The dissertation is divided into three chapters. Each chapter deals with one of the three exhibitions and concentrates on one of the areas of investigation, feminism, existentialism or psychoanalysis. Thus **Chapter one, *Object as subject : a feminist perspective***, centres on feminist discourse and my position in relation to it. In this chapter sculptures produced between 1988 and 1990 and which were exhibited at the 1990 exhibition, give concrete form to the debate. **Chapter two, *The negative aspects of god : an existential question***, revolves around an ontological inquiry that prompted the cycle of works exhibited in 1993, *Nicholas – October 1990*.

Chapter three, *Subject as object* : a psychoanalytical view deals with a post-Freudian approach to interpretation. This chapter is based on the 1996 exhibition, *John's wife*.

Although the tripartite structure is imposed for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the phenomenological experience of the ideas that has fed my art generally refuses neat compartmentalisation. The structure is not therefore intended to convey that my ideas and feelings are neatly ordered. The frame work merely permits a teasing out of the concepts; their framing into separate compartments facilitates analysis. However two core concepts refused such neat ordering. These are the questions of interpretation of the art works and the rôle of the unconscious in the production of my art. I have chosen to deal with these ideas as thematic threads that weave in and out throughout the three chapters, providing a counterpoint to the other debates.

Chapter one

Object as subject : a feminist perspective.

The centrality of the ego in psychoanalytical thought and the subjectivity of existentialism are echoed in feminism with its concern with both perceived and felt identity.⁷ John Berger provided the classical phrase when he noted that woman is both the surveyor and the surveyed (1972: 46).⁸

As early as 1953 Simone de Beauvoir, in her book the *Second sex*, said "Woman sees herself and makes choices not in accordance with her true nature ... but as man defines her ..." (in Broude and Garrard 1992: 190). Women are in the habit of self-scrutiny where the subjective self assesses its own consciousness through the objectifying eyes of the

other.⁹ de Beauvoir articulated what has now become received wisdom namely, that gender is a constructed, not an inherited, condition.

Nevertheless I had since the seventies refused to engage with feminist discourse. The reasons for this are complex and will be explored in chapter one. However, in writing this dissertation I was forced to engage with feminist concepts in order to position myself in the discourse. I found a theoretical home in the ideas of Julia Kristeva (1995). Kristeva, a French psychoanalytic feminist, uses Lacanian thought¹⁰ as a springboard for her “third generational” approach (1995: 222). Her views resounded empathetically with my ideas. My engagement with some of the central topics of feminist discourse that led to me a “Kristevan” position will be discussed in chapter one.

In this chapter I also analyse a series of “feminist” sculptures that I made between 1988 and 1990.¹¹ In a discussion of the critical interpretations elicited by these works I introduce the question of author/reader dichotomies in interpretation.¹²

Chapter two

The negative aspects of god : an existential question

Sartrean existentialism expresses a complex interdependence between the poles of consciousness and the world-out-there, which cannot be split simply into a dualistic separation on the idealism/realism axis. Sartre uses the concepts of *pour-soi* and *en-soi* to express the nature of consciousness and objects in the world (Blackham 1961: 111). The critical point for the purpose of this dissertation, however, is his focus on the nature of Being which is centred on consciousness and the subjective awareness of that consciousness as it experiences itself in the world.

It is the nature of the existential project to have recourse to the self as the centre of meaning. It follows that absolute authority does not reside in an ultimate being; the existence of god¹³ is in question. By the same token morality is a negotiated position. These ethical and ontological problems are explored in chapter two in which the exhibition *Nicholas - October 1990*,¹⁴ forms the basis for the discussion. This cycle of works explored the notions of "good" and "evil", the abuse of power and the absence of god.

The "wild grief that God is dead" (Blackham 1961: 155) which is generated by an existential position, finds its metaphorical counterpart in empty space. The problem of finding a material parallel to emptiness in the context of the gallery is alluded to in this chapter. The discussion focuses on the use of lighting in the gallery in the "Nicholas" exhibition and the employment of the photographic medium to generate images that exploit the metaphor of space.

The response of the critics to this exhibition expands the debate between authorial intention and reader interpretation, which was introduced in chapter one. It is suggested that an extrapolation of affect occurs; that the readers' response is interpreted in terms of the author's intention. It is suggested that the critiques are therefore based on a false premise.

Chapter three

Subject as object : a psychoanalytical view

In spite of my youthful renunciation of the Freudian theory, the concept of the unconscious as developed by Freud, has remained a significant one for me and has dominated my approach to life and to art. I am

interested in the subliminal workings of the unconscious not only in the production of dream imagery but also in the way it functions in the process of art production, interpretation and criticism. Exactly how the link between the unconscious and manifest imagery is achieved has occupied psychoanalytical theorists from Freud, *The interpretation of dreams*, (1900), through to Rycroft, *Freud and the imagination*, (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 303 - 315), and beyond.

The part that the unconscious plays in the genesis and the interpretation of my work is a thematic topic that occurs throughout the paper. However in the final chapter, chapter three, a more focused approach will be adopted when Charles Rycroft's model (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 303 - 315) that links dream work and the creative process, will be discussed¹⁵ with reference to a body of work I produced for the 1996 exhibition, *John's wife*. In this series of sculptures, the existential problems explored in the "Nicholas series" are developed in the domain of the personal.

The connection between the creative process and dream work has, in terms of my own experience, a sense of "fit". I may start a sculpture with a formal problem as its initial premise. At that stage, the content of the work is only apprehended subliminally, if at all. However during the working process I allow barely apprehended ideas to dictate both form and content. The pre-conscious is allowed reign.¹⁶ The sculpture reveals its meaning only after completion, a process which may take months or years. Its content is thus not only made manifest to that abstract entity, the viewer, but most importantly to me, the artist. The work, like a dream, provides encoded information that informs me of my subconscious fears, thoughts and desires. As Kuspit has noted, "Art functions in the psychic space of transition uniting inner and outer

worlds" (1993: 229). For me, Kuspit's inner world is represented by the subconscious, containing barely apprehended yet to be decoded meaning. The outer world is the functioning rational ego that seeks understanding. Art bridges these two entities. At this stage a verbal articulation of its form and content acts like "secondary revision"¹⁷ which itself provides encoded meaning (Wright 1984: 25). Art forms a loop through which information feeds back to its source.

The nature of my working process, raises the spectre of intentionality in interpretation.¹⁸ Critics have frequently assumed certain ideological and affective intentions in my work. For example, an *a priori* feminist programme was assumed to have dictated the genesis of the "feminist" sculptures 1988 - 1990. But, it is hard to see how propagandistic feminism can be a function of the unconscious. Nevertheless these sculptures, once completed, do permit a feminist reading. This paradox is explored in chapter one.

But I as first interpreter of the art work, am not the only decoder of meaning nor do I as "author" necessarily lay claim to the definitive interpretation. The "readers" of my texts are also important. Their views are discussed and contrasted throughout the dissertation. Favouring a position of "moderate relativism"¹⁶ (Wolff 1988: 99) I have approached the author/reader conundrum from the point of view that meaning is "always a mediation between author and reader, past and present, based on the historicity and preconceptions of the reader but allowing the text, the author, the 'other', to 'speak for itself/himself'" (*ibid.*: 101). I therefore present interpretation from both the author's and readers' perspectives offering (in chapter three) a psychoanalytic explanation on the readers' views.¹⁹

The three theoretical “world views” subsumed in the three chapters were implanted in my psyche during my developmental years. They became so much a part of my life that it required an effort of will and the focus demanded of this dissertation to bring them to the fore and permit an analysis of the influence of their core ideas on my artistic production. I initially resisted the task of formalising the ideas contained within such vast and diverse spheres of discourse. But more than the challenge of this task, I resisted examining my own creativity since I regarded it as beyond analysis. But having heeded Rycroft’s (1975: 315) warning of collapse, I nevertheless decided to take the plunge with the concession that the writing of this academic text should make some adjustment to the visual process. Thus this dissertation will attempt a creative fluidity. Where necessary it will even adopt a poetic tone. This compromise I find important if the two bodies of research, the academic and the visual, are to achieve their intimate and ultimately necessary connection.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹ Arnold notes that:

'[S]ubject' is a word with seemingly contradictory meanings. A subject is under control of another, and 'to subject' is to be under domination. But in the grammatical sense the subject is active not passive. This energising of the subject is also characteristic of the philosophical meaning, where the subject - the self or ego - thinks, feels perceives and intends (1996: 2).

It is in the latter grammatical and philosophical sense that I have used the word "subject"; "object" refers to the passive state.

² These works were exhibited at a one person exhibition at the First Gallery, Johannesburg 23 April - 11 May 1996.

³ I graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1969 with a BA (Hons) in psychology.

⁴ Although the centrality of the subjective position is clear in Freudian theory and existentialism, it is not as focused in feminist theory which can be approached from a number of materialistic and sociological perspectives. But in this dissertation feminism will be addressed from a personal and subjective point of view; how I, as centred female subject, have experienced both the nature of my gender and the discourse that surrounds it.

⁵ Freudian psychoanalysis, feminism and existentialism represent ways of seeing the world. They are loose systems of thought that have coloured the way twentieth century men and women have seen themselves. When I use the words "ideology", "doctrine" or "discourse" in the context of these world views, I do so advisedly, aware that no one word adequately circumscribes these areas of thought.

⁶ The exhibitions are *Untitled, (everlasting nothingness is made visible)* (Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg 1990), *Nicholas – October 1990*, (Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg 1993) and *John's wife*, (First Gallery, Johannesburg 1996). (See appendix A for a full list of works exhibited at these exhibitions).

⁷ It seems that it is at the point of gender identity that psychoanalysis,

existentialism and feminism coalesce. Gender construction is integral to the developmental approach typical of psychoanalytical thought. It also enters the debate as to the nature of consciousness as defined by the objectifying distance of "the other" in existentialism.

⁸ As Blackham has noted, "My own body is objectified by my power to look at myself looking on through the eyes of the other to infinity" (1961: 20).

⁹ "Projective identification" is the psychoanalytical term used to describe the process whereby identity is vicariously achieved by identifying with another's perceived successes (Slipp 1993: 191). At the time de Beauvoir wrote it appeared that women had little option but to achieve their successes this way.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, reformulated Freudian doctrine in the terms of Saussurian linguistics (Selden in Selden and Widdowson 1993: 139). Lacan broke the link between the signifier and the signified, a link which de Saussure had suggested was immutable (Wright 1984: 109).

Into this break he inserted the functioning of the unconscious. The result was that words are no longer secure in their meaning; things are not as they appear and meaning shifts according to sub-conscious precepts. This is a received wisdom in psychoanalysis. By linking this knowledge to language, Lacan shifted the emphasis from a neurosis-based theory to one of normative functioning. His approach has implications for hermeneutics.

¹¹ These works were exhibited at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg at the exhibition *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*, 6 - 27 October 1990. (This title is somewhat pretentious. It provided fuel for the critic, Ivor Powell, who headlined his critique: "A bit too much like everlasting nothingness made visible" (1990). However the choice of title was not mine. It was lifted by the gallery director from some notes I had made in preparation for the exhibition. These, in turn, were extracted and memorised from an Albert Camus novel, the title of which I have forgotten. The exhibition until then had been untitled. This event provided an object lesson in maintaining strict control over one's work during the process of setting up an exhibition.

¹² In accordance with the convention derived from literary theory I have used the words "author", "reader" and "text" generically to include "artist", "viewer" and the "art work".

¹³ I have written the words "god" and "christ" in lower case. This accords with my views on the nature of god.

¹⁴ This body of work was exhibited at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg between 17 April and 8 May 1993.

¹⁵ Selden (in Selden and Widdowson 1993: 139) has also noted how art shares similarities with dream imagery: both depend on the unconscious for their source, and both work on metaphoric and metonymic substitutions and displacements.

¹⁶ Burgin (1991: 215) suggests the use of the term "pre-conscious" instead of "unconscious", since "unconscious" denotes that which is unavailable to conscious thought except in coded form. In this dissertation the terms "pre-conscious", "subconscious" and "unconscious" will be used relatively interchangeably. But due note has been taken of their more precise definitions.

¹⁷ "Secondary revision" is when the dream is presented in the form of a verbal account. The conscious mind prefers to put the irrational dream sequence into recognisable and familiar logical order, involving a further distortion of the "distortion" already achieved ... (Wright 1984: 25).

¹⁸ The intentional fallacy was first articulated by Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946. They maintained that critical criteria must be perceptible in the work of art itself and that the artist's intention is external to these factors (Blocker 1979: 246).

¹⁹ The position of "moderate relativism" is typified by H-G Gadamer (in Wolff 1988: 99), who maintains that "understanding is always from the point of view of the one who understands". This view apparently weighted towards the readers' interpretation of a text, nevertheless does not neglect the author's point of view which offers one in a range of possible interpretations (*ibid.*: 102).

CHAPTER ONE

OBJECT AS SUBJECT : A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

THE 1990 EXHIBITION : *UNTITLED EVERLASTING NOTHINGNESS MADE VISIBLE*

In order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position ...(Broude and Garrard (eds) 1992: 17).

What a woman essentially lacks today for doing great things is forgetfulness of herself, but to forget oneself it is first of all necessary to be firmly assured that ... one has found oneself (de Beauvoir in Parker and Pollock 1981: 101).

1.1 A FEMINIST POSITION

1.2 THE "FEMINIST" SCULPTURES 1988 – 1990 : A PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

1.1 A FEMINIST POSITION

Having embarked upon a research project that utilises the (female) artist as the subject/object of research I found that it was necessary to position myself within feminist discourse. My ideas on feminism had for some time been largely inchoate. Although I had privately considered myself "feminist", I had for a long time avoided aligning myself with feminist movements or articulating my feminist ideals formally. The reasons for this denial lie in certain ambivalence towards feminism, which is perhaps best expressed by the juxtaposition of the quotes that I have chosen to introduce this chapter. When I selected them I was unaware of their mutual exclusivity. I have retained them as symbolic of a debate that, at the time this project was initiated, was fraught with contradiction and doubt. With a modicum of hindsight I now know that what I desired then, and now still seek, is a "masculine" authorial authority with which to engage with feminine experience.

In 1995, my uncertainty about my feminist position was expressed as a repudiation of feminism. When Marion Arnold interviewed me for her book *Women and art in South Africa*, my bald rejection of feminism hid a complex and contradictory response. As Arnold expressed it:

Cruise is conscious of ... belonging to a generation of South African women whose identities were acquired in a conservative patriarchy, and who now have to recognise conflicts between self awareness and social expectations (1996: 114).

Since my interview with Arnold in 1995 my position *apropos* feminism has clarified. In the process I have also come to realise, what perhaps is a truism to many, that "feminism" does not represent a single political position but many positions. There are many feminisms represented by arguments that vary from the essentialist to the reductive.¹

In 1995 I had rejected both these extreme positions and in so doing discarded the potential for a theoretical home somewhere between.

Yet as early as 1988 my feminist views were finding expression in art. The work that illustrates this contention is a sculpture entitled *Blue Doris* (1988)² (fig 1).

Blue Doris (1988) is a psychical portrait of the artist Doris Bloom. Bloom had impressed me with the single-minded management of her career as an international artist. I saw in her make-up a focused strength that I identified as "masculine". This descriptive term I use to describe personal qualities such as "single-minded", "aggressive", "unsentimental". These personal attributes were not encouraged in girls who grew up in the fifties and sixties. Yet for me they are desirable characteristics and when I perceived them in a younger woman they evoked my admiration and envy.

The working procedure for the portrait of Doris relied on unconscious processes. Stimulated by my admiration for Bloom, the sculpture evolved into a bear-like creature, female, yet equipped with a penis. The sculpture was also constructed in two pieces that slot one into the other. The male aspect, shaped like an enlarged penis, is not seen when the form is assembled. But Doris is twice blessed with that symbol of power, the phallus. In Freudian terms, this may be read as an expression of penis envy. But, I believe that women do not desire the physical organ but the power that is represented by the phallus. It is thus the signified not the sign that women desire and envy. Unconsciously I had equipped Doris, twice, with the token of authority.

As this work indicates, my feminist position was coalescing as long ago as 1988. However, it was not at the time acknowledged in my conscious thoughts or in my writings.

In subsequent years, as my work developed and became increasingly involved with the female body, it became clear that I, as a woman artist, working with the female nude as subject, yet simultaneously denying a feminist position, was on shaky ground. As Arnold expressed it:

Her work in clay, and her written notes, also point to the dilemma faced by South African women artists who are reticent about embracing feminism as a working credo and yet argue ardently for the expression of a female point of view ... (1996: 113).

The reasons for my ambivalence lay in a rejection of certain generic feminist positions. One of the most potent of which is expressed in the notion of female commodification encapsulated in the idea of the "male gaze" (Broude and Garrard 1992: 7). The argument runs along the following lines:

[M]ales assert their power through the privileged and, in linguistic terms, the 'subject' position of looking, while females are the passive powerless objects of their controlling gaze (Mulvey in Broude and Garrard 1992: 7).

Simone de Beauvoir had articulated this position as early as 1953 (published in *The second sex*). She said that women's state of passivity relegated them to the status of object (in Slipp 1993: 191). They became quite literally the second sex.

But, as I perceived it, the "gaze theory" neglects both the female artist and the female viewer. Where is the woman in the subject position? Is

she to be ignored or is it to be assumed that she is the silent, colluding partner to her male counterpart? This may well be the case for, as Broude and Garrard have noted, women through the ages have participated in the social construction of their image (1992: 12). de Beauvoir had observed that women achieved their sense of self by identifying with men (in Slipp 1993: 191). It was this aspect that she railed against; men as doers and women as simply being.

de Beauvoir realised that women had the power to effect their own liberation. *The second sex* was largely responsible for conscientising women to this possibility. As a student, my embryonic feminism was awakened by de Beauvoir's text. A decade later *The feminine mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963) watered already fertile soil.³

The second sex and *The feminine mystique* were seminal works. Since their publication, sufficient numbers of women have manoeuvred themselves out of rôles of passivity into positions of power. Therefore, Broude and Garrard's question as to the rôle of women artists and women viewers has a far greater urgency now, than it did in the days of de Beauvoir and Friedan. The effect of the second wave feminist movement⁴ has enabled women to move themselves up the subject/object continuum. One would then assume that the simplistic dichotomy between male and female implied by the "gaze theory" would be negated.

However, later developments of "the gaze" theory do not always avoid this type of polarisation of the genders. Laura Mulvey, for example, claims that the voyeuristic position of the spectator has "nothing to do with woman but has everything to do with man" (in Parker and Pollock 1987: 131). Mulvey argues that in depicting the female nude, male artists (she uses the British pop artist Allen Jones as an example), draw

attention away from (female) genitalia and focus the gaze onto fetish objects such as shoes and corsets (*ibid.*). She suggests that the avoidance of an explicit portrayal of the genitalia, as demonstrated in Jones' figures, is a result of male castration fear. She says that the female nude "concerns not woman, but the narcissistic wound she represents for man" (*ibid.*). The nude is therefore not only an object of male desire but also a projection of male fear. While this psychoanalytical interpretation is interesting it still leaves women spectators on the periphery. Neither their desires nor fears are acknowledged or explained.

Mulvey's simple dualism; woman as victim, man as (now misunderstood) gazer; is a result of the confusion of two ideas, which Victor Burgin has identified in his essay *Perverse space* (in Bann and Allen 1991: 131 - 132). He states that Mulvey has confused psychical with physical space. More particularly he argues that she has muddled Marxist with psychoanalytical modes of thought. Burgin's explanation runs as follows. He says that Mulvey has "put a psychoanalytical frame around a non-psychoanalytical notion of 'objectification', one derived from a Marxist idea of commodification - a woman packaged as an object for sale" (*ibid.*). He goes on to say that Mulvey has suppressed precisely that part that is central to psychoanalytical thought, the unconscious. In terms of the unconscious every desire is expressed in terms of duality along an active-passive axis (*ibid.*: 132). Thus voyeurism has its counterpart in exhibitionism perhaps as a suppressed desire within the same person.

If one accepts Burgin's reasoning, and I am inclined to do so, an explanation is made possible as to the rôle that women play in their own objectification. The nude female might not be so much the victim of the gendered gaze but may herself be an exhibitionist. She could thus, "provoke a mixture of desire, envy and hostility in male and female viewers alike" (*ibid.*: 137). Burgin's explanation acknowledges the

complexity of sexual behaviour. As he has observed "sexuality is not an urge to be obeyed so much as an enigma to unravel" (*ibid.*). This acknowledgement challenges the simple dualism of subject/object, voyeur/passive-victim of the gendered gaze. It recognises the complexity of male/female relationships and avoids a simplistic dualism in the explanation of gendered behaviour.

Yet Mulvey's explanation does have its use in that it suggests strategies for feminist artists. Women can and do depict those areas of female anatomy and female biological activity that are regarded as taboo. They bypass the fetishisation and go in for the kill, as it were, by drawing attention to the genitalia which are avoided in the fetishisation process. Judy Chicago, for example, has depicted female genitalia in a number of works including her *magnum opus*, *The dinner party* (1979).⁵ In this monumental feminist work, circular images were painted or modelled onto the dinner plates which then stood in symbolic relationship to women whom Chicago has chosen to venerate. Reference to their genitalia was made in flowerlike and circular form (Withers 1992: 455). Interestingly, in spite of the lack of explicit anatomical detail, and in spite of the fact female genitalia were used for political rather than erotic purposes (Lucie-Smith 1991: 262), Chicago was still accused of obscenity (Withers 1992: 462)!

The technique adopted by women artists of revealing taboo areas of female anatomy is not without its dangers. Griselda Pollock utters this warning:

[There is an] ... absolute insufficiency of the notion current in the women's movement which suggests that women artists can create an alternative imagery outside existing ideological forms, for not only is vaginal imagery recuperable but in that process the more sinister implications of sexual difference in ideological

representations are exposed (in Parker and Pollock 1987: 136).⁶

Pollock's position in one respect is that the problem with images of women is not merely a case of good images versus bad images, but that sexual difference is a complex of interacting constructs that functions as a series of signifiers in a particular ideological discourse (Kendall and Pollock 1992: 24).⁷ Her position acknowledges the fact that different meanings can be attached to images of women depending on the context of the images and the predisposition of the reader. One needs therefore to construct meaning in relation to other signifiers in the discourse (*ibid.*). While Pollock's position acknowledges the complexity of the problem of gendered identity, I would nevertheless not go as far as to accept her implication that "woman" is merely one sign which has meaning only in relation to another sign, "man", in a signifying system (*ibid.*: 24). There are physical/biological facts about gender difference that simply cannot be ignored.

The idea that gender is constructed by language is also central to the thoughts of the psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan. In a re-reading of Freud, Lacan has maintained (in Wolff 1981: 133) that at the point at which the child learns language (enters the symbolic order), s/he is positioned in the family and the society at large,

which is to say that the child learns to identify itself as male or female and as son or daughter. Here, more or less the traditional Freudian categories (the Oedipus complex, the castration complex) are incorporated, to explain the centrality of sexuality and gender in the construction of the family (Wolff 1981: 133).

What Lacan did was to locate language at the centre of gender identification. In Lacanian theory "*having a male or female body is irrelevant* ... without language there is neither gender nor gender-oriented

desire" (my italics) (in Wright 1984: 110). Lacan also identifies language as belonging to the masculine, symbolic order, of which the phallus is "the transcendental signifier" (*ibid.*). He thus appears to reinforce the phallogentrism of classical Freudianism! However, in terms of its implication for hermeneutics, Lacan's ideas introduce the notion of the instability of the relationship between the sign and its meaning. Lacan maintains that the bond between the signifier and the signified, established by Saussurian linguistics, is rendered unstable by the unconscious which is of the primary, pre-language (that is, pre-masculine) order (*ibid*: 109).

Lacan's theory, in spite of its implied phallogentrism, has influenced the French feminists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. These psychoanalytical theorists assumed since language itself was implicated in determining gender, language itself must be part of the patriarchal system. They attempted to subvert this "masculine" language by writing in the primary process language of the imaginary (Slipp 1993: 201). By avoiding subject/object sentence structures they attempted to reclaim territory from the patriarchy. However, it seems to me that their metaphoric and affective writing confirms feminine stereotypes namely, that women function beyond (beneath) logic and rationality. The polarisation of masculine and feminine is confirmed in their essentialising position. As Kristeva indicates:

[T]he dichotomy between man and women as an opposition of two rival identities is a problem of metaphysics, what does "identity" and even "sexual identity" mean ... [when] the notion of "identity" itself is challenged (1995: 222).

The essence of Kristeva's message is to question the psycho-symbolic structure that has caused women to feel rejected. She challenges the structure on behalf of women *and* men. For her difference is not defined

by the opposition of gendered groups but is a matter of interiorisation. "I am *at once the attacker and the victim*, the same *and* the other, identical *and* foreign" (1995: 223). Kristeva appears to confirm Burgin's argument that individual desire functions on a passive/active axis (in Bann and Allen 1991: 132).

Kristeva does not oppose patriarchy as such but "seeks to uncover women's (repressed) masculinity and men's (disavowed) femininity ..." (Goodwin 1993: 369). She refuses to see masculinity and femininity as binary terms in the same way as the biological entities male and female are.

Kristeva's ideas fell into my thought patterns with sympathetic resonance. I had written the following some months before I encountered her views:

Doris confined is Doris
anima consumes animus
and becomes one
(from *Book 7, Fragments* 1995 - 1996).⁸

The image that illustrates the poem and the poem itself was based on the sculpture, *Blue Doris* (1988).

As this work indicates I had intuitively rejected an essentialist position with its implications of "them" and "us". The combinations of feminine and masculine attributes in Doris Bloom were precisely those that evoked my admiration.

But in rejecting an essentialist position I do not deny biological difference. To do so would be absurd since it is patently obvious that pregnant or lactating, pre-menstrual or post-menopausal, women have different life experiences to those of men. I acknowledge biological difference without

agreeing to biological determinism. Broude and Garrard have identified this stance as "liberal feminism", a position which along with other liberalisms tends to avoid "totalizing constructs" (1992: 20).

At the other end of the spectrum I decided that the Lacanian model was also untenable. Gender constructed *only* by language ignores obvious biological differences between man and woman. There are physical facts that intrude into reality whatever the psycho-symbolic structure of society. My position is echoed by Wolff who noted that:

With the insistence by certain followers of Lacan on the primacy of the signifier and the denial of the independent signified, we run the risk of *according total determining power to language and sign systems* (my italics) (1981: 134 - 135).

I discovered this echo in Julia Kristeva's 1995 book, *New maladies of the soul*:

[W]omen feel rejected from language and the social bond, in which they discover neither the *affects* nor the meanings of the relationships they enjoy with nature, *their bodies*, their children's bodies, another woman, or a man. The accompanying frustration, which is also experienced by some men, is the quintessence of the new feminist ideology (my italics) (1995: 213).⁹

Thus my position can be stated: "man" and "woman" are constructs that go beyond biology but include biology. Language, societal pressures and childhood experiences are undoubtedly implicated in the construction of identity including gendered identity. The desired goal for the subjective experience of gender is for it to occur not only inter-subjectively but also intra-subjectively. Gendered and sexual behaviour is not a question of a simple dualism between "masculine" and "feminine". Rather these terms

describe positions in a complex grid of perception, emotion and behaviour which occur within individuals as well as between them.

1.2 THE "FEMINIST" SCULPTURES 1988 – 1990 : A PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

I have placed the word "feminist" between inverted commas in the heading to this section. This requires explanation. The series of sculptures, *Without title with mirror* (1988 - 1990) (fig 2), *Wedding night* (1989) (fig 3), *War zone* (1989) (fig 4), *Venus after Dora* (1990) (fig 5), *There is no father* (1990) (fig 6) and *Zoë* (1989) (fig 7) intimate feminist experiences.¹⁰ Nevertheless, they were not conceived with any intended didactic or protest functions. These sculptures were not initiated on the premise of feminist protest. On the contrary the works were made at a time when I set myself a fairly simple formal task, namely, to make a series of sculptures that combines human and animal forms.

The first work in the series, *Without title with mirror* (1988 - 1990) (fig 2), was inspired by a barely remembered sculpture of the she-wolf suckling the babies, Romulus and Remus.¹¹ The image had sprung, seemingly unbidden, into conscious thought. Since the pre-conscious process is precisely the basis on which the sculptures are founded the idea was exploited as a carrier of barely comprehended and yet to be decoded meaning. *Without title with mirror* (1988 - 1990) was pre-dated by almost two years by drawings of a dog/wolf feeding two children¹² (fig 8). These drawings had been forgotten yet the image must have lain dormant in the regions of the subconscious until it surfaced in *Without title with mirror* (1988 – 1990). Nevertheless, the form that emerged from the process of manipulating the clay was not the wolf of mythology, but a human female that had six swollen dugs like a bitch in

whelp. It was a figure whose breasts weighed her down in a kneeling position. The presence of the suckling children was implied.

The environment in which the sculpture was placed was similarly an unplanned process of discovery. Only after the work had been modelled was it decided to place it on a bed. The bed was found in a second-hand furniture store where the mirror, that was to become such an important aspect of the work, serendipitously appeared. It should be noted that up until the time that the mirror was seen in the shop, it had not occurred to me to use this device. At this stage the work seemed to have an energy of its own that dictated the direction in which it developed. It seemed clear that the mirror would not only add to the "bedroom" environment created by the bed but that it would also act as an intensifier, multiplying the image of the heavy breasts. Thus the bed, the figure resting on the locked box and the swollen breasts repeated in the mirror completed a work that had started with a simple formal premise: to make an animal/human form. It was only at the point of completion that the meaning of the work became clear. The milk-heavy breasts symbolised the weighty responsibility I felt at that time when my children were young and dependent and when the family consumed the milk of my creative energy.

It is also only at this point, namely at the completion of the work, that a feminist reading became possible. The work and the process of its making provided a conduit to the unconscious. That was its intention.¹³ The making of the sculpture involved an intensely private experience that was a search through pre-conscious thought. This could not be further from the didactic intention of politically inclined feminist artists and their agendas for socio-political change. The recent work of Lisa Brice will serve to illustrate the contrast between my "feminist" work and her protest-inspired images:

[V]iewers found themselves confronted by ... [Brice's] *Sex Kittens*, nine of them lined up on the walls and crawling forwards. A sardonic play between form and content pulled no punches ... (Williamson and Jamal 1996: 92).¹⁴

Williamson and Jamal assert in dealing with "gender issues and the dehumanizing of women" (*ibid.*: 94), Brice's work "takes no prisoners ... [t]he content is blazing clear" (*ibid.*).

Yet it can be argued that the content of *Without title with mirror* (1988 – 1990) is similarly unequivocal. Since in spite of my intention to the contrary, the process of making the sculpture unearthed a female experience that feminists would recognise. This is the sense of biological bondage. The swollen breasts allude to the act of suckling when self becomes subordinated to the rôle of nurturing. It can thus be stated that at the point of reception *Without title with mirror* (1988 – 1990) validly entered the feminist debate.

This variation between my intention and that of Brice's and the fact that these do not necessarily dictate the reception of our work raises the difficult question of intentionality. The problem is articulated in the following question: Just how valid is the intention of the artist as a determiner of the final meaning of the work? Those critics who impute an intention further compound this problem.

For example Benita Munitz in writing about *Without title with mirror* (1988 – 1990) and its companion sculptures¹⁵ headlined her critique, *Heavy feminist statement made at show* (1991). She said, "Life is a bitch and men are to blame ..." (*ibid.*):

I resent Cruise's implications - that women are helpless prisoners of their destiny, that procreation is a burden, that men and women are essentially alienated and, above all, that a woman's lot is hopeless (*ibid.*).

Munitz' critique implies an intention that "fits" neither my purpose nor my experience: I do not regard life as "a bitch" or men as blameworthy for the state of affairs. She has assigned an intention to this work (and the others in the series), that shifts the emphasis of the initial premise. She assumes that I, the author of the works, have adopted an oppositional feminist position, when this is not the case.

Two companion pieces made at the same time as *Without title with mirror* (1988 - 1990) allude to sexual politics and reflect my concerns of that time about the nature of female experience as nurturer and as sexual being. These are *Wedding night* (1989) (fig 3) and *War zone* (1989) (fig 4). *Wedding night* (1989) was exhibited at the 1991 Cape Town Triennial. This work caused a stir when the exhibition travelled around the country. In Pretoria the organiser thought to cover the erect penis of the male form with the grey blanket that formed part of the work and which she must have thought was conveniently placed there for that purpose! On being challenged as to the necessity of the "cover-up", she said that it was, "Only for the opening night so that the sponsors would not be offended" (in conversation with the artist).¹⁶

Wedding night (1989) began with the premise of combining animal and human forms but with the additional formal problem of combining two figures in one work. It was also a more conscious exploration of a female/feminist experience than *Without title with mirror* (1988 - 1990). It was intended to explore the interface between male and female experience. Its basic premise was that even in the most intimate moments, that of orgasm, a space exists in understanding between men and women. There is a gulf of silence. The space between the kneeling female form and the prone male figure is significant and was consciously managed in the process of constructing the sculpture. There was no such conscious decision that determined that the weaker prostrate form

was male and powerless nor that the larger bulkier kneeling figure was female and therefore controlling. The male screams. Whether this is in protest at his rape [!] or in orgasmic ecstasy, I do not know. The title was thought up some months after the completion of the work. These facts are probably the cause for the strong reaction *Wedding night* (1989) called forth. As noted, Munitz resented "Cruise's implications - that ... women are essentially alienated ..." (1991). Anthea Bristowe called the work "distressingly literal" (1992) and Ivor Powell approximating the truth but missing its essential point wrote that "[the] two figures are ... engaged in a species of physical connection that has more to do with violence about it than love" (1990).

Strangely enough, the companion piece to *Wedding night* (1989), *War zone* (1989) did not cause as much of a furore in spite of the more provocative positioning of the figures. This is probably because the work was not exhibited beyond its initial exposure at the Goodman Gallery in October 1990. Ivor Powell provides a description and, coincidentally, an explanation as to the meaning of the work:

[I]n an even more excessive and ambivalent image, that of *War Zone*, ... a man is both performing cunnilingus and being born out of the female, who is represented in two separate and severed body halves (1990).

Venus after Dora (1990) (fig 5) is much more problematical in terms of its interpretation and its symbolism. Once again the work was initiated by a formal concern namely, to make a free-standing life-size figure. At the time I had not arrived at the technical solution to make figures completely free-standing and the box-like shape of the lower half of the figure was a technical rather than an iconographic decision. However, having acknowledged the rôle of the subconscious as a director of meaning I cannot subsequently quarrel with Geers' interpretation that "The breasts, hips and buttocks of 'Venus after Dora' have been

exaggerated in a manner that echoes the prehistoric Venus of Willendorf ... " nor that the work refers to "Freud's famous case study of so-called female hysteria" (1990: 10). But that the work refers, as Geers prefers to see it, to "the fragmentation and oppression of women through patriarchal stereotyping" (*ibid.*) seems to me to box the meaning of the work into a set of feminist stereotypes that has more to do with Geers' mind set than with the work itself. The danger with Geers' somewhat clichéd interpretation as well as those of Munitz' above, is the implication that this was exactly what the artist meant. Both these critics have assumed a rôle as translator of the artist's intention when basically they were responding to the work in terms of their own making.

The danger with positions such as Geers' and Munitz' is that they are not entirely wrong. If this were the case it would be simple just to dismiss their criticism. For example, Munitz' interpretation is "incorrect" only in the degree of her response. She reacted as a woman to the feminine experiences connoted in the works. But within her overtly strong reaction lay the seeds of a negativity that said more about her projections than my intentions. Similarly *Venus after Dora* (1990) does allude to Freud's case of female hysteria as Geers suggested, but the image came via a route about which Geers could not have known but would, no doubt, have caused him some surprise. The "Venus" of the title refers to a work by Penny Siopis. This is the painting *Dora and the other woman* (1988).¹⁷ This work had impinged powerfully on my vision. It was in homage to Siopis' painting and its reference to Saartje Baartman that *Venus after Dora* (1990) was constructed. Thus the enlarged buttocks of the figure had more to do with the nineteenth century Saartje Baartman than with the prehistoric *Venus of Willendorf*; and "Dora" refers more to Siopis than it does to its original source in the writings of Freud!

Nevertheless Geers and critics of his ilk have uncovered a problem in interpretation. In their criticism they have implied that they have a conduit to the artist's mind. They have suggested privileged knowledge as to the intention of the works. When Geers writes that *Venus after Dora* (1990) is about "the fragmentation and oppression of women through patriarchal stereotyping" (*ibid.*) he is implying an authorial intention. But, as Barthes has written:

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. *Such a conception suits criticism very well*, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author ... beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is explained - *victory to the critic* (my italics) (1977: 147).

Barthes has circumvented the power of the critic as an interpreter of the author's intentions by the simple device of proclaiming the death of the author (Barthes 1977: 148). There is a tendency in contemporary criticism to accept Barthes' position namely, to deny the author unitary status as the God-like subject of his/her work.¹⁸ But to eradicate the "intentional problem" by eliminating the author as a determiner of meaning seems an overreaction to the problem of the "intentional fallacy". Geers, as a critic, incorrectly imputed a certain stance to me as the author of *Venus after Dora* (1990). But by removing the author and denying the critic the "victory" of his interpretation, leaves the subject without voice in an action reminiscent of "shooting the messenger"!

The putative death of the author also raises questions that have implications for women artists. Walker has phrased it well when she wrote: "[T]o erase a woman ... as the author ... in favour of an abstract indeterminacy is an act of oppression" (1990: 571). Just at the moment in history when women artists are (re)-claiming their place at the centre, the centre as represented by the subject, (the author) is said to have

died. The death of the author then becomes the death of women artists who are beginning to affirm their rightful place as creators. Is their hard fought battle against marginalisation merely to turn to dust?

Given a resounding “no” to Barthes' thesis on the basis of feminist politics however is one matter. It is altogether another matter that the “death of the subject” suggests in interpreting works such as those in the *Wedding night* series. These sculptures were initiated by the subjective response of an individual to the prompting of her pre-conscious. As author is she to be declared dead or alive? The problem can be phrased as follows: If one accepts that “only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’” (Barthes 1977: 143) where is the subject in a body of work which takes as its precise starting point the ego? This is the centre of self which is exactly the ‘me’ that Barthes wishes to eradicate?

Barthes' radical position is tempered by other, more compromising approaches to the author/reader dichotomy. Foucault suggests that “it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) ...” (in Rabinow 1984: 104). But he reduces “the author” to a construct that embodies a number of discourses. He says: “The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture ...” (*ibid.*: 107).

The centred self as the focus of the work is thereby denied status.

Janet Wolff has adopted, what she terms, a “reflexive” sociological approach to the author/reader dichotomy (1981: 107). She maintains that meaning is a result of *both* author and reader and their histories. That is, the genesis and the impact of the text are equally important

(*ibid.*: 108). She bases her approach on a Marxian model of production and consumption. Each term of the equation is dependent on the other. Wolff acknowledges the importance of the author as part creator of meaning. She says, "the author, now understood as constituted in language, ideology and social relations, retains a central relevance, ... the author being the first person to fix meaning ..." (*ibid.*: 136). But she does not place the particular "I", the creative source, in the centre of her Marxist approach with its emphasis on "society". The answer to the centred-self-as-author lies in areas of research where individual subjectivity is emphasised; Freudian psychology and existential thought. These will be discussed in the following chapters.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

- ¹ The arguments range from a belief in a feminine essence, (this line of reasoning dominated feminist research in the seventies (Chadwick 1990: 9)) to the reduction of gender issues to language. This latter approach is represented by the ideas of Jacques Lacan (Wolff 1981: 133).
- ² *Blue Doris* (1988). Ceramic with paint, 55 x 90 cm. Private collection. (*Clay+* 1988: 16.)
- ³ Although the latter text was largely addressed to middle class American women, when I read it in 1972, it spoke directly to me as a young mother, housebound and careerless on the South African gold mines.
- ⁴ According to Kristeva, the second wave of feminism began in 1968 (1995: 207). (The Suffragette movement represented the first phase.) She says a "third generation" of (contemporary) feminists is not so much defined by temporality as by a "signifying space" (ibid: 222).
- ⁵ Judy Chicago, *The dinner party* (1979). Mixed media, 14 m. Collection unknown. (Broude and Garrard 1992: 450.)
- ⁶ It is interesting to observe that homo-erotic images carry a much heavier load of taboo than the equivalent images of women (Lucie-Smith 1991: 268 - 9).
- ⁷ Broude and Garrard also noted that the female body becomes a signifier for a host of ideas projected onto it (1992: 7).
- ⁸ *Book 7, Fragments* (1995 - 6). Artist's book, poetry and altered mechanical prints, in metal cover (coloured print on frontispiece), 6 pages edition 5, 24 x 37,2 x 1 cm. Artist's collection.
- ⁹ Nevertheless, Kristeva avoids essentialising female experience. She says, she is not advocating "[a] female language", ... [which] as a particular syntactic style is problematic ... [nor] to the aesthetic value of creations by women, most of which mirror a more or less euphoric and depressed romanticism ..." (1995: 213).
- ¹⁰ *Without title with mirror* (1988 - 1990). Ceramic, altered bed, box and mirror, 115 x 148 x 62 cm. Artist's collection.

Wedding night (1989). Ceramic, altered bed and blanket, 120 x 190 x 130 cm. Artist's collection. (Cruise and Hemp 1991: 101.)

War zone (1989). Ceramic, 48 x 150 x 48 cm. Private collection.
Venus after Dora (1990). Ceramic, life-size. Private collection.
Zoë (1989). Ceramic and altered sunbed, 80 x 150 x 57 cm. Private collection.

There is no father (1990). Ceramic figure, wire, metal, stool and wooden base, figure on stool: 110 x 61 x 50 cm, base: 12 x 102,5 x 107 cm. University of South Africa Art Gallery Collection, Pretoria. (Arnold 1996: 112 and plate 54, Cruise and Hemp 1991: 100.)

¹¹ I had a subliminal memory of an image of *The Capitoline She-Wolf*.

The Capitoline She-Wolf (mid-fifth century BC). Bronze, size not given. Museo dei Conservatori, Rome. (Hatje (ed) 1965: 69.)

¹² Study for *Without title with mirror* (c 1987). Pen and ink, 12,5 x 20 cm. Artist's collection.

¹³ Spitz (1985: 41) has noted how the concept of the "unconscious" complicates the intentionalist issue. She says that since intention can be unconscious, any refutation of a viewer's reading by the artist only serves to confirm that he/she is repressing (*ibid.*)!

¹⁴ Lisa Brice, *Sex kitten cheap cheap* (1993). Mixed media, 160 x 145 cm. Collection unknown. (Williamson and Jamal 1996: 93.)

¹⁵ The works were originally exhibited at the Goodman Gallery (6 - 27 October 1990) on the exhibition *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*. The following year they were shown at the Jacobs-Liknaitsky Gallery in Cape Town, (7 - 26 October 1991), where Munitz saw them.

¹⁶ I was more amused than angered by this event since it demonstrated that the conservative attitudes that had dominated the apartheid era were still in evidence in the dying years of that era. I subsequently heard that the work suffered

the same fate when the Cape Town Triennial toured the Orange Free State.

¹⁷ Penny Siopis, *Dora and the other woman*, (1988). Oil pastel on paper, 153 x 120 cm. Collection unknown. (Williamson 1989: 23.)

¹⁸ Barthes wrote: "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author - God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1977: 146).

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF GOD: AN EXISTENTIAL QUESTION

THE 1993 EXHIBITION : *NICHOLAS - OCTOBER 1990*

Being ... a life to be built on the further side of despair
(Blackham 1961: 50).

2.1 THE EXISTENTIAL PROBLEM

2.2 A CRITICAL RIDDLE : THE CRITICS' RESPONSE

2.3 *NICHOLAS – OCTOBER 1990*

2.1 THE EXISTENTIAL PROBLEM

I was brought up in a free-thinking environment. My atheistic father in rejecting his Catholicism also repudiated all other forms of dogma.¹ He led me to the belief that moral decisions should be a matter of free choice, achieved without recourse to an ultimate authority. In adopting his approach I arrived at an existentialist position; man (and woman) exists within a world without a god nor with any moral certainty. Sartre expressed it as follows:

[F]rom the moment of my emergence into being, I carry the weight of the world on my own, without anything or anybody being able to lighten the burden ... (in Blackham 1961: 137).

A scepticism of authority led naturally to a questioning about the nature of existence. Ironically the problem of existence of god has never abandoned me but manifests itself in an atheism that I regard as the obverse of theism. These are two sides of the same coin. The argument is as follows: To deny the existence of god is to acknowledge the possibility of his presence.

The problem of god's non-existence found expression in a key sculpture in the 1990 exhibition *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*. The title of this work, *There is no father* (1990), (fig 6) asserts the absence of god. "God" in this context refers to god-as-comforter as well as the god as the source of moral certitude.²

There is no father (1990) presupposed a tragic event. The sculpture was modelled on the artist Regi Bardavid. As a study in disillusionment it eerily pre-dated, by only some months, the murder of her husband. Arnold says of this sculpture:

The figure's fractures, distortions and awkward forms and lack of proportional harmony convey the sense of bodily incoherence experienced during deep emotional distress The title, too, reinforces self-awareness and loss, alluding ambiguously to the absence of man as partner or father and as God (1996: 112).

The absence of the father as partner and protector reflects an ironic and even cynical feminist position. It affirms what to many feminists is an axiom; that the centre of self is within and man cannot substitute. But this cynicism also reflects a hope that this is not so.

This residual belief in the redemption of a relationship with a protector is also implicit in the atheist's denial of god. Asserting the non-existence of god, ironically foregrounds him more in the psyche than he would otherwise be. Jean-Paul Sartre, writing in the memoirs of his childhood said:

The believer ha[s] [no religious convictions]: for two thousand years the Christian certainties had time to prove themselves, they belonged to everyone, and they were required to shine in a priest's glance, in the half light of a church, and to illumine souls, but no one needed to appropriate them to himself; they were the common patrimony. *Polite society believed in God so that it need not talk of Him* (my italics) (1964: 63).

The atheist's position marked by the "wild grief that God is dead" (Blackham 1961: 155), leads almost inevitably to an existential sense of loss. Man is alone in a world that is mute as to its meaning. Reality, which is permanently in question, provides no answers. The cosmos remains enigmatically silent (*ibid.*: 152).

The metaphor for this state of silence is the void. The void as infinite space provides a negative parallel to god's boundlessness. A physical sense of uninhabited space creates a parallel for a psychical condition which is at one and the same time an anxiety and a position of stillness.

The sense of silence is an important aspect of my work. In my sculptures I attempt to extend beyond the particular circumstances of my life in order to reach a point where the viewer shares in a subjective experience which can be described as "a queer vestigial quiver of meaning forever out of reach" (Blackham 1961: 113). Antony Gormley has articulated his awareness of this condition as follows:

If late modernist painting conflated the figure and the ground in the interest of a single unequivocal surface, I propose the body is the ground and that at the other side of appearance is a space far greater than the space against which, traditionally, the body is figured. If Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk and the Sea* is a Rothko with a man in it, I am trying to make a space for a man containing *the boundless space of consciousness* (my italics) (in Hutchinson, Gombrich and Njatin 1995: 50).

But, the void while being a meaningful metaphor for an existentialist, is also problematic for sculpture: how does one define emptiness in sculptural terms while avoiding the necessary physical limitations that are created by galleries in which architectural features not only delimit the space but also domesticate it with details such as carpeting and furniture?

In the exhibition *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*, this problem was partially overcome by the use of lighting which was employed to provide dramatic spotlights onto the works. The walls of the gallery receded into the darkness beyond the pool of light. This technique was especially successful in the two black-painted rooms of the Goodman Gallery where the illusion was created that there were no edges to visibility (figs 9 and 10).

Surprisingly, this, the most successful aspect of the exhibition, was perceived in a negative light [*sic!*]. Kendell Geers wrote:

The lighting magically transforms the works into ominous simulacrum of their former selves Without the modelling light the crudity of Cruise's technique is reduced to an awkwardness that hints at indulgence (1990: 10).

At the subsequent exhibition, *Nicholas – October 1990* at the Goodman Gallery, I once again used the lighting to create a sense of the void. Pools of light, focused onto the works, allowed the walls of the gallery to recede into the darkness (figs 9 and 10). The viewer, on entering the space, stood in darkness just beyond the circle of light that circumscribed the work. Both sensory and emotional attention were then brought to bear and in the act of viewing a psycho-physical reaction was set up. The reduction of superfluous sensory stimuli could only be achieved in the black rooms of the Goodman Gallery. In the central room, which was painted white, the lighting could not be manipulated so effectively. I had to resort to other techniques in order to create the desired sense of isolation. I placed the figures at a distance from each other. The space between them was carefully controlled so that a tension, unbearable in its tenuousness, was established. As van Tonder noted the, “spatial arrangement was not arbitrary, nor for the convenience of the walking viewer, but carefully planned with much deliberation” (1994: 6).

However, her interpretation of this spatial arrangement was made in specific iconographical terms that I find uncomfortably dissonant. She said:

With the central placement of this female figure, [*Self-portrait* (1992)] Cruise undermines and questions the ... stereotype namely, the supposedly Biblically endorsed idea that man is the prime representative of mankind (*ibid.*).

It should be noted that while I acknowledge her interpretation as the prerogative of a viewer who has brought her experiences to bear on the work and while personal reading is to be encouraged in an open-ended

approach to interpretation, I believe she slips into an intentionalist mode by implying an authorial purpose in my use of space.³ If intention is to be evoked, it was rather my purpose to use the silence of space between the figures to re-create an experience that in some respects lies beyond the reach of language, especially of the rhetorical sort that van Tonder employs.

Nevertheless, however effective lighting was in creating the fantasy of limitless space in the gallery, it does not compare with the effect achieved by photography which is able to create the illusion of boundless space beyond the format of the print. In the gallery, the very presence of the spectator ensures that the space is inhabited and therefore is no longer empty. If any other viewers happen to be present at the same time, the problem is compounded. In addition the viewer's awareness of the spatial surrounds is, of necessity, three dimensional and includes all that lies beyond, behind and around the work of art. In contrast the photograph constrains and directs the eye forward. As Barthes has noted (in Burgin in Bann and Allen (eds) 1991: 131) "the subject (author, reader, spectator, voyeur) casts his eye towards a horizon on which he cuts out the base of a triangle, his eye or his mind) forming the apex".⁴ Thus the photograph achieves what cannot be achieved in "real" space. The eye is directed and focused forward in a "cone of vision" (Burgin in Bann and Allen (eds) 1991: 131). Derived from Euclidean optics (*ibid.*) this model serves to reduce the "noise" of extraneous information. The existential sense of silence that is my envisaged ideal for my sculptures can thereby be approximated.

Some time before the Nicholas exhibition I had become conscious of the limitations of the spaces in art galleries. I felt that the confining rooms usually circumscribed the reading of the work. I therefore decided to photograph the Nicholas cycle of works in vacant landscapes and barren interiors⁵ I planned to use the resulting images as part of the exhibition. I

wanted to suggest the possibility of other readings. The photographer, Doreen Hemp, had successfully documented the works for *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*. She had demonstrated that she was able to understand my spatial and psychological requirements and translate them into photographic form. Accordingly I chose to work with her on this project, which we, together, identified as an attempt to capture the moodiness of the works in spaces that I knew would be to a great degree denied me in the context of the gallery. We selected the bleak landscape surrounding the cavernous warehouses of Science Park in Buccleuch, Sandton for our venue. We used both the exterior grounds and the interior of the buildings. We placed the sculptures in these environments in such a way as to enhance a sense of desolation. The physical was to equate with the psychological. Three of these enlarged photographs were subsequently exhibited along with the sculptures. These photographs were of *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993) and two copies of *Without grace* (1993)⁶ (figs 14 and 15). In addition *Three shades (the bully boys I, II and III)* (1992 - 1993)⁷ photographed against a thunderous sky on a Golgotha-type hill provided the image for the invitation (fig 11).⁸

After *Nicholas – October 1990*, I decided to explore the use of the photographed image further. *Antony Gormley* (Hutchinson, Gombrich and Njatin 1995) provided a model. Gormley's sculptures, photographed on top of bleak hills (1995: 50) in warehouses (*ibid.*: 68) and empty rooms (*ibid.*: 138) created images in which an evocative dialogue was set up between figure and space. When viewing these moody photographs, it takes an effort of will to realise that the populated English landscape lies beyond the silence of the works and the format of the photograph. However, while space is of vital concern in Gormley's work⁹ (*ibid.*: 118), neither he nor his authors acknowledge the rôle of the photograph in the spatial representation of his sculptures.

Gormley's evocative photographs prompted me to reproduce the Hemp photographs in a similar format. *Wilma Cruise: sculptures 1990 – 1996* (Cruise: 1997) was self-published in 1997. In this book a selection of images from the three exhibitions, *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*, *Nicholas – October 1990* and *John's wife* was reproduced. The publication served not only as a visual record of the work and the Hemp photographs, but it also helped, as intended, to focus attention onto the sculptures in a way that would re-represent them; that is, a shift in context would parallel a shift in the perception of the works. I wished to arouse a sense of self-consciousness, a Being poised, unknown and knowing, in-the-world and yet separate from it. These are the incipient, barely articulated feelings I wished to evoke. In these photographs the immediacy of the moment and the specifics of the works were to be transcended.

2.2 A CRITICAL RIDDLE : THE CRITICS' RESPONSE

My existentialist view, which finds its physical correlative in space, is essentially a subjective position. The centre of self is the defining point of meaning in and of this world. As Blackham has noted, "the recall to self created by its choice and projects ... [is] the starting point of personal reality ..." (1961: 25). I find validation for my existence in the use of visual and written forms to "explain" the world to myself. These activities prevent me from travelling to the far side of madness.

If the world out there is devoid of meaning so, too, it is devoid of moral imperatives. These are left for the subject to define for him or herself. This quest for a moral direction has left me permanently interested in ethical ironies and dilemmas of all sorts.

A tragic event in 1990 brought vividly to the fore one such moral paradox that revolved around the existence of god as the fount of good.

This event provoked the cycle, *Nicholas – October 1990*.¹⁰ A printed note written for the exhibition explains the circumstances that initiated the works:

NICHOLAS – OCTOBER 1990

These works are to be regarded as a cycle representing a single theme. This revolves around the event of the murder of Nicholas Cruise on the morning of October 2, 1990.

On that particular morning Nicholas Cruise was telephoned and asked to receive a computer that would be sent to him for repair.

Nicholas worked for a computer company which was managed by a group of young South Africans. These concerned young men had been active in the End Conscription Campaign. They also did work for the ANC on a contractual basis. However, the motivation for sending a bomb hidden in a computer to this company and Nicholas in particular still remains obscure. Nicholas was blown away as he opened the computer and triggered the bomb.

This event abounds with ironies. Nicholas had worked for the company for less than two months. He was a concerned Christian and active in the welfare of his fellow man. But he was not a political activist. Nicholas' killers were three members of the Orde Boerevolk. These men were apprehended after this event and charged with Nicholas' murder amongst other crimes. In an attempt to obtain their freedom while awaiting trial the three harnessed their "cause" to the political amnesty agreement which was in effect at that time. Political prisoners were granted indemnity for their crimes under this agreement. Ironically they had not yet been tried or convicted for the crimes from which they were demanding pardon. The murderers' initial demands for release were not met and the three embarked on a highly publicised hunger strike. During the media hype that surrounded this strike no less a personage than Nelson Mandela visited the ailing three and pleaded to FW de Klerk for their release on "humanitarian" grounds! In the months of publicity that followed, screaming headlines made the names of Henry Martin, Adrian Maritz and Lood van Schalkwyk household words. Nicholas was forgotten. His name not mentioned while

arguments raged on about whether the three strikers had or had not been eating chocolates while on strike. Nicholas had effectively been negated; reduced to yet another forgotten number in the litany of mysterious political murders that makes up the South African experience.

The cycle of works is an act of mourning. It is also an attempt to redress the balance; to refute the negation of Nicholas. The works explore the ironies involved in these events - the juxtaposition of good men with evil. The link between the murderers and the murdered - a bizarre dance of death - a link that stretches into eternity. The cycle has to do with power, threat, death and the absence of God/god. These ideas encompass all the bizarre inexplicable killings that have littered the South African landscape in the past years. Thus the works while they have to do with Nicholas are also beyond Nicholas. The works are not portraits nor indeed illustrations. They are a shout against the silence (Goodman Gallery 1993).

The exhibition was held at a particularly sensitive time in the history of South Africa. Chris Hani, the ANC leader, had been assassinated a few days before the opening of the exhibition. His funeral was held on the day that the exhibition opened. On Friday 16 April, the day before the opening, *The Star* newspaper published an article implicating the *Orde Boerevolk* in the Hani murder (Pauw 1993).

Those who came to the opening on the day of the funeral had to go through a cordon of police that had been strung out on the main thoroughfares to the city. Collective emotions already high were reinforced by the show. The reviews of *Nicholas – October 1990* that appeared in the following weeks maintained the emotional temperature. They included this one: “A *mother’s* shout against the silence” (my italics) (Witthaus 1993: 27)!

The misunderstanding about my relationship to Nicholas was perhaps understandable since I had not specified it in my printed note. Nevertheless Witthaus' article illustrated the mood created by the exhibition. She wrote, “As I walked into Wilma Cruise's exhibition ... I

felt an overwhelming urge to weep" (*ibid.*). Johannes Bruwer, committing an error similar to Witthaus, assumed that Nicholas was my husband. He wrote in highly emotive language about "die weduwee naas die gebroke lyk van haar man" (1993: 21).¹¹ Anthea Bristowe in turn wrote: "This body of work seeks to ... deal with the *anger, grief and guilt* that constitute mourning" (my italics) (1993).

I was taken by surprise. The emotions of anger, grief and guilt that Bristowe attributed to me astonished me in that I had not felt their vehemence. In much the same way that Munitz (see chapter one) (mis)-read the text of the 1990 series of sculptures in terms that imputed certain emotions and ideas to me as the author of that text, so too did Bristowe, (and Bruwer and Witthaus) imply that I was driven by specific emotional states to create the works that made up the Nicholas series.

But the truth of the matter is that I approached the project of this cycle with a dispassionate distance. Nicholas had in fact been murdered three years before the exhibition and two years before the first works in the cycle made their appearance. Further I did not know him well; he was the son of my husband's brother. Nicholas' murder interested me in the moral dilemma that it posed. If I felt anger, it was abstracted towards all the senseless killings typified by Nicholas' murder; grief was not of the wild sort that tears and rips at the soul. Of guilt I felt none.

This is not to say that I did not want to evoke emotion on the part of the viewers. I did. It was important for me to ring a true emotional note free of easy sensationalism and overstatement. In a critique of my 1990 exhibition, *Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible)*, Kendell Geers had noted the "cliché" of the "silent gaping mouth" (1990: 10). This criticism stung at the time. I negated the scream (and the possibility of further criticism) by constructing all the figures for the 1993 exhibition without mouths. In the 1993 figures I tried to tap a well of feeling

without resort to cliché of any sort! This is hard to do in an age bombarded by violent images whose shock value has numbed sensibilities.

However to assume that emotion expressed in the art is the same as that which I, the artist, have experienced is to commit an affective fallacy; a confusion between the emotion evoked by the artwork with the emotion felt by the originator of that work. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, commented on the detachment she felt as the one who observes her own experiences. She said, "The / that speaks stands at a distance from the / that has experienced ..." (1972: 130). This disengagement between the observer and the experiencing subject is essential. It is the very act of distancing that allows me to make meaning out of experience and allows me to look dispassionately at the events and experiences of my life. Thus although the Nicholas series was constructed on the basis of a powerfully emotional event and although the work was designed to tap that emotion, it does not necessarily follow that the emotions felt by the recipients of that work can be extrapolated to encompass the artist.

This difference between interpretation by the recipients of the work and artist's intention is a subtle one. But one critic was able to pick up on the difference. In a small review Michael Coulson commented on "a key statement" (1993) he happened upon in my annotated sketches. It read, "Art has nothing to do with reality. It is ... only is".

Nevertheless, to dismiss completely the critical views of Bristowe and the other critics, on the basis of the extrapolation of affective states, is not a position I would adopt. This stance would lend support to the view that the author of a text is the sole arbiter of meaning, a position I do not support.¹² Neither do I support the view that any response on the part of the reader is valid merely because it has occurred. This latter approach is dismissively described by Hirsch as "dogmatic relativism" and "cognitive

atheism" (in Wolff 1981: 98). Rather I have adopted a relativist position (Wolff 1981: 99) wherein I regard both author and reader as important in contributing towards the meaning of the text. But, I wish to seek clarity between the terms "author" and "reader" in order to separate where and how their different interpretations evolve. Intentional "errors" such as Munitz' and Geers' and affective ones such as Bristowe's and Bruwer's tend to muddle the terms of the equation.¹³

Author's and reader's responses need to be teased out so that their contribution can be isolated and hermeneutic clarity achieved. Thus while the responses of Bristowe and colleagues are entirely valid and indeed necessary, since without a reader a work is incomplete (*ibid.*: 95), nevertheless these responses need to be anchored within the limited range of possibilities presented by the works. Intentional and affective assumptions that are imposed onto the text with no clear awareness of the process muddy the waters of interpretation. Meaning is a negotiated position between author and reader. Like all negotiations clarity is only achieved when each side is aware of their own "historicity and prejudice" (*ibid.*: 100).

2.3 NICHOLAS – OCTOBER 1990

The exhibition explored a number of issues related to the central event. I had perceived Nicholas' murder in terms of a war between good and evil, where evil triumphs. In evoking these absolutist concepts, I was suggesting a fixed ethical position. I was aware that this was contradictory to an existentialist view which maintains that moral positions are to be negotiated. But Rooks has pointed out that Sartre too, on occasions, referred to "fixed Values - the one unforgivable sin in [his] eyes" (1959: 14). This stance on my part can be accepted as ironic or contradictory; either way I am comfortable with the inherent paradox!

The central work of the exhibition was a personification of evil. *Three shades (the bully boys I, II and III)* (1992 - 1993) (fig 11) depict those malevolent presences (shades) that hover just off the edge of consciousness. They also portray actual men, the "bully boys" who abuse and terrorise through the exercise of power. In both senses, the metaphysical and the actual, they are never clearly seen but their brooding presence is felt. As van Tonder has noted, "*The Three Shades* can be ... seen as the collective shadow which hangs over all nations where such deeds [of murder] are committed" (1994: 35).

I also saw tragic irony in the failure of Nicholas' god to save him or to intervene in any way to validate his death. Working notes for the exhibition explored this theme.

christ is defeated
christ in defeat
the cross is black
evil reigns
silence the scream

nicholas is christ or
a black angel in love with death
a dance of the macabre

there is no peace in death
not in this death

gentle jesus meek and mild
where are the lambs?

A key work of the exhibition was the *Self-portrait*¹⁴ (1992) (fig 12). This work was the penultimate sculpture in the cycle. In spite of "the language" of the pose, which spoke of defeat and vulnerability, the work was consciously intended as an expression of anger. The susceptibility I "saw" in the figure after its completion only occurred when I was able to read the work from a viewer's perspective. This startled me because of the inversion of what I had intended and what I finally perceived. It

seemed as if the conscious authorial intention had been subverted by unconscious processes.¹⁵ In this way *Self-portrait* (1992) provided me with insight into my own emotions in which I understood that defencelessness has its genesis in anger.

This work is also the only sculpture on the exhibition to have arms. A poem written shortly after the work was completed offered an explanation as to the presence of upper limbs in the “armless” company:

the artist has power
she has arms
she controls
she is god
(for a small while)

but like god
she confronts evil
only in a place where
chaos reigns

(from *Book 3, The artist* (1995 - 1996)¹⁶)

As has already been noted the spatial relationships between and around the works was critical. *Self-portrait* (1992), *Three shades (the bully boys I, II, and III)* (1992 - 1993) and *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993) (fig 13) were placed in the central gallery at the Goodman. The distance between the figures was carefully manipulated in order to set up psychological tensions. *Self-portrait* (1992) was placed so that she appeared alone, hunched into herself. On one side of her was the threat provided by the dark figures of *Three shades (the bully boys I, II and III)* (1992 - 1993) on the other the *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993) who was located at a distance from the *Self-portrait* (1992). His presence could provide neither comfort nor hope of redemption. van Tonder said:

Cruise placed the portrait of herself in a central position in the main hall of the Goodman Gallery in order to give a pivotal or dominating presence in relation to the other figures, such as *Yellow Christ* and *The Three Shades*. In

other words the central placement of *The Selfportrait* could indicate that Cruise places herself in control of her own life/destiny. Cruise is thus questioning the conventional concept of God as the all powerful and human beings as having no power over their own lives and destiny (1994: 23).¹⁷

While *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993) was positioned in relation to *Self-portrait* (1992), in such a way so as to imply denial of redemption, the colour of the figure contradictorily asserted it. *Yellow christ* (1992 -1993) was the final work in the cycle. In the face of the unremitting darkness of the other figures, I had felt the need to use colour in the next sculpture. The decision to employ a non-localised yellow was taken at the time as a formal decision. I was only subliminally aware that I was using Gauguin's painting *The yellow christ* (1889)¹⁸ as a model. This work incidentally also furnished the title of my sculpture. I did not fully consider the implication of my choice of colour until the work was complete and then only during the process of "secondary revision" did the significance of *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993) become clear to me. Yellow is the colour of affirmation and of rebirth both in a biblical and natural sense. As the final work in the series it signalled a time of healing. This interpretation was pointed out to me by Nicholas' brother, Christopher Cruise, during a conversation at the opening of the exhibition. But while *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993) might have signalled a period of personal healing it should not necessarily be read as an affirmation of christian redemption. A note made at the time of the construction of the work acts as a reminder of my position of atheistic disillusionment:

christ has a cock
why then is he impotent?¹⁹

A key work of the exhibition was *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993) (fig 14). The figure of the "madonna" was modelled on a beggar woman whom I saw sitting on a pavement in Durban. I had gone to the city centre to

tender for a commission; a sculpture for the foyer of a corporate building. I saw this old woman sitting outside the new steel and glass construction in which the proposed artwork was to be placed. Legs straight out in front of her she appeared stoical in the acceptance of her condition. The contrast of her poverty and the building behind her was marked. In the weeks that followed I found myself unable to access a suitable image for the commission. The image of the old woman kept intruding into my consciousness and interfering with other creative processes.²⁰ This inability to respond to the commission with a correct corporate image was not governed by any moral imperatives; as an image the old woman had simply colonised my thoughts. It appeared to me serendipitous that she was in Durban, the place of Nicholas' death. It was logical therefore that she became the madonna for the Nicholas' (non)/christ.

The combination of the two figures occurred late in the cycle of works. The reclining figure of *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993) had been constructed in 1991 - 1992 a year before the madonna. It was during the photographic session at Science Park that the logical combination of the two figures occurred to me and *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993) was born.²¹ In this work, as with *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993), a christian theme was evoked. Again as with *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993), the christian reference was ironically intended. Nicholas Cruise was a concerned christian; his right wing murderers would no doubt have claimed the same position; yet, evil and the forces of darkness had prevailed. Thus while *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993) works within the tradition of the grieving mother of christ it suggests no possibility of resurrection. The madonna is hidden beneath, and blinded by, a cloth; the figure of christ/Nicholas is bound by bands of steel.

The Nicholas cycle of works asserts the proposition that atheists are paradoxically concerned with the existence of god. Yet I might not have pursued the christian theme in this cycle of works had Nicholas not been

a practising christian. Nicholas had chosen a particular path of morality; yet his reward for goodness was negation. God had not demonstrated his omnipresence to him. All was silent. In contradiction, the choices Nicholas' murderers had taken had led to their fame. This irony was what I wished to explore in the cycle of works and which was drowned by the more literal interpretation of the sculptures by my critics who chose to confront the actual event rather than the metaphysical questions provoked by it.

Within the matrix of belief and non-belief explored in this exhibition lies the question of the freedom of moral choice. In asserting my freedom from god and the implied ethical order I had resolved to create my own values (Rooks 1959: 12). This responsibility creates anguish. It is this anguish that motivated the cycle of works and the physical and moral silence they provoked.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

- ¹ My father's atheism created a number of problems for me during my childhood. I was educated at a time when "Christian National Education" dominated the state schools. This state-initiated dogmatism was reinforced by a fierce Calvinism at Benoni High, the co-educational school that I attended on the East Rand. Although the state religion was Dutch Reform, the majority of the teachers at my school belonged to English Protestant churches. Nevertheless they were as restrictive and as dogmatic as their Afrikaner counterparts. We were lectured on the evils of cinema, dance and holding hands. The latter led to intercourse and therefore was declared undesirable! I resorted to lying about my religious allegiance since not belonging to a church would have labelled me as a pariah amongst my peers and, more importantly, I would have been censured by my teachers. In my fourteenth year I joined the Student Christian Organisation, where, for a time, I ardently believed in personal salvation. Activities included "witnessing to Jesus" over our sandwiches at break. This venture into christianity was met with scorn at home with many a tearful outcome. In any event the home influence was to last into my adulthood. This has led me towards a cynicism of authority particularly any form of moral authority.
- ² The title of the sculpture was derived from the same Camus novel that furnished the title for the exhibition.
- ³ This is reflected in her statement, "Cruise undermines ..." (van Tonder 1994: 6).
- ⁴ I have used Barthes' argument here in a slightly different context. He made this statement in an analysis of the nature of representation (in Burgin 1991: 131).
- ⁵ Sometime in the eighties I had seen photographs of Henry Moore's sculptures taken in the landscape (Levine 1978). These images furnished the initial inspiration for the use of the photographed environment as an enhancer of the meaning of the sculptural image.
- ⁶ *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993). Ceramic, fired metal and cloth, 4 x 244 x 244 cm. University of South Africa Art Gallery Collection, Pretoria. (Cruise 1997: 10 - 11.)
Without grace (1993). Ceramic figure on concrete base with found object, 248 x 61 x 57 cm. Private collection. (Cruise 1997: 8.)

⁷ *Three shades (the bully boys I, II and III)* (1992 - 1993). Ceramic and cast metal, 175 x 80 x 40 cm; 184 x 76 x 65 cm; 172 x 70 x 76 cm. Durban Art Museum, Durban. (Arnold 1996: Plate 53 and Cruise 1997: 2 - 3.)

⁸ *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993) photographed on the same hill furnished the cover for the book/catalogue *Wilma Cruise sculptures 1990 - 1996* (Cruise 1997).

Yellow christ (1992 - 1993). Ceramic with cast bronze face and mask on concrete base, 173 cm. Private collection. (Cruise 1997: 4 - 5.)

⁹ Gormley has written, "My work is to make a human space in space ... [to] make bodies into vessels that both contain and occupy space ... " (in Hutchinson, Gombrich and Njatin 1995: 118).

¹⁰ There were eight works on exhibition, which was held at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 17 April - 8 May 1993. (See appendix A.) The sculptures consisted of eleven *life-size* figures as well as a number of annotated working drawings. The viewers could leaf through the sheets which were placed, loose, in a wooden box.

¹¹ Bruwer was referring to the tableau *Durban pietà* (1991 - 1993).

¹² Wolff refers to E D Hirsch as an exemplar of the view that "Only one interpretive problem can be answered with objectivity: 'What in all probability, did the author mean to convey?'" (in Wolff 1981: 99).

¹³ A confusion between reader's responses and author's intentions could be similarly attributed to van Tonder's analysis.

¹⁴ *Self-portrait* (1992). Ceramic on concrete base, 173 x 62 x 45 cm. Private collection. (Arnold 1996: Plates 55 and 56 and Cruise 1997: 7.)

¹⁵ It is important to note that Sartre did not support the concept of the unconscious. "On the contrary, Sartre insists on our being whole undivided selves ..." (Rooks 1959: 6).

¹⁶ *Book 3, The artist* (1995 - 1996). Artist's book, poetry and altered mechanical prints in colour, in metal cover, 6 pages, 33 x 43,7 x 0,8 cm. Private collection.

- ¹⁷ van Tonder's reading of this group of figures parallels Arnold's interpretation of *There is no father* (1990).
- ¹⁸ Paul Gauguin, *The yellow christ* (1889). Oil on canvas, 92 x 64 cm. Albright Gallery, Buffalo, New York. (Gardner 1959: 674.)
- ¹⁹ This was later published in *Book 1, The negative aspects of god*, one of seven artist's books produced for the 1996 exhibition, *John's wife*.
- Book 1, The negative aspects of god* (1995 - 1996). Poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover, 14 pages edition 5, one page a coloured print, 26 x 20,3 x 2,4 cm. Private collection.
- ²⁰ I think I submitted a half-hearted attempt at a design but I have no record of it.
- ²¹ The manipulation of figures in the large spaces of the warehouses at Science Park permitted new readings of the sculptures. The combination of the two figures to create the tableau, *Durban pietà* (1991 – 1993) may well not have happened had the element of play in the generous spaces of Science Park not occurred.

CHAPTER THREE

SUBJECT AS OBJECT : A PSYCHOANALYTICAL VIEW

THE 1996 EXHIBITION : *JOHN'S WIFE*

The personal pitted against the theoretical is a position which is privileged in terms of both feminism and psychoanalysis (Rankin 1985: 15).

3.1 A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

3.1.1 DREAMS AND ART : AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

3.2 *JOHN'S WIFE*

3.2.1 THE WRITTEN WORD / THE SUPPORTING TEXT

Freudian ideas have permeated modern consciousness¹ and become so much part of current thought that it is sometimes hard to isolate them from the matrix of received wisdom. This dissertation, however, representing as it does the formalisation of my ideas on art, requires that I articulate with more clarity than I have done in the past, my position *apropos* those Freudian concepts that have formed such an important part of my intellectual milieu. In this section Freudian theories will be discussed in much the same way feminist theories were analysed in chapter one; in order to position myself theoretically within the particular discourse. The focus will be on Freud's ideas on art, the artist and the nature of creativity; and those of his followers and critics who have developed his ideas further. The structure for the discussion is provided by Charles Rycroft (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 308 - 314) who noted the similarities between dream processes and the creative workings of the imagination. Rycroft's model enables a comparison to be drawn between the interpretation of dreams and that of art. This convergence of psychoanalytical theory and poststructuralist approaches to interpretation brings Freudian ideas into the contemporary arena. It also has the effect of shifting the burden from author-based interpretation to the reader's version of the text.²

Freud developed his theories on art early on in his career. *The interpretation of dreams* was written in 1900 and *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* in 1905. These two texts, written relatively early in the development of his theory on the structure and dynamics of the mind, contain his main aesthetic views. Freud did not produce a structured theory of aesthetics nor a complete explanation on the nature of creativity. It fell to his followers to develop his ideas more fully. And, as in all branches of psychoanalysis where different and conflicting theories abound (Spurling 1989 Vol IV: 7), ideas on the nature of creative process are myriad. As with feminist theory, where there is not

a single "feminism" but many "feminisms", so too does psychoanalysis proliferate in a number of different ways.³

Nevertheless certain core ideas attributed to the seminal thinking of Freud characterise the movement as a whole. Central to these ideas is the notion of the unconscious.⁴

The unconscious is that which is not available to conscious thought except through certain processes of transformation such as that which occurs in dreams. The unconscious is assumed to be governed by infantile, primitive and instinctual drives (the **id**) which are repressed and denied access to the conscious by the forces of the **ego** and **super ego** (Wright 1984: 10 - 11). In its simplest Freudian articulation, art is the manifestation, in concrete form, of the content of unconscious phantasy.

It is worth quoting Freud in full:

An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy, whence his path might lead to neurosis.

The artist ... possesses the mysterious power of shaping some particular material until it has become a faithful image of his phantasy; and he knows, moreover, how to link so large a yield of pleasure to this representation of his unconscious phantasy that, for the time being at least, repressions are outweighed and lifted by it. If he is able to accomplish all this, he makes it possible for other people once more to derive consolation and alleviation from their own sources of pleasure in their unconscious which have become inaccessible to them; he earns their gratitude and admiration and he has thus achieved *through* his phantasy what he had achieved only *in* his phantasy - honour, power and the love of women (Freud in his lecture on 'The Paths

to Symptom-Formation' in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1915 - 17) in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 16 - 17).⁵

In this model, Freud suggests that creating art is an act of sublimation; a defence mechanism which deals with repressed subject matter too painful to handle in conscious thought. This, essentially neurotic process, is similar to that which occurs in dreamwork; hence the noted similarity between dreams and art. The trouble with this model is that it assumes that artmaking is a pathology and that the artist is "not far removed from neurosis" (*ibid.*).

But making visual art is more complex than Freud's explanation suggests.⁶ The ego plays a rôle in creativity since, even at the simplest level of craftsmanship, an artist cannot be dreaming, nor psychotic when s/he manipulates paint, clay or stone. However, it should be noted, that the concept of the ego was developed in 1923, late in Freud's theoretical oeuvre, and *after* the articulation of his main ideas on art (Spitz 1985: 6).

It was the analysts after Freud who shifted the emphasis away from the repressed rôle of the unconscious in the creation of art, to the rôle the ego plays in creativity. Some of these analysts, such as Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann and Ernst Kris (Spitz 1985: 7) argue for the supremacy of the ego-forces, over and above those of the unconscious ones, in the production of art. But others such as Spitz, Wollheim and Ricouer, (*ibid.*: 4 - 7) continue to favour the oneiric (dream-based) model while advocating a broader and less pathological interpretation of it. As Ricouer has stated:

Works of art ... are not simply projections of artist's conflicts, but the sketch of a solution. Dreams look backward ... the work of art goes ahead of the artist; it is a prospective symbol of his personal synthesis ... rather than a regressive symbol of unresolved conflicts (in Spitz 1985: 8).

Experience of my own creative process lends empirical support for Ricouer's view. Artmaking is neither total conscious control, nor a psychotic surrender to the unconscious; instead it is a play between the forces of the ego and the subconscious. It is a dialogue between barely apprehended pre-conscious thoughts such as those that occur in dream, and the controlling and guiding force of the ego.

In 1975 Charles Rycroft (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 303 - 315), developed a view of the creative process that acknowledges the twin rôles that the unconscious and the ego play in the creation of art. Although Rycroft's ideas are firmly grounded within Freudian thought, he expands on Freud's concepts of the primary and secondary processes (*ibid.*: 304). Primary processes are characteristic of (unconscious) dream life; secondary of (conscious) waking life. As Rycroft has phrased it: "[T]he primary processes are iconic and non-discursive, the secondary processes are verbal and discursive" (*ibid.*).⁷ Rycroft maintains that Freud committed an error by assuming that the primary and secondary processes were "mutually antagonistic, and that the former ha(d) ... to be relegated by repression to a curious underworld, the id or the unconscious" (*ibid.*: 307). Instead, Rycroft argues, the two processes function in harmony in a healthy individual; the imaginative process co-existing and interacting with rational operations. He notes that artists and writers have always accepted this (healthy) connection between creativity and dreaming (in Spurling 1989: Vol III: 307). If one accepts his premise, the perception that the artist is "not far removed from neurosis" (Freud in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 16 - 17) falls away. Artmaking then enters the realm of the robustly-functioning artist instead of being in

the domain of the neurotically-effete individual.

Rycroft lists three similarities between dreaming and the creative process. He says:

Works of art and dreams are granted meaning according to the predilection of their viewers; in both dreams and art, meaning is open to multiple interpretation; the production of images in dreams and art is independent of will (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 310 - 311).

This prototype provides a model for the interpretation of artworks.

3.1.1 DREAMS AND ART : AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Early psychoanalytical approaches to art interpretation tended to emphasise a neurosis-based approach. In 1910 Freud conducted a study of Leonardo da Vinci.⁸ In this work he "analysed" da Vinci on the basis of his artistic imagery. Freud used the imagery da Vinci employed in his artwork, to decode his unconscious and suppressed desires.⁹ This analysis is similar to the technique an analysand would use to decode dream imagery in a clinical situation.

Freud's analysis of da Vinci provided a model for later pathographic analyses. The emphasis of pathographic analysis usually revolves around the individual and psychoanalytical concerns such as the oedipal complex of the artist. As such it has more to do with the techniques of the discipline of psychoanalysis than with the art object. The artwork is of interest only in its rôle as a conduit to the unconscious of the artist. Kuspit says pathographic studies favour narrative, iconographic interpretations while ignoring the aesthetic quality inherent in the art object (1993: 303 - 304).¹⁰ This approach also lends support to the view of the artist-as-neurotic. Rycroft's model, however, provides a way out of the impasse created by the pathographic approach. Rycroft shifts

the burden of meaning from the author and his/her pathology to the reader of the text and his/her inclinations. His first premise is stated as follows:

[Works of art and dreams can be] ... granted or refused meaning according to the predilection of their viewers, hearers or readers ... (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 310).

Theoretical support for Rycroft's shift of emphasis comes from Peter Brooks (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 354 - 368), who points out how meaning, dependant on the reader's bias, is similar to the process of transference that occurs in the clinical situation. Brooks' premise is that a degree of transference occurs when a reader decodes a text; the reader then projects his affects, biases and attitudes on the artwork (*ibid.*). Accepting Rycroft's and Brooks' premises allows critical texts, those that are written in response to an artwork, themselves to be decoded in terms of the repressed desires of the reviewers. Their approach provides a theoretical context in which to analyse the views of interpreters and critics.¹¹

It has already been noted (chapter one) that Kendell Geers in his analysis of *Venus after Dora* (1990) (figs 5 and 9) brought his own attitudes to bear in his interpretation of the work. A pathographic interpretation of Geers' critiques may well be possible but it is not one I wish to pursue since an analysis of my own responses in terms of counter-transference is then made possible! However Rycroft's and Brooks' explanations do acknowledge the particular and personal origin of critics' views and they do provide a theoretical point from which to deal with them. It is also worth re-stating the axiom that "it is impossible to eliminate the self from the act of interpretation, and that interpretation is always *re-*interpretation ..." (Wolff 1981: 100).

In the 1996 exhibition *John's wife* certain personal biases are evident particularly in Michelle Witthaus' review, *Self revelation in this show really is 'brave'* (1996: 15). Witthaus said that, "This time around, she ... explore(s) a quieter kind of anguish: that of a woman sinking into a *lonely* and *embittered* middle age" (my italics) (1996: 15).

Even though the *John's wife* exhibition was predicated on the exploration of middle-age female identity, words such as "lonely" and "embittered" are quite specific adjectives. They describe emotions that are not so much extracted from the works as sentiments that are imposed on them. By extrapolation they are used to describe the artist. Witthaus has assumed that her own emotions, albeit evoked by the artwork, are the same as mine, the artist.¹² Although, interpretation is her prerogative as the reader of the text, nevertheless, in terms of Rycroft's premise, Witthaus' choice of words says as much about her own fears as they do about the artwork.

Other artists are also aware of the dangers of (mis)-interpretation of their work. For example, Jane Alexander (Williamson and Jamal 1996: 20) is "keenly aware of being misrepresented by others as she is of misrepresenting herself" (*ibid.*) Her strategy is to withdraw herself from the discourse surrounding her work thereby achieving an "impersonal and austere" (*ibid.*) distance from her critics. It is not a method I would choose. I would rather decode the critics' texts. By testing their interpretations against the artwork meaning and debate continually evolves. Further, as Gadamer (in Wolff 1981: 100) has noted, a distinction needs to be made between (good) "prejudices" and "false judgements". He says that:

[A] good historian [or reviewer], while necessarily starting from his or her own prejudices, will make those prejudices conscious, and will also retain an openness to the past, or

the text, allowing the initial prejudices to be corrected by what is actually contained in the text (*ibid.*).

It appears that Witthaus had not sufficiently acknowledged the personal bias of her responses to the *John's wife* exhibition, nor did she test them adequately against the artwork. In contrast, Michael Coulson (1996: 64), in reviewing the same exhibition, displayed a greater sensitivity and openness in his reading. In an apparent reference to Witthaus' review and in response to a note that I had written in which I had observed that, "Truth lies in the interstices between autobiography and art", he said:

Wilma Cruise's exhibition has been referred to in a couple of places as "brave". ... However this sort of analysis is surely what art is about, and in any event *Cruise warns us against assuming that the work is autobiography ...* (my italics) (*ibid.*).

The second similarity between dreams and creativity suggested by Rycroft restates the first premise, namely, "that meaning is open to multiple interpretation" (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 310).

Rycroft says works of art and dreams either have no meaning or many meanings (*ibid.*). By this Rycroft means that dreams and art use processes whereby manifest meaning does not necessarily conform to actual (hidden) meaning.

In dreams meaning that is too distressing for conscious thought, is disguised and transformed through the processes of "condensation" and "displacement" (*ibid.*: 23). Condensation (the fusing of images) (Spurling 1989 Vol I: xxiv) is the compression of the complex latent content of dreams into a "smaller content" (Wright 1984: 20). It is a technique common in the construction of jokes. Displacement (the replacement of

one image for another) (Spurling 1989 Vol I: xxiv) occurs when, through a chain of association, meaning is shifted from the actual event or emotion to another which is less painful to the psyche (Wright 1984: 21). The artist, in a process that parallels that used in dreamwork, uses metaphor and metonymy to allude to meaning. Metaphor and metonymy can be regarded as the rhetorical equivalents of condensation and displacement. Metaphor compresses meaning in a single image/word where one thing stands for another; the connection resulting in a shifted (displaced) meaning. Metonymy also relies on connections between two entities where the one takes on an attribute of another. Freudian symbolism, for example snake = penis, relies on metonymy wherein the shape of the snake alludes to the shape of the phallus.¹³

As Wright has noted (1984: 24), “both condensation and displacement can produce visual and auditory images for abstract thoughts thus contributing to the actual process of representation ...”. Dream representation does not follow a logical or rational course. Contradictions co-exist, time is compressed and syntactical association between word and image is left to the dreamer (*ibid.*).

Art, like dream, also does not follow an exact correspondence between meaning and its representation. As Rycroft has succinctly phrased it, art does not make factual statements like “Arsenic is poison” (1975: 310). An artwork, like a dream, embodies ambiguity and mystery. It encodes its meaning thereby allowing for multiple readings. The viewer is required to balance truth and illusion; to penetrate the artwork to a hidden and repressed verity. To phrase it linguistically, the gap between signifier and signified is split open.¹⁴

Jane Alexander’s *Butcher boys* (1985 – 1986)¹⁵ provides an example of a work that is rich in its suggested meanings. The sculpture presents itself matter-of-factly. Three figures sit on a bench. The veracity of their

presence is asserted both in material fact and in the figures' authoritative demeanour. But other hidden realities are signalled by the physical distortions of the figures. The malformations and the animal references function metaphorically, hinting towards other realities. The metaphoric implications are of a deeply disturbing nature but just what they are remains tantalisingly and ambiguously out of reach. The work is fertile in its possibilities of association that revolve around threat, violence and violation.

Dream representation also may or may not make use of conventional cultural symbols, the decoding of which is nevertheless still dependent on the context of the dream (Wright 1984: 25). This is similar to the interpretation of art which is dependent on both the cultural and specific context of the work.

Thus art, like dream, relies on ambiguity and apparent contradiction to get the message across. Art is dependent on the context for its interpretation and, like dream, is open to multiple meaning.

A third similarity between dreams and imaginative works suggested by Rycroft, "is that their production is independent of will" (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 311).

The imagination with its mysteries, ambiguities and contradictions needs to flow free of the impediments of cool reason and logic. As has been noted in the discussion of, *inter alia*, *Without title, with mirror* (1988 - 1990) (fig 2) (chapter one) and the *Self-portrait* (1992) (fig 12) (chapter two)¹⁶, the meaning of the works evolved out of a working process that had occurred seemingly independent of conscious volition.

The process of secondary revision was used to analyse the sculptures

after their completion, at which point their meaning was revealed to me, the progenitor [*sic!*] of the works. It was in my viewing and in my “telling” of them that I gained new insights as to their meaning.

In dream analysis, the process of secondary revision occurs when a dreamer, on recounting the dream, orders the images into a more logical sequence. The recall of the dream permits “re-vision” of the imagery (Wright 1984: 25). Wright has pointed out how this re-ordering of the illogicality of dreams parallels “the rivalry of interpretation” that occurs in reading a text (1984: 26). She says:

Reading shares this danger with the reporting of a dream. Boundaries shift with contextual placings of the visual material of the dream or of any symbolic medium, including what we call art: the rivalry of interpretations both within subjects (conscious versus unconscious) and between subjects (teller versus hearer) remains a common characteristic of dream and art ... (*ibid.*).

In a paradoxical inversion of my normal working process, the three “John’s wife” sculptures, *John’s wife (yellow)*, *(blue)* and *(white)* (1995)¹⁷ (figs 16, 17 and 18) were not as regulated by subliminal forces as the previous works. It seems to me, in retrospect, that they were more managed by conscious decisions. But it is, as Rycroft has noted (1975: 313), vital for artists to have a relationship with external reality if art is not merely to be a solipsistic exercise for the mentally deranged. Not only does the artist need to be in touch with reality on a practical level but the artist also needs to tap into the “shared iconography of the culture” (*ibid.*). A precarious balance between the irrational and solipsistic on the one side and a universally understood lexicon of symbols on the other has to be maintained. If the balance sometimes swings one way and then the other, then that is how it is.

In this respect the three “John’s wives” are direct conscious expressions

of an emotive condition. They are self-portraits using a western art tradition of the nude.

3.2 JOHN'S WIFE

In 1996 the exhibition *John's wife*¹⁸ explored the notion of identity; specifically middle-aged female identity. The subjective view that had informed and coloured the perception of events, which in 1993 had culminated in the exhibition *Nicholas - October 1990*, now moved to centre stage and became the focus of the research itself.

The locus of the exhibition was provided by the three nudes, *John's wife (yellow)* (1995) *John's wife (blue)* (1995) and *John's wife (white)* (1995). These were life-size figures which each explored a facet of experience of a menopausal woman. Supporting these three works was a number of drawings, prints¹⁹ and artist's books. The exhibition was heavily loaded in terms of the written word. Not only were there seven volumes of poetry but the drawings contained numerous scribbled notes, musings and observations. In addition each work was supported by a hand-written note recording the genesis of that work.

The exhibition was a personal document informed by a spirit of autobiography. I had decided to foreground the paradox of being both perceiving subject and perceived object. This irony was inherent in the title *John's wife : artist as subject; subject as object*. The reference to myself as "wife" alluded to the fact of observing myself from a distance. But the choice of title also referred to a practice, common in the conservative patriarchy of the mining world, of assigning women to rigid social positions. These positions were predominantly defined in terms of identity achieved via marriage.²⁰ By referring to myself as "John's wife", I wanted to poke fun at this archaic practice as well as at myself for

allowing this position to be imposed on me.

Nevertheless, the exhibition was only peripherally concerned with socially-defined, feminist issues. It had more to do with the subjective experience of femininity and age. But subjectivity, as Rankin has noted (1985: 15), is not one of uncritical reflection but the actual source of the difficulty. This was the case in this exhibition where I was aware that expressing my subjective and shifting experience of identity through the medium of the nude self-portrait, was going to raise certain problems. I had chosen to use the body as a vehicle of expression since in an existential sense it "is both a point of view and a starting point ... an obstacle, [and] a resistance to my projects. ... It is the condition of action ..." (Blackham 1961: 120).

Within this matrix of subjectivity, the difficult question of voyeurism arose. I had, by using my own nude body to explore a subjective position, placed myself in the public domain where I would be the recipient of "the (male) gaze". I was not unaware of the irony inherent in this position. Post-menopausal women are not meant to be the object of desire; or so the populist media would have us believe. If this were the case and middle age women were beyond the desire implied by "the gaze" then logically "the gaze" would be stripped of its *raison d'être*. But voyeurism is a complex pleasure. The voyeur, not only feeds off images of youth and beauty; the horrors of age and decay also fascinate. I was aware then that my strategy was a dangerous one and that perhaps it is as Mulvey suggests only by using the radical gesture of removing the image from the scene altogether, that the gaze can effectively be negated (in Rankin 1985: 19). It has already been noted (in chapter one) that Mulvey's militant position ignores female spectatorship and therefore it, itself, is open to radical questioning. I had chosen instead to forego the strategy of the absent and fragmented body, as Mulvey's line of reasoning would suggest. I had employed this technique in two works,

Fractures I (1994 - 1995) (fig 19) and *Fractures II (fat corner)* (1994), in which I used repeated fragments of bodies in multiple sequence.²¹

I decided, after these two works, once again to return to the entire and single figure to convey my message. The reasons for my abandonment of the partial and fragmented body are not yet clear to me. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the first "wife" in the series of "John's wives", *John's wife (yellow)* (1995) (fig 16), is armless and headless. This work could then be regarded literally as a transition from fragmentation to wholeness. But it would also be a mistake to read this process metaphorically as a return to soundness, in that, experientially, this was definitely not the case.

John's wife (blue) (1995) (fig 17), presents herself in an ambiguous sexual posture. The presentation of her rear-end offers penetration. The suggestion is that at that moment, when the offer of sex is made, women have the ultimate control. But the kneeling position, rear-end up and head down, is also a position of obeisance; a posture which is common in the primate world when acknowledgement is made of the other's superior social position. The ambiguity of simultaneously having control and relinquishing that control which is implied by the posture, signals the paradoxical experience of a married feminist!

John's wife (white) (1995) (fig 18) is entire and intact. This sculpture exemplifies the subjective position of self as subject-as-object. The figure sits on a grey-white chair in front of a grey-white mirror whose milky and damaged surface throws back a grey image. Slumped over a sagging belly, a tiny pietà (actually herself) on her lap she looks down contemplating the source of creativity. The pietà is the artist to which she has given birth and which is also her mother lode; the source of her creative energy. The image is repeated in the mirror where she contemplates her own image contemplating herself. At the exhibition at

the *First Gallery* in April 1996, I chose to replace the mirror with an easel containing my self-portrait in two dimensions and a printed image of the sculpture *Yellow christ* (1992 - 1993).²² In this version of the tableau, the artist contemplates the results of her own creativity. It is this white sculpture that most closely approximates the ambivalence of conscious subject observing herself as (no longer unselfconscious[!]) object.

The choice of colour for the three central works of the exhibition was made in order to create emotive distance; to announce that the figures, although alluding to life, were not life. Colour also stood in metaphoric relation to certain conditions. In this respect the works link up closely with the notes and poems I wrote surrounding the exhibition. *Yellow (John's wife (yellow))* (1995) (fig 16)) refers to the process of ageing. It does not represent rebirth nor hope as it did in *Yellow christ* (1992 – 1993) (fig 13). Instead it refers to “yellowing”; an idea I had explored in *Fragments of childhood* (1995) in which I had written, “the landscape is yellowed now - was it always yellow?”²³

3.2.1 THE WRITTEN WORD / THE SUPPORTING TEXT

Rankin has noted a tendency for feminist works to rely heavily on the written word. She says,

This popular feminist tactic ... effectively regulates the pleasurable absorption of the spectator in the visual scene by introducing the shock-effect of distance, and inserting in that gap the readings that are to be privileged in the perception of the work (1985: 19).

While I was not aware of deliberately using this tactic to this end, I was nevertheless conscious of a desire to distance the spectator emotionally. Nel has noted this cooling distance, although he attributed it more to the print technique than the use of text. He said:

Cruise's work is not seductive. The exhibition is underscored by a brusqueness in the directness of the interpretation of her world and a lack of sensuousness in the engagement of her media. The proto-expressionist drawings, photocopied and transferred to hand-made paper, *muffle their emotive impact distancing their charge and quelling any direct sense of the erotic* (my italics) (Nel 1996: 7 - 9).

Ironically the impetus and the rôle model for the exhibition were provided, not by visual feminist documents such as Mary Kelly's *Postpartum document*²⁴ but by a literary autobiography. This was Doris Lessing's *Under my skin* (1995), which I was reading at the time my exhibition was reaching fruition. Lessing wrote about her childhood and youth in the then Rhodesia. She adopted an approach of what seemed to me to be searing honesty. Her autobiography was also written in an apparently clumsy style which enhanced the directness of the message. It was this technique and tone I decided to adopt in my exhibition and which resulted in the "brusqueness" that Nel had picked up on.

Since an autobiographical approach had been selected it was logical to use a diary-like format for the exhibition. Thus the use of the text in working drawings, as books and as "explanatory" notes was a conscious decision to encourage "a reading" of the work. "Reading" the exhibition was also encouraged by the sequential display of the works which encouraged the viewers to move around the gallery in a circular sequence. The entrance to the gallery contained the "frontispiece"; a laminated photocopied self-portrait with the partially eradicated text, "... le with care"²⁵, (fig 20) which gave what I hoped was a gentle admonishment to be careful with the fragile ego within.

Central to the text of the exhibition were the volumes of poetry. These had been written between 1989 and 1996. The poems were derived from working drawings. They were stream-of-consciousness jottings that I had used to access ideas for the sculptures. As such they can be

regarded as part of the working process; a means whereby the ideas for sculpture were developed. In the process of drawing and writing the words were allowed to flow freely so that pre-conscious ideas could be accessed. This process is not too different from the word-association techniques used in clinical situations. It is also similar²⁶ to the “automatic writing” method used by the Surrealists who owe their debt for the idea to psychoanalysis (Forster 1993: xiv).

The writing of poetry became concentrated between August 1995 and April 1996. It was also the time when the idea of the artist's books reached fruition. This period was marked by a time of crisis. My mother had died on 11 July 1995 after forty-one days in intensive care when she hovered between life and death. She was not brain damaged but was conscious of her predicament. The family decided in the face of unending suffering and on medical advice to turn off the life-support machines. It fell to me, a choice that I willingly made, to be with her till her last. I then literally ended my mother's life. The trauma of this action haunted me. I wrote in a letter at the time, “Did I fail her at the moment when she was utterly without a voice?” In the face of the subsequent doubt and considerable emotional turmoil about my decision, art and poetry became an important crutch. In articulating my feelings through the image and the word I was able to distance myself from them. I was thereby able to observe myself with a degree of dispassion.

The series *The red poems* (1995)²⁷ was written at the time of my mother's dying and subsequent passing (see appendix B). The last poem of this period, entitled *Easter Monday*²⁸ was written months later when a deep depression had set in.

The Easter rabbit has gone
so too the laughter of children
the sun still shines
and the air is April crisp

melancholy settles like a grey blanket
a portent of the winter yet to come

This poem also introduces one of the central themes of the exhibition, which is the process of ageing. My mother's death, coinciding as it did with my own mid-life, marked a halt in the forward hurry-scurry of my life. It became a time for re-assessment marked by a consciousness of mortality. The retrospective diary-like nature of the exhibition was therefore an attempt to put my life into perspective. It was also, in an oblique way, a homage to my mother.

Easter Monday was written on a scrap of paper and hung as part of a two dimensional work entitled *Youth, beauty ...* (1996) (fig 21). This work included a series of photocopies based on a photograph taken when I was nineteen.

I found the damaged and long-forgotten photograph in a drawer. I photocopied it five times. Onto the bottom right hand corner of each of the first four prints I pasted a small image of myself. The fifth print I altered, ageing my own image.²⁹ I then re-photocopied it in a slightly larger format. I pegged the five images onto a line. In front of the photocopies, I pasted *Easter Monday* and another poem *Fragments of childhood*.³⁰ The two poems bracketed time from my childhood to middle age.

Nel had this to say about the work:

The damaged 1964 photograph of herself ... becomes a metaphor for the damage of ageing to the self-image and the attrition of the life process itself. These images hung casually on a line using pegs alludes to feminist strategies of display and the deceptive poetry of the ordinary. The images of self on the thin sheets of paper, pegged to a line seem like the fragility of a life caught in the wind (1996: 9).

The focus on age does not only have to do with the physical process of ageing. It is also concerned with the mental and perceptive aspects of growing older; that sense of distancing and sadness, which I attempted to capture in *Fragments of childhood*:

Galloping over mine dumps
"beware the eroded gullies"
quick over the caved-in ground
"caved-in" was just a word
(in those days)
joy was the sound of hooves
hollow on the ground

there were holes there
overgrown and fenced off
"venture there at your peril"
children disappeared then
(so we were told)
frissons of pleasure
never us never us

the landscape is yellowed now
was it always yellow?
(from *Book 7, Fragments* (1995 - 1996))

The exhibition *John's wife* was thus a catharsis; it was a means of coping with grief. As Hazel Friedman described it, "It is a ... document about love, loss and middle age ..." (1996: 40). Questions of identity naturally followed this time of crisis. It was a time when everything seemed for the briefest of moments to have stopped and then moved on again.

iron red cows
in a yellowed landscape
in a world that is the same
only forever different
(from *Book 2, The red poems* (1995))

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- ¹ Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939), is one of the seminal thinkers of the twentieth century. Like Duchamp (1887 - 1968) in art and Einstein (1879 - 1955) in physics, he has influenced, in fundamental ways, the way modern man (and woman) sees himself and the world in which he operates.
- ² The discussion will presuppose that the reader has some working knowledge of psychoanalytical ideas; although most of the concepts discussed are in common currency.
- ³ "Freud's theories, so far from constituting a unitary, fixed structure, which either stands or falls as a whole and which analysts subscribe to in its entirety, are really more a collection of miscellaneous ideas, insights and intuitions which Freud produced over a span of fifty years ..." (Rycroft in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 303).
- ⁴ The "unconscious" is also a cardinal concept in the theory of Freud's early disciple and contemporary, Carl Jung (1875 - 1961), who articulated the notion of the *collective unconscious*. The *collective unconscious* is the repository of images and symbols common to all of humanity. Freud however, differed from Jung in that he focused on the unconscious of the individual and did not adopt a lexicon of symbolism linked to spirituality and religion. The Jungian approach with its more optimistic view of man does not hold much attraction for me. I have more empathy with the Freudian emphasis on the individual, bleaker aspects of experience. This fits more comfortably with an existentialist vision of the world.
- ⁵ Freud's phallogocentric perspective is very apparent in this excerpt.
- ⁶ Freud did "modify" his view of the artist-as-neurotic in 1928 when he wrote, "Before the problem of the creative artist analysis, must, alas, lay down its arms" (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 306).
- ⁷ Rycroft differs from Jacques Lacan who regards unconscious processes as an integral part of linguistic operations. Lacan had said, "what the whole psychoanalytic experience discovers *in the unconscious is the whole structure of language*" (my italics) (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 23). Nevertheless, Rycroft has noted that had Freud lived after the formulation of linguistic theory he would have been much more likely to have adopted a theoretical model based on language rather than one based on biology (*ibid.*: 309)!

- ⁸ *Leonardo da Vinci and a memory of his childhood* was published in 1910 in Vol XI, *The standard edition of the complete psychological works* (Wright 1984: 184).
- ⁹ Freud's pathographic analysis of da Vinci reflected the late nineteenth century Romantic view of the artist-as-troubled-outsider; an attitude that was current at the time Freud was developing his theories about artists and creativity (Spitz 1985: 50).
- ¹⁰ Kuspit here enters the debate about the essentialist nature of aesthetic experience. This argument has swung from one view to the other throughout the century (Greenberg versus social realists for example). I will not necessarily engage with it except to acknowledge the validity of Kuspit's view namely, that the experience of art goes beyond mere iconographic interpretation; or as Kuspit has phrased it, "the mathematical" interpretations of Freud *et al.* (*ibid.*: 311).
- ¹¹ Wolff has noted how interpretation is thus doubly subjected to critical analysis (1981: 116).
- ¹² This extrapolation was also apparent in Witthaus' review of *Nicholas - October 1990* (1993: 27).
- ¹³ A "crude" interpretation of metonymic associations between objects, such as snake = penis is commonly attributed to Freudian theory. But Freud himself rejected these one-to-one associations as being too mechanistic (Wright 1984: 25). As Spector has noted, the simplistic approach to sexual symbolism was adopted by Freud's followers rather than by Freud himself (1973: 99).
- ¹⁴ Spitz has also noted that unconscious "intention" involves the repression of the connection between the signifier and the signified (1985: 93).
- ¹⁵ Jane Alexander, *Butcher boys* (1985 – 1986). Plaster, paint, bone, horns, wooden bench, life-size. South African National Gallery, Cape Town. (Williamson and Jamal 1996: 21.)
- ¹⁶ *Self-portrait* (1992) was the only figure to have arms in an exhibition of armless forms. Did the presence of the arms unconsciously represent a desire for power? At the time there was no intention nor any conscious volition toward this end. However, my later interpretation, paralleling the process of secondary revision, revealed a meaning that had, experientially, a sense of "fit". The artist had been invested with power. She was "god, for a small while" (From *Book 3, The artist* (1995 – 1996)).

¹⁷ *John's wife (yellow)* (1995). Fired clay, (yellow pigment) and chair, 101,5 x 84 x 45 cm. Artist's collection. (Cruise 1997: 25.)

John's wife (blue) (1995). Fired clay (blue pigment), 50 x 120 x 64 cm. Private collection. (Cruise 1997: 22 – 23.)

John's wife (white) (1995). Fired clay, (white pigment) and found objects, 110 x 85 x 66 cm. Artist's collection. (Cruise 1997: 22 - 23.)

¹⁸ *John's wife: artist as subject, subject as object* was presented at the First Gallery, Johannesburg, 23 April to 11 May 1996.

¹⁹ I used the photocopy process to standardise, alter, enlarge, reduce and repeat a series of images, which were drawings and photographs of my own works. The photocopies were then transferred onto handmade paper usually in editions of five prints. This print technique enabled me to use text as well as image.

²⁰ The practice of underground mining in South Africa, was, until 1991, legally restricted to men only. Since 1991 women have been allowed to work underground in management or research positions. Manual labour is still prohibited to women. (The Minerals Act 50. 1991: Section 32.)

²¹ *Fractures I* (1994 - 1995). Ceramic, paint and mirror, approx. 14 x 4 m. Artist's collection.

Fractures II (fat corner) (1994). Ceramic, chairs and wood, 221 x 241 x 75 cm. Artist's collection.

At the time I was exploring the concept of fragmentation I wrote the following:

Fragmentation is both an expression of a psychological reality and a property of the medium of ceramic. Fired clay tends to shatter on impact. This tendency of the material to break is exploited; cracking in the firing process is a metaphor for another, psychical reality. A plaster mould cast from a nude form made by the artist, provides the fragment which is repeated as a "multiple". As the plaster mould disintegrates with use, the forms reflect the deterioration offering a *physical parallel to a psychical disintegration*. Embodied within the works is the notion of decay, specifically of the female form - an ageing reality. A mirror reflects the multiplicity of the already multiplied form

(1995: from a proposal made to the *Africus* 1995 Biennale
(*Africus Johannesburg Biennale Catalogue* 1995: 102).

- ²² The easel contained three images. These were *Self-portrait 1987 (long)* (1995 - 1996), *Thoyohandou* (1996) and *Yellow christ (screened)* (1995 - 1996).

Self-portrait 1987 (long) (1995 - 1996). Photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture, edition 5, 101,5 x 4 cm. Artist's collection.

Thoyohandou (1996). Photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture, edition 5, 101,5 x 41 cm. Private collection.

Yellow christ (screened) (1995 - 1996). Photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture, edition 5, 101, 5 x 41 cm. Private collection.

- ²³ I referred again to "the yellowed landscape" in *The red poems* (1995) (see appendix B).

- ²⁴ Mary Kelly, *Postpartum document* (1973 - 1979). Mixed media, 18 units; 25 x 20 cm (edited version). Collection unknown. (Rankin 1985: 16.)

- ²⁵ ... *le with care* (1995 - 1996). Photocopy, laminated and altered, 84 x 55 cm. Artist's collection.

- ²⁶ The process is similar to automatic writing but not identical, since automatic writing tries to eschew all conscious (ego) control. In my work I allow a free play between conscious, rational processes and the pre-conscious irrational ones.

- ²⁷ *The red poems*. (1995). Artist's book 2a and 2b, a dual book edition, poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover, each 6 pages edition 5, smaller: 24 x 21 x 1 cm; larger: 31,2 x 22,1 x 0,9 cm. Private collections.

- ²⁸ This poem was not included in the volume *The red poems* (1995). Instead it formed part of the installation *Youth beauty ...* (1996). *Youth beauty ...* (1996). 5 photocopies, 2 poems, pegs and string, 4 x A3 mounted on A0 and 1 x A0 print. Artist's collection.

- ²⁹ This image was enlarged to A0 size and included in the *Cuban suite* which was exhibited at the *Sixth Havana Bienal*, April - May 1997. For a discussion of this work see Conclusion and Postscript.

³⁰ Although it was part of the installation *Youth beauty ...* (1996) this poem was written as part of the working process for the sculpture *John's wife (yellow)* (1995). It was included in *Book 7, Fragments* (1995 - 1996) .

Book 7, Fragments (1995 - 1996). Poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover (coloured print on frontispiece), 6 pages edition 5, 24 x 37,2 x 1,0 cm. Artist's collection.

CONCLUSION AND POSTSCRIPT

The / that speaks stands at a distance from the / that has experienced ...(de Beauvoir 1972: 130).

Man is not substance that thinks, but a separation from all substance: I am not, therefore I think (Blackham on Sartre 1961: 113).

In her review of the exhibition *John's wife*, Betty Lamprecht (1996: 14) wrote the following about the suite of erotic prints known as *A suite (a love poem)* (1990 - 1996) (figs 22 and 23).¹

She said:

In ... this series Cruise celebrates the joy of the physical side of the man-woman interaction. The answer as to why a voyeur, in masculine form, appears in the drawings, can be attributed to explanations found elsewhere in Cruise's work namely, *that her animus is the artist in her; the one who observes and documents* (translation and italics mine) (*ibid.*).²

Although Lamprecht's statement was made with particular reference to *A suite (a love poem)* (1990 - 1996), nevertheless it has managed to encapsulate several of the concerns which have formed the nucleus of this dissertation. These are my stance on feminism, the rôle of the unconscious in the production of art and the place of interpretation as an act of meaning.

The original drawings for the *A suite (a love poem)* (1990 - 1996) were made six years before they were shown on the *John's wife* exhibition. They were drawn over a period of a few days sometime in 1989 or 1990. The suite was originally intended as a private document. It was only in 1995 when the photocopy-print technique was made available to me and when I had decided to investigate my life retrospectively, that they moved into the public domain. Nevertheless they reveal that the habit of observation; the / that observes is different from the / that experiences (de Beauvoir 1972: 130); was already well established in 1989 - 1990. At that time I did not know the reason as to why I had chosen to place the voyeur in the erotic suite, nor did I, at the time,

question his presence. He seemed to have arrived by an act of unconscious volition which, in terms of my processes of accessing images, I welcomed. I simply accepted his appearance without question. Lamprecht's 1996 reading of him as a metaphor for the observing eye offered an explanation that had an experiential sense of "fit". My response to her interpretation was, "So that is what he is about"! I accept him as my artistic alter-ego, my observing and dispassionate eye - I. He is subject; a personification of that part that stands at a distance and observes the behaving and performing object.

Having welcomed Lamprecht's insight, I am nevertheless left with the question of why I had chosen to represent my own artistic alter-ego as male, short, rotund and bald (figs 22 and 23)! It seems as if he represents the complex response I have to the feminist conundrum. As discussed in chapter one I reject a polarised dichotomy between the genders. I avoid a simple dualism. I prefer to read the terms "masculine" and "feminine" as descriptive of certain mind-sets which can co-exist in a single individual. However accepting Lamprecht's reading that my artistic self is the *animus* aspect of my personality, I am brought back to the contradictory position of a feminist who rejects the "feminine".

I have always consciously chosen a "masculine" position for *inter alia* materialistic reasons. In order to succeed in an often difficult and critical art market I felt an assertive, non-emotional, strong approach was required. It is these qualities that I had admired in Doris Bloom, the artist, and which led to the sculpture *Blue Doris* (1988) (fig 1) (see chapter one). My choice of a "masculine" approach was also dictated by reasons that had to do with the negative connotations of "women's art". I work with a medium that has come (unfairly) to be associated with the pejorative connotations of "craft" and "women's work". I desired to

signal my distance from these prejudices by making work in fired clay that could not be interpreted as “craft” nor read in a sentimental (feminine) way. My use of large scale, rough surfaces and bleak subject matter precluded these readings. As Geers noted, “The works shift beyond their *mere ceramic forms* and into a metaphorical state alluding to a psychological conflict taking place within the dark void of the viewer's own imagination” (my italics) (1990: 17).

I am also aware that by rejecting any aspect of my art that can be described as “feminine” I am also accepting the pejorative connotations that have grown up around this term. To this accusation I have no defence other than to fall back on the claim that, “In order to speak, to represent herself, a woman (has to) assume(s) a masculine position...” (Owens in Broude and Garrard 1992: 487).

I am, as the first reader of my work, usually the first interpreter. My readings retrospectively provide me with insights as to the meaning of the work. As such my art functions like dream imagery; its images and metaphors are decoded and, in a process similar to secondary revision, information is looped back to its source.

The unconscious has always played an important rôle in the genesis of my art. The formalisation of the process of creativity demanded by this dissertation forced me to re-engage with psychoanalytical thought. I had rejected Freudian approaches shortly after I graduated in 1969. This was for two reasons. The first was an inchoate fury at the perceived phallocentrism of Freud's writings. The second, was governed by a doctrinaire positivist approach that scorned the “unscientific” nature of Freud's teachings. But thirty years later positivism itself is under siege and Freud's teachings have fertilised and regenerated in surprising ways,

including contributing to the ideas of the feminist Julia Kristeva. Freud's views on art and creativity have provided the springboard for models of critical analysis that are adaptable to other contemporary modes of thought. In particular Charles Rycroft (in Spurling 1989 Vol III: 303 - 315) has linked dream and artwork together in a classical Freudian manner thus bringing psychoanalysis into line with poststructuralist modes of thought. Rycroft provides a model for interpretation that takes into account both the author and the reader of the text as well as acknowledging the rôle of the unconscious in the creative process.

My approach to the author/reader dichotomy is one of moderate relativism. I believe both terms of the equation are necessary in contributing to the genesis of meaning. However, the act of interpretation itself is revealing. As has been discussed throughout this dissertation, the responses of the critics frequently do not correspond with the intended meaning of the work. But, their responses reveal much about their own predilections and prejudices and as such can be regarded as texts to be decoded. However, readings can be relatively open or closed and in this dissertation critical responses have been juxtaposed and analysed. I have discussed when and how these have a sense of "fit" in terms of my own interpretation. I have attempted to show where the attitudes and affects have led to a fallacious interpretation of artistic intention. But my intention as the author of the text is itself not inviolate. Intent does not necessarily provide the definitive interpretation. Meaning continually evolves and critical responses themselves can give insight. This is especially true of Lamprecht's analysis of *A suite (a love poem)* (1990 - 1996) which is uncommon in its perspicacity, particularly since her comments were distant in terms of time and place from the genesis of the work.

Observing myself through Lamprecht's eyes in the erotic suite, I became aware that she had summed up the paradox; *artist as subject : subject as object*.

As Blackham has noted, "Consciousness by being always consciousness of something refers to itself ... " (1961: 113). This existential loop of awareness between self and the world-out-there has governed my habit of perceiving myself perceiving, and so on.³ In existential terms consciousness is known via experience which is centred on and through the body. The body is the site of experience and, therefore, logically I have chosen to express myself through the representation of the body since that is how I know myself and the world. Bodily representation also enabled me to deal with abstract questions, such as the feminist one which was discussed in chapter one, wherein a body [*sic!*] of work (the sculptures 1988 – 1990) retrospectively provided me with insight as to my feminist position. In chapter two, a cycle of works, *Nicholas – October 1990*, (1993) provided the genesis for an existential questioning about the nature of god. The personal experience of death was further explored in the exhibition *John's wife* (1996) (chapter three) wherein the process of ageing was discussed from a personal perspective. In this latter exhibition the use of text in my work was foregrounded for the first time. Throughout the dissertation the problem of interpretation has wound its contradictory path.

I have attempted to impose a formal structure on a process of observation, creation and interpretation that in its nature resists such formalisation. As such a meaning has been imposed on a body of work which in its creation spanned eight varied years from 1988 to 1996. At the outset I attempted to unearth answers to questions that had yet to be formulated clearly. The search has been rewarding. But even though

this dissertation has been written from an autobiographical perspective it cannot be regarded as definitive. In 1996 I wrote, "Truth resides in the interstices between autobiography and art" (from annotated drawings for the *John's wife* exhibition). It is a statement that still holds true.

POSTSCRIPT

In 1997, I was invited to participate in the Sixth Havana Biennial in Cuba. The curatorial brief to the artists included the following statement:

The Center [*sic*] Wilfredo Lam wishes to promote in this oncoming Biennial a reflection on the relationship between man and his memory as a means to defend his own identity The sixth Biennial of Havana, in its different exhibitions will receive artists who have placed man at the centre of their concerns and who appeal to memory registers as a way of preventing the destruction of their social and human identity. Some of them portray the loss of identity process either as observers or witnesses to this destruction ... and still there are some others *who appeal to their own individuality* to communication by means of human feelings as a way of not losing their identity ... (my italics) (Extract from brief to the artists, Centro Wilfredo Lam 1997: 008).

The appeal to individual memory, contained in the brief, suggested that I could continue my pursuit of subjective experience for the work I was going to make for the Havana Biennial. It seemed logical to proceed with the exploration of identity through an analysis of the self-portrait, a process I had initiated for the *John's wife* exhibition. As I have noted in the introduction, I had preserved all the self-portraits I had produced over the years. I had re-discovered these drawings, photographs and documents in 1995. For the *John's wife* exhibition, I had re-worked the images by altering and standardising the format through the use of the photocopy process. I had, in most cases, transferred these images onto hand-made paper using thinners and a press.

But I was dissatisfied with the transfer process. Initially seduced by the hand-made surfaces of the paper and the velvet "inkiness" of the print, I

later became aware that this technique muffled the emotional intensity of the works. In contrast, I felt, that one of the most successful works of the *John's wife* show, was *Youth beauty..* (1996) (fig 21) which had used the unmediated photocopied image. In this work emotion was not muted by the transfer technique which has the effect of distancing the spectator with its inherent politeness and "high art" connotations.

I therefore decided to abandon the transfer process for the Havana Biennial. This decision fitted well with the constraints imposed upon the South African contingent of artists.⁴

The restrictions placed upon the artists arose out of the experience of the 1994 Havana Biennial. In 1994, completed artworks had been air-freighted from Johannesburg to Cuba. As one of the participating artists, I had submitted a large work entitled *Three figures for a landscape* (1993).⁵ In spite of the expensive and logistically complicated nature of the transport, the three life-size ceramic figures arrived in Havana in shards! The other artworks suffered similar, if less drastic fates, arriving at their destination in various stages of damage. In the light of this history, the four artists selected for the Sixth Havana Biennial were given a brief; to construct their work on site, in Havana, from materials taken to Cuba in the form of personal luggage. No provision was made for the transport of completed works.⁶ Given the fact that the spaces assigned to the artists were large, (mine was approximately thirty by six metres), this was a considerable physical impediment. However, photocopy paper is light and I felt that a roll of images carried as hand-luggage would address part of the problem. This decision also accorded with my artistic desire to abandon the transfer process and to use the actual photocopy as the artwork.

I had also discovered that I could enlarge the images to an A0 size. To the collection of enlarged self-portraits I added four more to bring the suite up to date. I had twenty-one images that were in effect a record of a thirty year period of self-investigation. Onto each self-portrait I pasted the date of its execution. But I did not present the images chronologically. Not that that would have revealed much if I had, since I discovered that the suite represents neither a chronicle of ageing, nor a record of an artistic development that could, in Greenbergian sense, be regarded as a progress from mimesis to abstraction. The drawings stubbornly refuse such ordering. Like truth in general their message is more complex. The drawings can be said to reflect certain psychical states recorded over the years.

The earliest drawing, dated 1967, is a distorted face, with dark ringed eyes (fig 24).⁷ In 1967, I was young, alone and poor in Amsterdam, desperately homesick and miserable. I had caught a reflection of my face in a pewter teapot. This twisted, hollow-eyed image prompted me to record my inner state. These same feelings of despair would re-occur over the years. My intermittent recording of them accounts for the fact that there is no sequential reading to the series. Instead there is a sad re-visitation of depression. Thus the portraits are not so much records of an external reality so much as a trace of an internal state.

The self-portraits formed only part of what I later called *The Cuban suite* (1997) (fig 25). In Cuba I combined the two-dimensional images of the self-portraits with a final portrait constructed in the round (fig 26). This final work I constructed *in situ* from paper, cardboard, wood-glue and paint, all of which I had transported to Cuba. This monumental head provided the sculptural form in an installation that consisted otherwise of

two-dimensional images. I also planned to use notes and poems that I had written in recent years.

The written word has always been important in my working process. But until 1996, when it moved into a public domain, the use of the written word had been part of a private process. At the *John's wife* exhibition, it became an important aspect of the final artwork. In Cuba I decided, once again to use text and image. I decided that the words and drawings were to work in parallel but that the relationship between them would not necessarily be a logical one. The images would not illustrate the text, nor would the text explain the images.

My use of word to access images has always relied on sub-conscious processes. I do not juxtapose verbal and visual systems of communication for conscious, political purposes as, for example, does Barbara Kruger:

She creates meanings knowingly, responsibly and deliberately with a view to changing the beliefs of the viewer, or setting up a critical awareness with which to undermine the ideological structures that underlie the representation of many stereotypes (Cilliers 1993: 38).

My use of text, like that of the image, is a response to the world and its events. It is as if a mirror has been tilted to catch a slight shift in the reflection. A note written prior to my departure for Havana expresses my reasoning as follows:

Self-portraits and words : both seek to define identity in an inchoate world where the gentler aspects of existence are drowned in violence, death and anarchy
(working note for *The Cuban suite* (1997)).

In any event the extant texts were not used. Instead a poem that I had written during my first days in Havana was scribbled, in charcoal, directly onto the wall. It read as follows:

I love kissing in Cuba
in Havana
where music filters down the streets
and a little girl sashays to its distant beat
where the grass is brown
the cannons stark and black
more art than weaponry
I love kissing in Cuba
(from *The Cuban suite* (1997)).

The Cuban suite (1997) provides the *coda* to *Artist as subject : subject as object*. But the final chord has not been sounded. The suite, in its Havana form, was left in Cuba, as was intended. Since the collection of images represents thirty years of self-investigation it suggests that the process is without end. Therefore, I have used the same images again in the exhibition that accompanies this dissertation. But in terms of the ongoing and ever-changing process of self-investigation, the emphasis has shifted. A new set of physical constraints created new problems which in turn demanded fresh creative solutions. Most importantly, the space required a different response to that of the Moro Castle, which was the site of the original *The Cuban suite* (1997). *The Cuban suite* (1997) however, reflects that the process of observation is constant. The subject still observes herself, observing. She stands a small but important distance from the experience of being-in-the-world.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

¹ *A suite (a love poem)* (1990 - 1996). Altered photomechanical prints, 8 images edition 5, each 27 x 38 cm. Artist's collection. This work is a framed version of *Book 5, A love poem* (1990 - 1996). Unlike the other six volumes it has no text.

Book 5 A love poem (1990 - 1996). Artist's book, altered photomechanical prints, 11 pages edition 5, 29,5 x 33 x 2 cm.

² The original Afrikaans version is as follows:

In "A Love Poem", a reeks erotiese tekeninge van die huweliksbed, besing sy die vreugde van die fisieke kant van die man-vrou-interaksie. Waarom daar 'n voyeur in 'n manlike gestalte verskyn, kan 'n mens moontlik toeskryf aan Cruise se verklaring in ander werke dat die animus die kunstenaar in haar is. Dit is immers die kunstenaar wat waarneem en dokumenteer (Lamprecht 1996: 14).

³ Consciousness (the *pour-soi*) of being also includes an awareness of "the other" who is "a *pour-soi*, a personal being, a self, like me" (Blackham 1961: 118). Contradictorily Blackham says that, the other cannot be known as an object, since only the dead "are permanently objective" (*ibid.*:119).

⁴ The other artists were William Kentridge, Meshekwa Langa and Penny Siopis.

⁵ *Three figures for a landscape* (1993). Three ceramic figures on concrete bases, 171 cm, 168 cm, 171 cm. Destroyed. (Havana Biennial 1994.)

⁶ We were later given the opportunity to transport a small amount of raw material to Cuba, courtesy of one of that country's diplomats.

⁷ *Self-portrait* (1967). Pen and ink, approx. 30 x 20 cm. Original destroyed.

APPENDIX A

FULL LIST OF WORKS ON THE EXHIBITIONS 1990, 1993 AND 1996.

When exact measurements are not known the approximate size is given; for example "life-size".

Untitled (everlasting nothingness made visible), Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 6 - 27 October 1990.

L'Homme révolté (1990).

Ceramic, wooden bench and blanket on a wooden base,
44 x 85 x 116 cm.

South African National Gallery, Cape Town.

(South African National Gallery 1997: 77.)

There is no father (1990).

Ceramic figure, wire, metal, stool and wooden base,
figure on stool: 110 x 61 x 50 cm, base: 12 x 102,5 x 107 cm.

Unisa Art Gallery Collection, Pretoria.

(Arnold 1996: fig 19 - 20, plate 54 and Cruise 1997: 21.)

Venus after Dora (1990).

Ceramic,
life-size.

Private collection.

Crouching woman (but the earth is dark) (1990).

Ceramic and fired metal on a wooden box with lock,
± 80 cm.

Private collection.

(Cruise 1997: 18 - 19.)

Without title with mirror (1988 - 1990).

Ceramic, altered bed, box and mirror,
115 x 148 x 62 cm.

Artist's collection.

Wedding night (1989).
Ceramic, altered bed and blanket,
120 x 190 x 130 cm.
Artist's collection.
(Cruise and Hemp 1991: 101.)

War zone (1989).
Ceramic,
48 x 150 x 48 cm.
Private collection.

Zoë (1989).
Ceramic and altered sun bed,
80 x 150 x 57 cm.
Private collection.

Space is colourless Sam (1990).
Ceramic and bench,
75 x 69 x 74 cm.
Artist's collection.

Dog with options (1988).
Ceramic with leather,
120 x 165 x 91 cm.
Private collection.

***Nicholas - October 1990, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg,
17 April – 8 May 1993.***

Nicholas I (1990 - 1993).
Bronze (edition x 3 + a/p),
30 x 43 x 33 cm.
Private and artist's collections.

Durban pietà (1991 - 1993).
Two ceramic figures, fired metal and cloth,
54 x 244 x 244 cm.
Unisa Art Gallery Collection, Pretoria.
(Cruise 1997: 10 – 11.)

Three shades (the bully boys I, II and III) (1992 - 1993).
Ceramic and cast metal on concrete bases,
175 x 80 x 40 cm, 184 x 76 x 65 cm, 172 x 70 x 76 cm.
Durban Art Museum, Durban.
(Arnold 1996: Plate 53 and Cruise 1997: 2 - 3.)

Self-portrait (1992).
Ceramic on concrete base,
173 x 62 x 45 cm.
Private collection.
(Arnold 1996: Plates 55 and 56 and Cruise 1997: 7.)

Yellow christ (1992 - 1993).
Ceramic with cast bronze face and mask on concrete base,
173 cm.
Private collection.
(Cruise 1997: 4 - 5.)

Without grace (1993).
Ceramic figure on concrete base with found object,
248 x 61 x 57 cm.
Private collection.
(Cruise 1997: 8.)

Without thorns (1992).
Ceramic and fired metal,
167 x 56 x 70 cm.
Private collection.

Without judgement (1992).
Ceramic, box and bricks,
155 x 111 x 45 cm.
Private collection.

***John's wife*, First Gallery, Johannesburg, 23 April -
11 May 1996.**

SCULPTURE

John's wife (yellow) (1995).

Fired clay (yellow pigment) and chair,

101,5 x 84 x 45 cm.

Artist's collection.

(Cruise 1997: 25.)

John's wife (blue) (1995).

Fired clay (blue pigment),

50 x 120 x 64 cm.

Private collection.

(Cruise 1997: 22 -23.)

John's wife (white) (1995).

Fired clay (white pigment) and found objects,

110 x 85 x 66 cm.

Artist's collection.

(Cruise 1997: 22 - 23.)

War zone II (1994).

Fired clay with white pigment and red paint,

59 x 160 x 50 cm.

Artist's collection.

DRAWINGS

Doris (1995).

Pen and ink with collaged photocopies,

113 x 142,5 cm.

Artist's collection.

John's wife (on paper) (1995).

Pen and ink with collaged photocopies,

129,5 x 81 cm.

Artist's collection.

DIGITALLY REPRODUCED DRAWINGS

Figure in a yellowed landscape (1995).

Digitally enlarged drawing, plastic laminated onto canvas,
84,5 x 118,5 cm.

Artist's collection.

Fracture (1995).

Digitally enlarged drawing, detail, plastic laminated onto canvas,
31 x 31 cm.

Private collection.

BOOKS

Book 1 The negative aspects of god (1995 - 1996).

Poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover, 14 pages,
edition 5 (page "yellow christ" a coloured print),
26 x 20,3 x 2,4 cm.

Private collection.

Book 2a The red poems (1995 - 1996).

Smaller of dual book editions,
poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover, 6 pages,
edition 5,
24 x 21 x 1 cm.

Private collection.

Book 2b The red poems (1995 - 1996).

Larger of dual book edition, poetry and altered photomechanical prints,
in metal cover, 6 pages, edition 5,
31,2 x 22,1 x 9 cm.

Private collection.

Book 3 The artist (1995 - 1996).

Poetry and altered photomechanical prints in colour, in metal cover, 6
pages, no edition,
33 x 43,7 x 0,8 cm.

Private collection.

Book 4 John's wife (1995 - 1996).

Poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover,
(blue ink surrounds), 7 pages, edition 5,
28,5 x 27 x 1,6 cm.

Private collection.

Book 5 A love poem (1990 - 1996).

Altered photomechanical prints, 11 pages, edition 5,
29,5 x 33 x 2 cm.
Private collection.

***Book 6 The bully boys* (1995 - 1996).**

Poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover, 7 pages,
edition 5,
29,3 x 21,3 x 2,4 cm.
Private collection.

***Book 7 Fragments* (1995 - 1996).**

Poetry and altered photomechanical prints, in metal cover,
(coloured print on frontispiece), 6 pages, edition 5,
24 x 37,2 x 1 cm.
Artist's collection.

BOOKS FRAMED

***Book 1 The negative aspects of god* (1995 - 1996).**

Larger framed edition, poetry and altered photomechanical prints
including one colour print, 14 pages, edition 5,
36 x 184 cm.
Artist's collection.

***Book 4 John's wife* (1995 - 1996).**

Poetry and altered photomechanical prints,
larger edition on a wooden screen, 7 pages, edition 5,
each plank 2030 x 280 cm; pages: 24 x 18 cm.
Artist's collection.

***Book 5 A suite (a love poem)* (1990 - 1996).**

Altered photomechanical prints, 8 pages, edition 5,
each: 27 x 37,5 cm.
Artist's collection.

PRINTS

***Thoyohandou* (1996).**

Photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture, edition 5,
101,5 x 41 cm.
Private collection.

***Self-portrait 1987* (1995 - 1996).**

Photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture, edition 5,

101,5 x 41 cm.
Artist's collection.

Yellow christ (screened) (1995 - 1996).
Photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture, edition 5,
101,5 x 41 cm.
Private collection.

Yellow christ (crowned) (1995).
Photomechanical print from photograph of original sculpture, edition 5,
70 x 51 cm.
Private collection.

Yellow christ (screened) (1995).
Smaller version, photomechanical print from photograph of original
sculpture, edition 5,
54,5 x 37,5 cm.
Private collection.

Cleft 1 and 2 (1996).
Altered photomechanical prints from photographs of original sculpture
with acetate,
each 101,5 x 41 cm.
Private collection.

1964 to 1996 (1995 - 1996).
8 mechanical prints from original self portraits, plank and bulldog clips,
each page approx: 42 x 22 cm, plank: 61 x 227 cm.
Private collection.

The artist (1995).
Mechanical print from photograph of original sculpture,
34 x 52 cm.
Artist's collection.

After jelly jelly tot belly (1995).
Photomechanical print from photograph of original sculpture, edition 5,
54,5 x 37,5 cm.
Artist's collection.

Self-portrait 1987 (1995 - 1996).

Photomechanical print,

80,5 x 54 cm.

Artists' collection.

... le with care (1995 - 1996).

Photocopy, laminated and altered,

84 x 55 cm.

Artist's collection.

Youth beauty ... (1996).

5 photocopies, 2 poems, pegs and string,

4 x A3 mounted on A0 and 1 x A0 print.

Artist's collection.

APPENDIX B

the red poems

iron red cows
in a yellowed landscape
in a world that is the same
only forever different

Mom
dying
her world in a basket of wool
blue emerald
and red
the colour of blood

Mom
pregnant with death
mom
who is sad today
mom
who is not scared of death

red earth
the colour of blood
a broken body
a discarded tin can and
a grey blanket

red earth
the colour of Africa
the place of my birth
and her death

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