

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ARTIST AS CELEBRITY**

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**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ARTIST AS CELEBRITY**

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JEWELLERY DESIGN, DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY.

I declare that this dissertation is my work and has not been submitted
previously for any degree or examination through any other institution.

anet norval

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation introduces and explores the link between the phenomenon of the celebrity artist and autobiographical narratives. It investigates the possibility that artists plan, strategize and embellish or create stories that could gain enough attention from the general public to achieve celebrity status. This enquiry will establish various contexts, that of different artists, the audience, the celebrity artist and my own, locating the research and findings within a historical and contemporary discourse.

The research presents several concepts and factors that will contribute to the understanding and contextualization of the hypothesis, as well as possibly substantiate it. Concepts such as celebrity, fame, narcissism, the ego and exhibitionism form the basis of the enquiry while theories based on narrative, autobiography and memory rehearsal provide credible support and background. The nature of this dissertation requires a broad investigation including contemporary social sciences, philosophy and psychology, media studies and history of art.

In order to determine whether the aforementioned concepts and theories are employed by certain individuals to gain celebrity status, three celebrity artists are introduced through their biographies, rises to fame and their popularity and relationships with the general public. The artists, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Tracey Emin are introduced chronologically. All three artists have established public identities and in the attempt to substantiate whether these identities are constructed and pre-mediated the final analysis (in form of a causal analysis) presents fluctuating results with several possible causes.

As part of this enquiry I introduce my creative output through discussing my autobiography, themes (of my work), mediums (I choose to use), exhibition and the resonance found with the selected artists. In light of the discussions based on the backgrounds, public identities and resonance I have found with each artist I determine whether I embellish my stories to gain fame.

The research is conducted through qualitative research methodologies and presented in a consequential order. The methodological approach and process is best described through the term Bricolage, which refers to the use of multiple methodologies in its approach to research, in other words, a hybrid of praxis (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). The process of this enquiry includes theoretical research, historical research; studio based and –led research, as well as a causal analysis.

As part of the research, many factors have been considered and discussed, as an investigation into autobiography; the research will aid me in progressing as an artist as well as contribute to the greater knowledge of the autobiographical field. Furthermore, introducing and exploring the link between autobiographical narratives and the artist, as celebrity is a discourse that can be developed and further expanded on. Through this research I have attempted to establish a link between high art and popular culture, and the artist and the audience.

The findings represent a process of attempting to understand a complex set of possible causes with one ultimate effect and the influence it has on an individual and the general population. Many artists want to be famous and would go through the motions to become a celebrity. It does, however, fully depend on the individual and no ultimate formula can be presented.

PREFACE

The following conventions have been used in this dissertation:

- The Harvard method of referencing has been used in the List of References
- “ – ” have been used for direct quotations
- ‘ – ’ have been used for quotations within another quotations
- Titles of artworks, books and essays are in *italics*
- Sub-headings are in **bold** and *italics*
- Epigraphs are in *italics* with 1.15 size spacing and left and right indent

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INTRODUCTION: *Stargazing*.

...every man (is) his own auteur, the multi-talented direct-writer-star of his own drama.

- Richard Schickel, 2000

There is a vast difference between a story and a *great* story. Most people enjoy hearing stories and when the opportunity arises to tell a story very few will decline. After all, history is a great story told to us by our forefathers and to them by their forefathers or so I have been told. The possibility to acquire fame whilst telling a great story is a very intriguing subject, which undoubtedly has a great story behind it. Surely this is where celebrities come from and why some individuals make it their life goal to tell the ultimate story.

Background to the Study, Rationale and Motive

After witnessing a recording of a live television debate (*Is Painting Dead?*, 1997) turn into a raucous performance accompanied by drunken slurs, rude hand gestures and cursing by British artist, Tracey Emin, I became interested in the relationship and difference between being a celebrity and an artist; and being a celebrity artist. In many cases, Tracey Emin is more known for her social misdoings than her art (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002).

My interest in this topic furthermore stems from the fact that I am an autobiographical art practitioner. I derive most of the concepts for my work from childhood memories, family memorabilia, experiences and my emotional reactions to these. My last solo exhibition in 2010, *Epilogue/ Naskrif*, was based on a series of events in my personal life prior to the exhibition. Described by Peter Machen (2010), as “an autopsy of an aftermath” and “not exhibitionist or sensationalist”, I began to question whether exposing a personal story in a public arena, creates an impression of sensationalism and whether it had relevance to society at large. (Refer to the Appendix)

Problem

There seems to be a fine line between *acting* in a specific manner and actually *being* a specific way. As an autobiographical artist, exposing my life

story, this fine line is the very point where I begin to question actions that could be less sincere than expected. On the one side of the line there is the sincere and honest telling of a story, stemming from the basic human need to share a story and then there is the other side where the narrative is skewed in such a way that the actions and the actor is eternalized and made famous beyond expectation. However nothing is straightforward one-way or the other, there always is a grey area. In this case, it has a bit of both, the telling of a story with a bit of embellishment in order to possibly influence the audience in a specific way whilst benefitting the storyteller.

Initially my inquiry seemed simple and uncomplicated but as the research progressed, the grey area increased and comprised much more than I expected. Beginning with the simple question of whether artists embellish their stories to gain celebrity status has grown into an extensive exploration, which has a great story of its own.

Aims and Objectives

With this research I intend to gain a greater understanding of the grey area and either sides thereof. Do artists embellish their stories to gain greater success and therefore rise in fame to celebrity status or do they tell their stories sincerely or does the audiences' primal human urge to sensationalize stories influence the outcome? The need to gain celebrity status could possibly stem from several factors and circumstances in an individual's life. Firstly, however, it is crucial to get a greater understanding of the phenomenon of celebrity. At surface level, the concept of celebrity is uncomplicated and easily comprehensible, but in order to reveal whether it is the desired effect an individual seeks depends on several factors, which I will introduce and analyse as part of this enquiry. With an in-depth look at fame, where its roots lie and how it affects society at large I wish to establish an understanding that can possibly explain the complex make-up of the phenomenon of celebrity.

Methodology

In the attempt to determine whether artists translate their autobiographies into their chosen media and construct identities and narratives that could attain enough media attention to gain celebrity status, I have approached this thesis through a qualitative research methodology. The approach and process is best described through the term Bricolage, which refers to the use of multiple methodologies in its approach to research, in other words, a hybrid of praxis (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). Through this Bricolage, I will employ several methods including theoretical, historical research as well as narratology, autobiography, practice-based and –led research and concluding in a causal analysis in attempt to establish whether these artists have indeed planned, strategized and embellished or created a story that could gain celebrity status.

Context

Over the last few decades the concept of celebrity has evolved. Mass-media and popular culture have influenced society's broad understanding of fame, by increasing the possibility of becoming famous and by making celebrities more accessible to the general population. Through different media avenues, society is also influenced by celebrities to behave in certain ways, believe certain stories and follow prescribed trends (Schickel, 2000).

As an audience, the general public craves sensation, this becomes apparent through how stories are told. Adding a bit of exaggeration to a tale makes it more entertaining to believe and tell. Whether autobiographical artists embellish their stories to elicit specific reactions from their audience and the possible reasons why they choose to reveal their inner most private lives and experiences with the public does come to mind. Does it become a possible narcissistic self-display to cultivate a sensationalist reaction from the audience? And is it all pre-meditated? Surely in today's highly commercial world where the main focus has become economic it is essential to question authenticity, strategy and deeds.

What constitutes an authentic autobiography? However straightforward the question may be, the answer is a perplexed gamut of sub-answers.

An individual's autobiography is undoubtedly authentic as it is their story and only they have experienced their life the way they have, but as much as this conclusion may be true there are other elements, which influence the final outcome of an autobiography. Most importantly, what and how we choose to share depends on who the audience is. Our ability to precisely recall elements as they happened is affected by experiences we've had after the fact and where we currently are in life, only to mention a few. The way in how we externalize memories differs from how we experience them internally and furthermore how the audience interprets them includes yet another layer.

The ability to narrate a story and influence the audience in a certain way involves planning as well as a thorough knowledge of popular culture and mass media. Through this enquiry it will become apparent that celebrity artists intrigue the public through their biographies, personas they create and what they choose to reveal. As part of their strategy, they embody certain personality traits, aiding them in their transformation. These traits are explored through concepts such as the Ego, Narcissism, Exhibitionism and Navel-gazing. The transformation is the shift from a visual artist into an art celebrity who appears in tabloids and newspapers not for their artworks but rather for their personal lives and actions.

In order to understand the artist as celebrity, I have selected three celebrity artists to investigate: Andy Warhol (1928 –1987), Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960 –1988) and Tracey Emin (b.1963). They have been selected mainly because of their fame but also to contribute knowledge to my studio practice as part of the practice-based research element of this thesis. Through exploring their public personas, biographies and work I have critically engaged with who the person behind the artist is. All three artists have constructed a public identity or a myth, which has brought them fame. And to an extent, their actions are pre-meditated where they employ levels of exhibitionism, narcissism and navel-gazing.

Andy Warhol is described as being the most famous artist of the late twentieth century (Faerna, 1997). The father of Pop Art and the individual who brought fine art to general society by reflecting the era of consumerism back to the

consumers. He was a front-runner in mixing all media and combining art with fashion, with music, and with film (Schickel, 2000). His created persona made him an enigma. Wearing blonde wigs and moving in the right circles aided his rise to fame.

Jean-Michel Basquiat decided he wanted to be famous from an early age and was determined to make it in the art world. He strategically planned his rise to fame by tagging the correct buildings in SOHO to be noticed by the right people (Emmerling, 2003). He too frequented all the right parties and surrounded himself with celebrities (Wines, 1988).

Tracey Emin stumbled into the art world through acquaintances but managed to capture the audience's attention through her wild, 'mad Tracey from Margate' behavior and her risky art works (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008). Emin is currently one of the wealthiest and well-known artists in Britain, and the world. She models Vivienne Westwood, endorses top brands and introduced the launch of the GQ magazine app for iPad (www.gq-magazine.co.uk, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

With a greater understanding of what narratives encompass and how popular culture and mass media employs narratives it is easier to determine how and why the afore-mentioned artists engage their biographies in a certain way. According to the field of Media Studies, the manner in how a narrative is presented to an audience will affect how it is perceived (Rayner et al., 2004). Thereby being a potent means of influencing responses of an audience (Rayner et al., 2004). Certain methods can influence desired reactions from the audience, thereby assisting in the creating and maintaining of a celebrity.

Looking at the title, *Autobiographical Narratives: An investigation into the artist as celebrity*, my inquiry has metamorphosed into a consequential exploration of stories. What makes a celebrity? A celebrity is a person who is willing to tell or act out a good story in front of an audience. What makes a good story? A good story includes a bit of drama, some personal detail in order to connect with the audience and a public persona who the audience can recognize, love or hate, admire or empathize with. Schickel (2000) believes that artists assert

their claims to heroic status by appealing to the general population. He further emphasizes the essential link is to have an easily understandable drama, something that would attract the attention of the general public, something that would make one stand out from the rest of the visual art world as well as the rest of the general public.

Could this exploration be that easy? I can't help but reflect on my practice and attempt to determine whether my work is presented in a certain manner to influence my audience. My use of signifiers and symbols as clues is an attempt to connect with my audience. Could these clues I present to the audience add to my public persona without me being aware of it? Or am I aware of it? I will explore this and other theories extensively by discussing my autobiography, my solo exhibition and the resonance I have found with the three selected artists.

The research is presented in a consequential order. It systematically guides the reader through my process of research. Beginning by thoroughly discussing a theoretical framework and research methodologies it situates the paper within a qualitative research methodology engaging with several research processes to establish the outcome of the hypothesis.

By contextualizing underlying concepts, which form the basis of the inquiry, it introduces celebrity, fame, narcissism, the ego and exhibitionism whilst discussing the relevance of theories based around narrative and autobiography (Smorti, 2011) as well as memory rehearsal (Walker et al, 2009).

The theories and concepts are substantiated through the introduction of the selected celebrity artists. The artists are contextualized through short biographies, their rise to fame and how their work resonates with the public audience. Furthermore these artists are employed as part of a reflective exercise where I attempt to find resonance with each individually thereby forming part of the practice based and –led research I have embarked on.

Delimitations

Even though this paper introduces various artists and references their work, it does not offer a comparative analysis of the artworks, or the art movements that each artist is (was) involved with. The artworks are included to contextualize the understanding, use and link to popular culture and aid as material with which I aim to find resonance, as well as situate the artists within a celebrity paradigm.

Chapter breakdown

Chapter 1 elaborates on the research methodologies employed as well as the conceptual and theoretical framework. It introduces Bricolage, a term which refers to the use of multiple methodologies in its approach to research. The term is best described as a hybrid of praxis (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). Within this chapter the hypothesis, assumptions and theories of possibilities are introduced and contextualized by initial core questions.

Chapter 2, *Understanding Fame: A Precursor to being a Celebrity* introduces and unpacks the concept of celebrity and fame. In order to contextualize the contributing factors, which are prevalent in the creation (and maintaining) of a celebrity, it explores the phenomenon through the use of examples as well as introduces theories based on memory, autobiography narrative and specific traits possibly tied to the personality of a celebrity.

Chapter 3, *Famous!* Is an in-depth look at the rise to fame and biographies of three celebrity artists, namely, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Tracey Emin.

Chapter 4, *Almost Famous*, reflects on my work and studio practice. In order to contextualize my work as well as discuss my themes, mediums and exhibition I have included a short autobiography. The chapter concludes with a summary of the resonance I have found with each artist, including it as part of the studio based and studio lead research I have embarked on.

Chapter 5, *From Zero to Hero*, presents the research and findings in the form of a causal analysis, whereby all the contributing factors in the creation of a

celebrity artist is methodically examined to determine whether there was in fact a cause-and-effect relationship. The chapter proposes two possible cause-and-effect relationships in attempt to establish credibility for the suggested hypothesis.

CHAPTER 1: *Lights, Camera, Action!*

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodologies

Bricolage is a hybrid praxis which presents an approach that places the researcher's practices and discourses within a different space – *'... between artist and product, producer and audience, theory and practice so that it becomes a space for reflection, contemplation and revelation...'*

- Robyn Stewart, 2010

Initially this enquiry seemed cut and dried. In my mind it seemed uncomplicated and straightforward, however, once I embarked on the preliminary investigation I realized the complexity of the concepts and contexts I was attempting to gain understanding of, therefore many subdivisions were formulated. This has in a sense made this paper; *Autobiographical Narratives: An investigation into the artist as celebrity*, a journey with many twists and turns. What am I actually trying to achieve with this enquiry and why? To summarize, it is to gain a greater understanding and relevant knowledge of the celebrity artist and autobiographical narratives and to establish whether artists embellish their life stories to gain celebrity status and fame or not.

In the attempt to investigate how artists translate their autobiographies into their chosen media and whether they construct identities and narratives that could attain enough media attention to gain celebrity status, I have approached this thesis through a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methodology incorporates various methods of research allowing the researcher to borrow from different disciplines according to what is needed to locate and contextualize the research. It enables the researcher to portray perspectives while conveying feelings and experiences, making it an all encompassing process while placing emphasis on detail and the ability to discover meaning (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010).

Through my research I seek to gain an understanding of the principle concepts, which form the fundamentals of my hypothesis. It is necessary to provide solutions for the following questions:

1. What is a celebrity?
2. What is an autobiography and what is narrative?
3. What is the link between celebrity, mass media and popular culture?
4. What could influence an individual to want to be famous?
5. Which aspects need to be present to create a celebrity?
6. How does memory affect the way a story is told?

By answering these questions I will gain insights and knowledge that will substantiate how credible the theories of possibilities and assumptions are. The initial approach to this research project is an investigation; therefore the credibility of the outcome(s) will be based on the data collected from several sources.

The theoretical framework for this research paper has been formulated in order to describe, understand and extend the existing knowledge of autobiographical narratives and the artist as celebrity. Furthermore the paper will investigate the actions of the selected artists and query the authenticity of these actions. The basis of the theoretical framework relies on assumptions and theories of possibilities. For this enquiry, *Autobiographical Narratives: An investigation into the artist as celebrity*, there are several theories with various possible combinations. The basic assumptions and theories of possibilities are as follows:

1. Artists embellish their stories to gain recognition and fame
2. Artists manipulate and influence public opinion through the media
3. Artists strategically plan how they are perceived by the public

These assumptions and theories of possibilities can be combined into one theory or assumption, reading as follows:

Artists possibly embellish their life stories; construct public identities and personas whilst strategically employing their knowledge of popular culture and mass media to gain celebrity status and fame.

Furthermore, the nature of autobiography also raises assumptions and theories of possibilities. These include:

1. Validity of authenticity
2. The manner in how an autobiography is narrated will influence the audience
3. It is impossible to remain objective when revealing a story

Therefore a second theory and/ or assumption arises:

The nature of autobiography relies strongly on how and what the narrator chooses to reveal and how the audience receives as well as perceives it.

Denzin and Lincoln describes qualitative research as “an inter-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary and counter-disciplinary field, qualitative research allows for the engagement of open-ended exploration of methods, including, practice based and practice led research, action research, narratology, grounded theory research and the possibility to reference various case studies” (2003:11). The qualitative research process is further described as a method of inquiry to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). Researchers are interested in the way life is lived in real situations, these situations are deemed as very important as they are believed to influence behavior, which according to researchers, proves the theory of the socially constructed nature of reality (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010).

Creative arts researchers can adapt conventional research methodologies while incorporating other methodologies according to the nature of the studio inquiry. A creative arts research methodology has many components, which may be understood through the term bricolage (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). By employing qualitative research methodologies, I am able to engage with a number of processes to collect data. ‘The many methodological practices of qualitative research may be viewed as soft science, journalism, ethnography, bricolage, quilt making or montage’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003: 13). Reflecting on the researcher as a bricoleur, a bricoleur is described as a “*Jack of all*

trades, a kind of a professional do-it-yourself person” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003: 13).

Bricolage is a term that refers to approaches to research that use multiple methodologies. It is best described as a hybrid praxis which presents an approach that places the researcher’s practices and discourses within a different space – “between artist and product, producer and audience, theory and practice so that it becomes a space for reflection, contemplation and revelation” (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010: 128). In creating a bricolage, most available methods, strategies and empirical materials are appropriated, these methods include feminism, cultural studies and constructivism which may include processes of grounded theory, visual analysis, narratology and ethnography (Barret & Bolt ed., 2010).

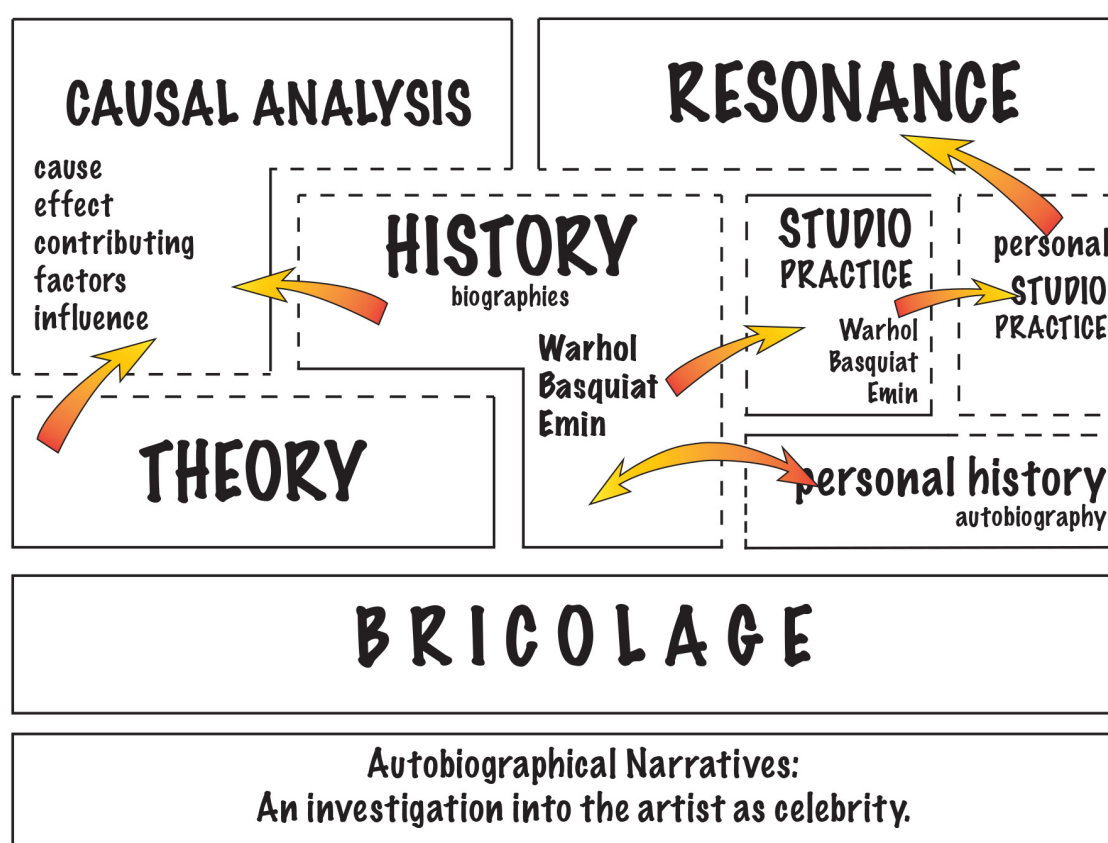


Diagram 1. Diagram Illustrating the process of my Bricolage
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The processes (refer to Diagram 1) I intend to employ throughout my research include practice-based and –led research, autobiography, narratology and a

causal analysis. The nature of this paper and its hypothesis requires a broad investigation including contemporary social sciences, philosophy and psychology, media studies and history of art. Along with previously established theories and my own inquiries I intend to gain information, which can assist in my studio practice. Practice based research is an investigation undertaken to gain new knowledge by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice, whereas the main focus of practice-led research is to advance knowledge about and within this practice (Terre Blanche et al, 2006). As I am an autobiographical visual practitioner an investigation into my studio practice will achieve suitable outcomes towards my research and allow for reflection, contemplation and revelation. Furthermore by continuing my arts practice and researching the outcomes I intend to contribute to the greater knowledge of the field of visual narratives as well as autobiographical art.

Practitioner-based research engages triangular research praxis – it employs the critical, investigative and reflective approaches to research. The triangulation of research becomes a very important and inextricable meeting of theory and practice where advancing in the one will reveal information and knowledge in the other and visa versa (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). “Practitioner based research is concerned with processes for theorizing practice, using appropriation, pastiche and collaboration” (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010: 124). Practitioner-based research is seen as a hybrid methodology with its base in qualitative methods but often blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and experience, revealing an effort to capture and reflect the complex dynamics involved in the phenomenology of artistic practice (Terre Blanche et al, 2006).

By reflecting on other art practitioners working in a similar field and researching available data I can construct my own theories and interpretations. Why do the artists use the mediums they choose? How do they establish the concepts for their works and how do they maintain their artistic practice without redoing what they have previously created? Through practice based and –led research and a studio-based enquiry it will be possible to establish whether I embellish my autobiography to make for more sensationalist imagery. In addition I will discover why I choose the mediums I use, how I establish the concepts I explore in my work and how I continue to

create work without repeating previous works. How do I improve my own practice?

Autobiography is an application which enables us to consider influences and meaning and the roles they play in collecting the information necessary to explore and demonstrate personal knowledge (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). It assists the practitioner in revealing personal experiences in the context of life stories, as the basis of research (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010:128, 129).

By attempting to find resonance with the three selected artists; Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Tracey Emin, I aim to contextualize and understand my own creative practice. By doing this I will be able to refer to case studies in order to gain knowledge through examples that could illustrate my proposed area of study. A case study can be described as a detailed analysis of a person or group in order to gain information or understanding of the phenomena under investigation. In this instance, the selected artists will be researched and analyzed in terms of constructing their own identities in order to gain celebrity status. Case studies are often also used to establish a model, the selected candidates will be analyzed for common likenesses or generalizations. Through primary analysis I will be able to identify important elements such as contradictions and inconsistencies, common themes as well as draw comparisons and find contrasts.

By constantly reflecting on the resonance found between my own work and that of the practitioners this research will facilitate a better understanding of my field, the relevant theories and the associated art- and studio practices. As much as the selected artists, Warhol, Basquiat and Emin will be discussed through theory and history, they will also be employed as case studies. Mainly for three reasons; the first being as a means to establish what a celebrity artist is and whether embellishment of stories is employed; secondly, for my own practice, aiding my understanding of process, narratives and artistic methodologies and as a means to determine distinctive elements; and thirdly as an aid in determining an outcome for the causal analysis which concludes this research.

As a bricoleur with the freedom to include as many processes needed for my research, I will also employ a causal analysis where the research is primarily concerned with demonstrating cause-effect relationships (Jensen, 2012). The purpose of a casual analysis is to determine whether or not a cause-and-effect relationship actually exists whilst analyzing the celebrity artist and the possible enhancements of their biographies to gain fame. If it does exist, I need to determine exactly what it is. A cause according to Jensen (2012) influences or changes something and the resulting change is called the effect. Through this research I will attempt to locate the cause(s), effect(s) and influence on the individual and audience. “Causal analysis allows for the researcher to reflect their experience and learn from the past” (Jensen, 2012: 235). I will begin by exploring the effect, whilst unpacking the contributing factors and elements and thereafter, examine the cause. Several factors and elements are involved in the cause but ultimately there is only one effect.



Diagram 2. Diagram Illustrating Causal Analysis
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Whilst conducting this causal analysis there are many questions to ask. These questions include whether one event or condition or situation lead to another and whether there was more than one cause, then determining how the change occurred and lastly what the outcome was, what was the effect? The effect being the celebrity status and the cause including the notions engaged to achieve the status of celebrity. This causal analysis will also influence how I interpret my own work and possibly enable me to reflect on how I have created the work for my solo exhibition.

As a practice-based research practitioner I continuously reflect, contemplate and attempt to find answers. Through this enquiry I will establish various contexts, that of the different artists, the audience, the celebrity artist and myself. This will locate the research and findings in both a historical and contemporary discourse.

Through critical engagement and constant reflection on my studio practice I aim to establish what knowledge my inquiry can reveal and determine whether this knowledge could possibly be acquired and revealed through other modes of research. My research will however, enhance my understanding of my practice and that of the selected artists. The parallel relationship between the research paper and the studio practice reveals understanding, allows demonstration and knowledge gaining as well as self-contextualization.

Creative arts research extends beyond the reading of texts to the engagement with the work of other practitioners. It's a means of locating the research project in the field by providing contexts of theory and practice.

Neo-narrative is the study of stories that offer interpretive reconstructions of an aspect of a person's life whilst offering a way to link theory with culture and contemporary studio practice. Therefore summarizing it as the study of narrative, narrative structure and the way they affect our perceptions. It is the art, techniques and processes involved in telling a story. Once understood, themes identified within the study can be used to unpack and interpret resonance found with the different artists' work. It presents a process for analyzing what actually happened according to the individuals involved and the experiences, approaches and responses of these individuals are documented and analyzed for either unique or shared qualities (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). I have not only selected three influential artists but also artists who have informed my personal studio practice and art making.

The resulting bricolage is a complex, reflexive, collage-like creation, which will represent my stories and the stories of others, depictions and perceptions of the world and the phenomena under investigation (Barret & Bolt ed., 2010).

The journey of this enquiry therefore includes theoretical research, historical research; studio based and –led research, as well as a causal analysis.

Through this enquiry I will establish various contexts, that of different artists, the audience, the celebrity artist and my own. This will locate the research and findings in both a historical and contemporary discourse as well as a theoretical and practical discourse.

Gaining an understanding of the main concept of this paper, *Autobiographical Narratives: An Investigation into the artist as Celebrity*, it is imperative to begin the research with the phenomenon of celebrity. The following chapter will present insights and knowledge pertaining to celebrity, the inner workings thereof, and possible personality traits (of a celebrity) as well as introduce concepts such as narrative, memory and autobiography. Thereby, forming the basis of this study.

CHAPTER 2: *Understanding fame*

A precursor to being a celebrity

The mass public is not so much interested in technique as in knowing “what’s the story here?”

- Richard Schickel, 2000

In order to establish whether autobiographical artists enhance their life stories through their art and embody their stories to gain fame, this chapter will unpack the concept of celebrity. By looking at the popular understanding of the phenomenon as well as specific examples of *the celebrity*, I will investigate the broad history of celebrity in modern society and discuss examples of reality television, artists whose fame has erupted because of television, paparazzi and glossy magazines. Accompanied by examples, I will illustrate how celebrities and celebrity artists have been memorialized through different media and the impact their fame has had on following generations of audiences. While discussing the phenomenon of celebrity, I will unpack the roots of fame how modern society views the famous, how fame can lead to or stem from the ego, and how it possibly creates or enhances an inherent narcissism. Through introducing the concepts of autobiography and narrative, I will attempt to illustrate that these are ways for the celebrity to connect with their audience.

Celebrity and Fame

The subject of celebrity and fame somehow creeps into everyone’s thoughts in a strange and irrational way. Whether in favour of or in disfavour thereof, everyone has pondered the subject. Surely then, artists too have pondered this subject. In light of their careers, would it not be more lucrative to be recognized as a celebrity artist? Would it not be better to be an artist whose following and fan base spreads across all walks of life and continents?

The meaning of the term *celebrity* has gained an ever-changing range of definitions and understandings and I will therefore refer to what society currently and generally believes it to be. At the beginning of the twentieth century, celebrities were seen as individuals who became famous because of excelling in their careers and crafts (Schickel, 2000). As the twentieth century

progressed, directed by mass media and popular culture, it has become much easier for an individual to gain celebrity status. As the chapter continues it will become apparent how society's perspective on the celebrity phenomenon has shifted into a whole new paradigm. Currently, however, the word celebrity conjures up imagery of the red carpet, great movie stars, paparazzi and multi million rand/ dollar bank accounts. Celebrity in the modern sense of the word is also believed to be a function of prosperity (Schickel, 2000). Thus, generally speaking, it is believed (and most of the time an accurate prediction) that when an individual becomes famous they become affluent. The power of celebrity spreads far and wide and has to an extent had an effect on most individuals; the individuals who are celebrities, those who look up to them and want to be celebrities and general society which places a high value on celebrity status. Because of this, it is deduced that there is power in celebrity, those who have it can put social, aesthetic, political and moral ideas across to those who buy into it (Schickel, 2000).

As the audience, we look up to celebrities, people who are great, people who have become stars. "A celebrity must be known or he is no celebrity" (Gabler, n.d: 30). In light of Gabler's quote (n.d), celebrities are labeled differently, they are unlike the general population, they are individuals who have "it" and who have "made it". There is a certain greatness these individuals have attained, which appear unattainable and in a sense maybe even incomprehensible to the normal individual on the street. Many people dream of celebrity lifestyles and follow what the celebrities do in their everyday life while others detest it or are indifferent to it. The obsession or disinterest of the general population influences the lives of celebrities, just as much as celebrities influence the public. As McNamara (2009) states, "the nature of the contemporary celebrity demands the negotiation of publicness and privacy" (2009:1). After all, celebrities are only human with the same basic human needs as everyone else. Even though they are mostly in the public eye, celebrities still need their privacy and time out from the limelight. Many celebrities avoid the glamorous lifestyle, as it is something they themselves do not want. Richard Schickel (2000) refers to a number of pop stars who avoid the limelight, making themselves scarce when they are not performing or recording. He reiterates

that many pop stars in fact live positively reclusive lives. What are the implications of this, on the celebrity status of the individual? Surely it could be a negative impact if we reflect on Gabler's (n.d) notion that an individual must be known or they are not a celebrity, or could it enhance the mystery behind the person?

The word celebrity is described as, "A famous person, i.e. well known actors and film stars" and "Being famous, fame" (Hornby, 1995: 178). When further dissecting the understanding society has of the word celebrity, there is a tendency to admire those who have become famous for any apparent reason, a fame bug that bites. Referring to cultural historian Daniel Boorstin, and his book, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961), Neal Gabler re-iterates the definition of a celebrity as a "person who is known for his well-knownness" (n.d.). Boorstin's definition is contrary to earlier notions that a celebrity becomes famous for being successful in their field. He suggests his own understanding of the term has a negative perspective which takes a moralist stance but insists that the majority of society can however differentiate between celebrity and greatness (Gabler, n.d) and that many a celebrity have arrived at their destination through pure determination and some talent. These are people who have somehow entered the scene with some media coverage and have acquired public attention and interest, be it through film, music, television or art.

In recent years, the age of reality television has changed the audiences' appreciation and admiration of the great celebrity. What it has done is bring the celebrity into our homes, and now these reality television stars make being a celebrity more accessible to the common person on the street. We see our own lives being reflected back at us. Our own stories are told through a person in the limelight. We have a sudden understanding and there is a possible connection between the life of the celebrity and our own lives. "Television does make for an excellent close up medium, especially when one looks at reality television shows" (Schickel, 2000:44). As an audience we get to know the reality television stars as if they were our own friends, we relate to what happens in their lives and draw comparisons. Some of the actors become very familiar to us and receive our affectionate regard. As soon as an

audience is introduced to a dramatic reality television star (are there any other types?) we make them famous, we encourage the phenomenon of celebrity. We buy into their daily interactions and watch it unfold in the form of a series on television. Reality television has breached the walls of polite convention that formerly separated performer and audience – the well known and the unknown (Schickel, 2000: 44).



Figure 1. Photograph by Lionel Deluy
Cast of *LA INK*, 2009
Copyright © 2009 Kat von D

A suitable example of how reality television actors can rise to celebrity status is celebrity Katherine von Drachenberg. Katherine von Drachenberg, aka, Kat Von D is the now famous tattoo artist who hit fame and celebrity status after she broke away from the reality television show called *Miami Ink*. Von D was cast as one of the tattoo artists that the audience could watch weekly go about their daily business of working in a tattoo shop. The audience was exposed to what was happening in the tattoo shop, they could rub their hands together when there was conflict and shed a tear when there was sadness. Kat von D, accelerated her celebrity status by becoming the star of her own reality television series called *LA Ink* (Figure 1), where the audience witnessed her opening her own tattoo shop, *High Voltage Tattoo*, in Los Angeles. Suddenly, Kat von D had moved from being a tattoo artist to being a celebrity tattoo artist, selling *Kat von D* merchandise, publishing three books and releasing her own make-up line. With each new development in mass media, our illusions of intimacy with celebrities increase. The readily available paraphernalia, books, social networking sites and television shows, 'makes us

not only think we know them but also believe we know what makes them tick' (Schickel, 2000: 29).

The genre of reality television aims to replicate real events and have a great appeal for an audience, as the 'actors' are recognizably similar to its viewers. This allows the audience/ viewers to empathize with an ordinary person as opposed to an action hero or heroine (Rayner, et al, 2004: 91 & 92).

In addition to reality television, tabloid magazines are another medium that conveys celebrity matters and information. Weekly editions of these magazines appear worldwide reporting on the latest celebrity gossip, covering everything from star weddings and new babies to drunken outbursts at the paparazzi. As noted by Su Holmes (2005) in her paper *Off-guard, Unkempt, Unready? Deconstructing Contemporary Celebrity in heat Magazine*, the content of these magazines include numerous pictures that are "clearly saturated with the rhetoric of expose, particularly in terms of penetrating the celebrity image by capturing them 'off-guard'..." (2005: 27). As an audience we revel in all information shared about celebrities. We look at tabloid magazines, keep our eyes peeled on the television and make sure to follow our favourite stars on Twitter or any other social media network available.

The need to stand out above the rest or find resonance with a famous person stems from the almost human need to tell or hear a story. What exactly transforms a famous person into a celebrity? According to Neal Gabler in his paper *Toward a new Definition of Celebrity*, the answer based on empirical evidence, is narrative (n.d). Empirical evidence is derived from Empiricism, which is the theory of knowledge based on or emphasizing the role of experience, especially based on perceptual observations by the senses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Knowledge based on our experiences becomes more universal when the experience is similar. We are interested in stories and when we can connect on a personal level it deems the story more valid. If there is no interest in a story then there is no need for a celebrity. These narratives capture our attention. Celebrities drive popular culture and popular culture creates celebrities while we learn about their lives through magazines and television.

As celebrities and ordinary people we all engage in the ordinary/ extraordinary paradox of *celebrity* and *celebrity culture* (Schickel, 2000). We have an inherent need to get to know the 'real' person behind the celebrity; the question that comes to mind, when we've realized that these celebrities are like the rest of us is: What makes celebrities so special? According to Dyer (1986), by posing this question we also answer it; it is the penetration of the usual celebrity façade, which reveals the 'ordinary' self that sets us apart from celebrities but also brings us closer. Therefore explaining stardom and fame as "but the star will of course be unique... but ordinary, in that the star must be someone with whom the spectator can identify" (Schickel, 2000: 141).

Celebrities' biographies and autobiographies act as foundation narratives revealing where the person behind the fame comes from. Here we are exposed to the life before stardom, success and fame. We are on more than one occasion told of struggles, hard childhoods and narcotics abuse and how the individual has survived and bounced back. A good example would be the popular television series on VH1 called *Behind the Music*. *VH1 Behind the Music* is a documentary series, which narrates the stories and careers of famous musicians. The series follows the musicians' rise to success and reveals the struggles and tribulations experienced as an up-coming celebrity. The *VH1 Behind the Music* series connects with its audience as a popular storyteller, documenting the success and rise to fame of these celebrities – stories we all want to hear and connect with. Through a documentary style it recreates the celebrity's life story as well as their rise to fame.

The word fame is derived from the Latin word *fama* which means "manifests deeds" (Schickel, 2000:24). Fame was previously understood as a by-product achieved by an individual, who with some talent (and luck), had worked hard enough to gain respect and fame (Schickel, 2000). Like any work of art, becoming a celebrity is the product of the process (Gabler, n.d). The process includes several factors such as planning, determination, persistence, specific personality traits but also luck and timing.

Artists for many centuries have played a celebrity role, by being the one with the talent who is able to capture a moment, or depict a story. Artists have for

many centuries depicted the stories we as society have so easily believed and accepted. As we have learned earlier, that by being successful in their craft or profession, a great artist can also be the famous artist. The one that has been given the gift to capture a portrait be it in oil paint on a canvas or carved from marble. Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci were seen as great artists and today people know their names and their artworks the world over.

During the Modernist era, the male artist was seen as genius, not far from celebrity as fame was involved. Jackson Pollock and even before that, Pablo Picasso, became household names. Through art historians and critics these artists were transformed into art icons. In the effort to transform these artists into heroic cultural figures, Pablo Picasso was very susceptible to the mythologizing process. Picasso created life drama from his shifts between styles and mediums and his fondness for pleasure, comfort and women. He opened up his life to photographers and invited them into his studio while projecting confidence, playfulness and a very photogenic disposition (Schickel, 2000:221,222). These artists were the front-runners of their respective art movements, had a taste for self-display and –promotion while providing scandals the popular culture press could not ignore and therefor made their mark in history (Schickel, 2000).

Both Pollock and Picasso have been memorialized through movies based on their lives. Jackson Pollock was eternalized in popular culture and brought to life for the modern day audience through Ed Harris re-enacting his life story in a full-length feature film titled *Pollock*, released in 2000 (Internet Movie database). Through the movie, the audience was allowed a closer inspection into the trials and tribulations of the modernist painter and his life story riddled with alcohol abuse and confusion. To the audience it made the story more real to see it re-enacted step-by-step and masterpiece-by-masterpiece. There are several full length features based on Pablo Picasso's life. The most popular and accessible to the modern audience is *Surviving Picasso* (1996), a full-length feature film based on the story of Picasso's wife, where we are granted a voyeuristic inside view of the life of Picasso through the eyes of his wife. There is always added drama present when the audience is in search of the 'real' story behind the celebrity, especially if it is told through the eyes of a

lover. An interesting observation is that the movie-going audience is presented with a new relationship with the artist (Pollock and Picasso) through an already established relationship with the celebrity actor playing the part, Ed Harris as Pollock and Anthony Hopkins as Picasso. Could this influence the mythologizing process even further?

Even in death, artists have been memorialized as celebrities. The Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, has a museum in Mexico dedicated to her life and art. The *Blue House* as it is also known is located in Mexico City and is Kahlo's original family home; the house where she grew up, spent her life living with Diego Riviera and died. After her death Diego Riviera, donated the house and its contents to become a museum in Kahlo's honor. The house is divided into different sections, which means Kahlo's fans can experience her life and retrace her steps from rooms filled with personal belongings to her art on the walls. Once again the need for the audience to connect with the celebrity through their own lives is highlighted. In order for an audience to follow a celebrity they need a story in which they can find commonalities within their own lives.

In the age where everything is readily available and adaptable, the term celebrity artist could be a rather problematic concept. The term could be understood within two opposite spheres of context. Firstly, a celebrity artist could be described as an individual who has gained recognition and fame in general society through or because of their artistic capabilities, secondly however, it could be described as an already famous individual (mostly from another industry) who now also creates art. As opposed to the first, who has undoubtedly worked hard to build their career within the visual arts, the latter could be in a position where there is an established fan base and following, therefore a loyal audience that would support the new endeavor. Countless examples, such as famous musicians becoming exhibiting visual artists and film stars crossing over into the music industry complicate the concept. An important note to add is that this status should be attained during the artist's lifetime otherwise they would be categorized through only Fine Art History, and not popular culture.

How do artists become celebrity artists? Schickel (2000) believes that artists assert their claims to heroic status by appealing to the general population. He further emphasizes the essential link is to have an easily understandable drama, something that would attract the attention of the general public, something that would make one stand out from the rest of the visual art world. The drama would somehow attach a tragic myth to the artist, deeming them as different to the general population, a rarity. It is believed that a myth could possibly enhance an individual's social standing, and myths relating to an artist often influences how the audience perceive their work.

Autobiographies, Narratives, Memory and the Story.

As an audience we connect with celebrities, be it film stars, reality television actors or artists through their life narratives, their biographies and their autobiographies. The term autobiography is derived from three Greek words, *auto*, *bio* and *graphen*. When directly translated it reads as a self-written account of a person's life. Robyn Stewart notes that by using (auto) biography as a personal history, whilst viewing events in historical context we are able to better understand a personal situation by bringing forward prior, related experience (Barret & Bolt ed, 2010). Thus we interpret narratives through our own experiences, which can then become shared experiences through resonance found.

Throughout the ages, the writing of one's own story has been translated through many forms, firstly described as what was understood as a self-justification transgressed into self-documentation, which then was substituted by confessionals and self-critical reflections. All human beings embody a story and have an inherent need to share it.

Andrea Smorti (2011) believes autobiography to be a double-sided process of continuous constructions, with memory on the one side and narrative on the other. This process of continuous constructions are deeply linked to social interactions. The whole nature of autobiography is therefore subjective, even more so when authors reveal an inability and/ or unwillingness to accurately recall and retell memories, leading to misleading (embellished?) or incorrect information (Smorti, 2011). In review of Smorti's explanation of autobiography

and an author's possible inability or unwillingness to accurately recall and retell memories, one has to question to what extent autobiographies could possibly be enhanced or believed to be entirely truthful. This however, does raise thoughts on how it could actually be possible to accurately recall an event.

Writing an autobiography offers the individual the opportunity to recreate their history. By retelling their life memories, the individual is required to consciously think about their life story whilst narrating it, therefore making it a conscious reflection. Smorti (2011) states that autobiographical memory is transformed into a cultural artifact through autobiographical narrative, she further explains that by narrating internally stored memories they are externalized in a different format, which is understood not just by the self but also by the other. Even though autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative originates from the same author, they are not the same entity. Autobiographical memory is internal whereas autobiographical narrative is external. These two states influence one another when the memory is externalized through the narrative and a story is created. Surely then, the story could also be influenced by who the audience is?

According to authors, Walker, Skowronski, Gibbons, Vogel and Ritchie, 'people rehearse life events in many ways and for various purposes' (2009: 763). In addition they discuss the different ways individuals rehearse their memories and how these could possibly affect the memory and the emotions attached to it. There are five types of memory rehearsal; involuntary rehearsal, rehearsal to maintain an event memory, rehearsal to re-experience an emotion of an event, rehearsal to understand an event and rehearsal for social communication (Walker et al, 2009).

Autobiographical artists are artists who have made their own lives the theme of their work. Central to autobiographical art is the artist's conscious dealing with memories and their intent to transform a life experience into an artistic experience or narrative for the viewer.

Autobiographical artist Tracey Emin reveals her life narrative in a very visceral way. She looks at her history by retelling the intimate details of her family. Her

themes are highly personal as she explores her childhood through jagged narratives revealing trauma, abuse and confusion. By tapping into the mainstream of public consciousness, Emin has allowed for her art to connect with people in a very direct manner, resulting in her work transcending into a pop-cultural consumable. It is said that Emin has “attracted more press gossip than serious critical analysis, which she has made work to her advantage” (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008: 70). Smorti’s theory that autobiography is a two-sided continuous process of constructions, linked to social interaction, raises questions about Emin’s level of accuracy whilst retelling her story.

Narrative is described as means to tell a story. Human beings have always searched for a way to reveal who and what they are about. It is an account of a series of events be it fact or fiction and a way in which we expose our greatest hopes and fears. Narrative begins in the mind where the individual accumulates their different perceptions of their experiences; furthermore this is formulated into a description of a life experience as a story (www.narrati.com, 2011). As we’ve learned before, sharing a story is an essential human function, which helps an individual to externalize their biographical or non-biographical experiences. This is a way for individuals to process information as well as retain everyday information as narratives with characters, plots and actions.

The discourse of autobiography relies strongly on how and what the narrator chooses to reveal. The manner in which the story is presented depends on how the material is added, influencing how the story is received by the audience. The most important point-of-view is that of the voice that tells the story, the narrator. After all, the biography is the recollection of the life story of the narrator, who is well aware of the definite attributes and limitations that are crucial for how the story is perceived.

In the field of Media Studies, narrative is described as being a potent means of influencing responses of an audience (Rayner, et al, 2004). Therefore it can be argued that in relation to autobiographical art and Tracey Emin’s work, the responses are mostly determined by the way in which the narrative is exhibited. Furthermore, enforcing how autobiographical artists’ possibly

influence the audience's reading of the work, we can refer to Roland Barthes' structuralist theory, which states that, narrative functions through a series of codes. There are five codes, which according to Barthes, are interwoven into each and every narrative to keep the audience's interest (Rayner et al, 2004:50). Barthes further argues that these series of codes are used to control the way in which information is given to the audience, thereby possibly eliciting a predetermined response, such as shock, glorification or even stardom. In addition, Sean Hall (2007) suggests the viewpoint, from which the narrator chooses to present a story, will influence how the audience reads it. Therefore reinforcing previous theories of how autobiographical artists influence the reception of and responses to their work.

Ego, Exhibitionism and Narcissism

In the attempt to prove premeditated notions celebrity artists may employ to promote their own fame, I will investigate behavioral traits that lend themselves to the embellishment and enhancement of their biographies and appearances. As much as artists have specific styles in their work, many artists have cultivated specific looks to be recognized in public. During the sixties, Pop artist Andy Warhol cultivated an image which transformed him from Andrew Warhola (his birth name) into the artist and person known as Andy Warhol today. Warhol consciously reconstructed and rebranded himself into the artist he marketed to the art world. He decided to become a star on a much bigger 'stage' and this was an act he would perform for the rest of his life (Modern Masters: Andy Warhol. 2010.). This act would include a physical appearance, which was called the Andy suit. The Andy Suit included a specific wig, shirt and trousers, and was cemented in the minds of the public and they would forever afterwards recall that image when hearing the name Andy Warhol. 'He wanted fame, and to achieve that he required imagery that would force the world to take him seriously as an artist' (Grange Books ed., 2004: 7).

According to popular culture, the ego has been blamed for ruining an individual. The majority of references are negative, for example a person can be known for 'having a big ego'. The ego has been studied throughout the

centuries and many psychologists and psychiatrists, such as Freud and Satre, have attempted to provide an understanding of what 'ego' really means. More often than not individuals buy into the negative perceptions of what the ego is and describe it loosely as a person's idea of herself or himself especially in relation to other people. It can be argued that a healthy ego could enable an individual in asserting themselves within specific contexts, having positive effects in more than one sense.

The field of Psycho-analysis has introduced many perspectives on what the term Ego really embodies. As I am attempting to understand how autobiographical artists emerge as celebrities it is important to gain a broad understanding on these perspectives presented by the field of Psychoanalysis. How does the ego assist artists in becoming celebrities? Is there a connection, and if so, what is the connection? The gathering and presenting of this information is in order to establish and understand whether certain acts and ways of revealing narratives (possibly partly-embellished) by autobiographical artists, is an act driven by the Ego. It could be argued that these acts could be the way these artists establish their celebrity statuses.

The Ego could be described as the entity, which becomes inflated when an individual believes their self-worth to be high, whilst other perspectives describe it as a belief in the self. The activity of the ego is the activity of the individual, who has desires and hopes. Freud and Sartre have extensively worked around the topic of the Ego. Sartre (1937) reveals in his article, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, that most philosophers see the ego as an 'inhabitant' of consciousness and that psychologists claim they can pinpoint "the material presence of the ego as a centre of desires and acts in every moment of every persons psychical life, describing it as the unity of states and actions" (1937: 37). It is believed that the ego identity depends on a particular structuring of all realms, the mind, heart and body experience into a specific, stable and rigid organization resulting in a sense of psychological identity which is adhered to and defended by the individual as a most precious possession (Sartre, 1937).

Originally Freud described the word ego as a sense of self, directly referring to the Latin word meaning *I myself*. After revision, he assimilated the Ego as “a set of psychic functions including states such as judgment, defense, tolerance, control, reality-testing, planning intellectual functioning, synthesis of information and memory” (Snowden, 2006: 105-107). Freud believed the Ego to be the part of the personality, which is responsible for dealing with reality. He further believed that the Ego is in place to mediate the needs and demands of the id, super-ego and reality and therefore functions in all states of the mind, the conscious, preconscious and unconscious (Freud, 1914). Does the ego contribute to the rise of a celebrity? When an artist believes their self-worth to be high, where the conscious realizes the individual’s desires and hopes to attain fame, does this establish the celebrity artist?

The question why autobiographical artists reveal the private details of their lives and whether it transcends their work and themselves from self-documentation into a narcissistic self-display was explored through the exhibition titled *Ego Documents* at the Kunstmuseum in Bern (2008). The exhibition explored various strategies for dealing with autobiographical material ranging from self-documentation to the cultivation of the individual and questioned why these artists would reveal their inner most secrets and the possibility whether it was to satisfy the curiosity and sensation craving of the viewer. The exhibition reflects memories, which were artistically processed through an array of different mediums including film, prints and painting. The exhibiting artists employed familiar everyday self-documentation techniques including diaries, photographs, letters and collections of memorabilia. The artists presented varied concepts of ego, identity and experience while employing diverse strategies in dealing with autobiographical narratives. It also explored possibilities of how autobiographical art can be a narcissistic self-display as well as serve to cultivate the artist’s own image (Buhler, 2008). On reflection, we might ask whether autobiographical art is an ultimate act of narcissism?

Within the field of psychology, there are two main branches of research into narcissism. The one being clinical psychology, where it is treated as a clinical disorder and the other, social psychology, where it is treated as a personality

trait (Campbell and Foster, 2007). Sigmund Freud (1914) derived the term narcissism from Greek mythology and he used it to describe a personality trait of egotism. According to Greek mythology, Narcissus was a handsome young Greek man who had never seen his reflection. The young man was described as being 'pathologically self-absorbed' and fell in love with his own reflection when he saw it in a pond, this obsession with his own reflection later on lead to his sad and lonely demise.

Freud (1914) believed that some narcissism was an essential part of an individual's psyche and was supported by Andrew P. Morrison when he noted "a reasonable amount of healthy narcissism allows the individual's perception of his needs to be balanced in relation to others" (1997). Healthy narcissism is a structural truthfulness of the self and is believed that it could form a constant, realistic, self-interest with mature goals and principles (Moore and Fine, 1990). Freud (1914) also suggests that healthy narcissism forms an essential part of normal development and that it correlates with good psychological health. It is believed that self-esteem works as a mediator between narcissism and psychological health, therefore individuals with a magnified and extreme manifestation of narcissism experience an elevated self-esteem and self-perceptions of competence and likability and most likely do not experience worry or gloom (Sedikides et al, 2004). Campbell and Foster (2007) describe the personality of a narcissist as follows; 'narcissists think they are better than others, their perceptions of the self are greatly exaggerated while they perceive themselves to be unique and special individuals' (2007: 37). They are further described as being selfish and success orientated demonstrating a lack of interest in warm and caring interpersonal relationships. Autobiographical art could either be narcissistic or not. The way in which it is presented, however, could classify it as self-documentation and narration or an exhibitionist self-display and navel-gazing.

In general terms, exhibitionism is referred to as a flashing or streaking. In this sense it refers to an individual's exposure of genitalia to an unsuspecting individual (victim). The act however references behavior, which is intending to attract attention or to shock. In a sense it could be argued that autobiographic artists who reveal their inner most secrets while embellishing their narratives

to gain attention from the audience, employ tactics not very different from exhibitionism. Could these individuals be exhibitionist narcissists, with such inflated grandiose self-perceptions who constantly seek admiration from others or could they be navel-gazers? In the early part of the twentieth century, the term navel-gazing was used to describe individuals who were extremely self-absorbed only interested in their own issues and self-indulgent (Smith, 2010). As we have noted earlier in this chapter, these artists could possibly construct their narrative to elicit a specific, pre-meditated reaction from the audience, or do they tell their autobiographies sincerely and without any adornments?

Upon reflection, celebrity status could be measured according to a number of factors. We have determined according to Gabler (n.d) that a celebrity is a person who is known for their 'well-knownness', however, according to Schickel (2000) these individuals, or at least some of them, have gained their fame because of being successful in a specific profession. Thus, to an extent working hard plays its part, even if it is working hard at becoming famous. Our sense of celebrity is somewhat governed by mass media. As a society, we are inundated with information fed to us through various types of media. Publicity is a way for an individual to become a celebrity, reflecting on a person's well-knownness, the more you see a face, the more widely known they will become. Schickel (2000) furthermore blames television for celebrity creation and the many radical changes Western Culture has undergone. Mass media plays a big part in celebrity creation and how we perceive and receive these individuals.

In the attempt to establish an understanding of the contributing factors of what creates a celebrity artist, I have discovered many possible combinations. One needs to consider how well known the individual is and whether they aspire to be famous with the willingness or need to be in the limelight? Do they to create myths about their lives and narrate their stories in certain ways thereby engaging in self-exhibitionism?

At face value, one of the most important factor is the narrative an individual presents. If the narrative is interesting enough, there is the possibility of a

celebrity (Gabler, n.d). Furthermore, if an audience can relate to or identify with the narrative presented is another important factor. In the next chapter I will introduce the selected artist through an in depth look into their rise to fame as well as their biographies.

CHAPTER 3: *Famous!*

An in-depth look at the rise to fame and biographies of Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Tracey Emin.

You have to become famous before you can secure the attention, which would give fame.

- Richard Schickel, 2000.

Artists for many centuries have played a celebrity role, by being the one with the talent to capture a moment, or depict a story. Artists have over the centuries depicted stories we as society have so easily believed and accepted as fact. The great artist has also been called the famous artist, in other words the celebrity artist.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the meaning of the term celebrity has acquired an ever-changing range of definitions. As modern society grows more aware of their surroundings through exposure to mass-media, popular culture and celebrity culture it is easy to place importance on an individual who is believed to be a chosen one, one that was chosen to be famous. Through discussion of the phenomena of celebrity and fame we've established that famous people were celebrated for doing well in their professions and then became famous because of it (Schickel, 2000).

In the attempt to understand the artist as celebrity, I will be discussing the biography, materials, techniques and themes of Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Tracey Emin. It is crucial to the research that I explore Warhol, Basquiat and Emin's backgrounds to establish whether there was a specific point where the artist in fact did choose to embellish a story to gain recognition or whether they had aspirations from the beginning to become famous, and how they set out to do so.

Opinions and theories on the celebrity artist or artist as celebrity vary according to the artist discussed. An initial negative reaction to the concept of the celebrity artist can be based on what Richard Schickel refers to an artist being a 'sell out' (Schickel, 2000: 210). 'Selling out' referring to the willingness to do anything to gain media recognition. However, initially described from a

negative perspective, it can also be described as a decided path an individual travels on to become well known and a success in the art world. Depending on perspectives, there could be many more pathways into celebrity status but a very probable third is sheer luck playing a hand, being in the right place at the right time.

As we will discover throughout the chapter, the three selected artists have risen to fame in different ways. We will discover how Andy Warhol had to rebrand himself to become the artist we know today, Jean-Michel Basquiat, used cunning means (Graffiti) to position himself to capture the attention of the art world and how Tracey Emin stumbled into the art scene through acquaintances. A few things these artists do however have in common may be the reason they have all become legends in the art world. As part of the research I aim to find resonance with these artists and therefore need to look at the different themes of their work as well as the materials and techniques they have used. Exploring their autobiographies will assist me in gaining insight into how they became famous. Their biographies and autobiographies act as foundation narratives revealing where the person behind the fame comes from. Here we are exposed to the life before stardom, success and fame. Through these narratives we are told of struggles, hard childhoods and narcotics abuse. Through this study I attempt to prove whether these individuals skillfully planned to pursue a successful career within the art industry. Using the evidence presented in the previous chapter I will draw reference on how a celebrity is created and reveal how these artists have gained the title of celebrity artist.

With a clearer understanding of celebrity, fame, autobiography and narrative I will attempt to determine whether these artists do position themselves in such a way that they are adored by the masses, which in return makes their art popular. Do they augment their life stories so as to capture an audience and how do they embellish the narrative within some of their work to retain their audience's attention? Are they narcissistic embellishers who live up to the audience's expectations or are they skillfully tuned into their different eras' mass media and know how to make it work to their advantage? From insights

I have gained on exhibitionism, narcissism and the ego, the groundwork for understanding the celebrity artists has been laid.

All three artists, Warhol, Basquiat and Emin, have pioneered various techniques and mediums and have become famous for specific mediums and styles, which in a sense belong to them. Schickel (2000) notes that a certain fame develops around leading figures of the cutting edge. For example, Andy Warhol through pioneering Pop Art was the face of Pop and became famous because of it. Respectively these artists have tapped successfully into the mainstream of a specific era and have connected with audiences in a very direct and visceral way. The art they make and the stories they tell somehow reflect what the audience wants to hear. Warhol reflecting and commenting on popular culture, Emin reflecting a soap opera style look into her own life and experiences and Basquiat somewhere in-between.

Warhol, Basquiat and Emin worked hard to gain the icon status they possess, through determination, plotting a career and becoming the artists and celebrities we know today.

I will discuss each artist in chronological order in a separate section.

PART ONE

Famous for being famous: Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol has been called a mirror of his age. His works constitutes the quintessential frivolousness and banality of that period.

- Faerna, 1997

It is widely believed that Andy Warhol was the most famous artist of his generation and is probably the most vivid representation of someone known for his 'known-ness' (Schickel, 2000:239). He was described as being "a closet workaholic whose energy and shrewdness, as well as talent, made him not only the most productive and influential artists of his time, but also one of the wealthiest, most self-promoting, and singularly identifiable" (Wheeler, 1991: 150). Warhol commented through his imagery on all aspects of the consumerist, celebrity-crazed and sensation-seeking society that he later predicted would allow for each and everyone to be famous for fifteen minutes (Wheeler, 1991). Warhol had however immediately rocketed into stardom, leaving his fifteen minutes behind. Warhol's ability to gauge popular culture as well as steer it, played a monumental part in cementing him as one of the most successful celebrity artists of our time.

Andy Warhol was born Andrew Warhola to Czechoslovakian immigrants on the 6th of August 1928. After a bout of madness and being bed-ridden for 2 years as a child he became fascinated with the radio and the stars of the music world (Grange Books ed., 2004). Through this fascination he made the connection between popular culture and celebrities and realized that by understanding the one he would achieve the other.

Graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Carnegie institute, Warhol set his goals for New York, moving there as soon as it was possible. He became successful as a commercial artist, doing illustrations and drawings for magazines like Glamour, Vogue and the New Yorker (Grange Books ed, 2004: 22). Warhol had always wanted to become a star. His diaries emphasized how he coveted the stardom of Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Jackson (Tomkins, 1980). In fact, Warhol was so determined to succeed that

he adopted a specific look called the Raggedy Andy in order to gain some sympathy from potential art directors and clients (Grange Books ed, 2004).

The Raggedy Andy character (Figure 2) implies that most of Warhol's actions were pre-meditated and that he was capable of orchestrating a performance that would ensure his rise to fame. Warhol continued with his commercial success and won several design prizes, but yearned to enter the Fine Art world. At this stage in his life we notice a shift in how Warhol markets himself to the public. It is proof of his deliberate decision to become famous.



Figure 2. Andy Warhol, 1964
The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.,
New York
© 1997 Harry N. Abrams, Inc.



Figure 3. Andy Warhol, TDK Advertisement, 1984

Realizing early in his career that if he were to be a star simply being an important painter was insufficient, he would also need to be a 'face' (Adams, 2004: 90). He began believing that looks were a certain part of fame and as previously mentioned, conceptualized a persona for public consumption (Adams, 2004). So, during the sixties, Warhol started to cultivate a trivial image and transformed from Andrew by rebranding himself as the artist and person known as Andy Warhol. It is believed that he intentionally cultivated this image to gain acknowledgement as well as to set him apart from other art practitioners (Faerna, 1997). In the attempt to gain recognition from the media, Warhol decided to rebrand and remarket himself. "Andy decided to become a star on a much bigger stage. He used to put on what he called his

Andy suit. It was an act he would perform for the rest of his life” (Modern Masters: Andy Warhol. 2010.).

The Andy Suit (Figure 3) included a specific wig, shirt and trousers, and was cemented in the minds of the public and they would forever afterwards recall that image when hearing the name Andy Warhol. By adopting the white hair in the form of wigs, Warhol made sure he had used the maximum transformational effect. The wigs would become part of his trademark (Adams, 2004). “He wanted fame, and to achieve that he required an imagery that would force the world to take him seriously as an artist” (Grange Books ed., 2004: 70). Publicity became crucial to his success. Warhol depended on an age where everything had become a commodity and could be sold through advertising. The most effective way was through personal publicity (Schickel, 2000). Warhol invented through the *Andy suit* someone who the masses could look up to, and someone who symbolized Pop Art like a father figure who had all the right moves and because of mass media culture all the latest stuff. Thus, *Warhol the artist* became a crucial element of his oeuvre.

Andy Warhol on what work he would produce, described himself as ‘ a popular character... but I’ve got no images’ (Grange Books ed., 2004: 164). This comment resulted as a group of self-portraits (Figure 5), which, intentionally or not, made the point that Warhol had himself, become a cultural icon by 1967. “Instead of making images, he had become an image” (Schickel, 2000: 239).

Warhol’s mediums, techniques and themes were very much a reflection of popular and mass-culture. He was an artist who undoubtedly put his finger on the pulse of modern culture. In fact what contributed to Warhol’s status, as an icon was that his subject matter always reflected something the general population would understand. Through pioneering a variety of techniques from repetition of isolated images to images reflecting printed material as well as the use of bright colours, which were often encountered in mass culture, highlighted subject matter that the mass-consuming audience have grown accustomed to (Faerna, 1997), (Schickel, 2000). By employing methods lifted from mass media and mass culture, Warhol bridged the gap between

highbrow art and trivial culture successfully. Mixing the once strictly separate worlds until they became indistinguishable was a great achievement for Warhol, as he paved the way for developments from the nineteen eighties to present day in which the combination of fashion, design art and glamour has become self-evident (Emmerling, 2003).

Warhol explored many different materials and techniques, which kept him in 'fashion'. At first he hand painted all his artworks, but as the master of commercial techniques that he was, Warhol soon shifted to 'drawing' with found imagery applied to canvas by the silkscreen process (Grange Books ed., 2004). This made it possible for Warhol to make repetitive prints at a faster pace as well as create different combinations of colours with the same screen.



Figure 4. Andy Warhol
Turquoise Marilyn
Acrylic on Canvas
101.6 x 101.6 cm, 1964
Private Collection



Figure 5. Andy Warhol
Self-portrait
Acrylic Paint and Silkscreen on Canvas
55.9 x 55.9 cm, 1966

The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition and the viewer is expected to take it into his or her own psychological domain (Schickel, 2000). On reflection of this theory, we can reference Warhol's celebrity series of silk-screens of famous actors and actresses such as Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe (Figure 4) and Elizabeth Taylor.

The endless reproduction of these famous faces, which we all know, reminds us that celebrity power arises even more from endless bombardment. It is a

strange equation of the more you see of something, the more you want to see of it in the positive, or in the negative, the more you want to see of something, the less you want to see of it. Either way, it has made an impression, the audience is aware of it thereby making it well known, thus famous. Warhol was very aware of how this process worked. He bridged all mass-media gaps by producing art, film, releasing publications and appearing on television programmes such as *The Love Boat*. The more he was in the media, the more well known he would become. By fostering a mysterious and exclusive persona he fascinated many.

Warhol's approach to the art world was very business like. He opened The Factory where artworks were churned out as if part of an assembly line. Danto (2009) refers to Warhol's comment in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* where he discusses business art;

"Business art is the step that comes after art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art... Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art"

Even though Warhol is not categorized as an autobiographical artist as such, he reflected his era, his work is biographical of America. I have included Warhol as a means to discuss and establish an artist's conscious decision to become famous and to demonstrate that fame could be achieved through carefully considered actions and business.

PART TWO

Determined to be Famous! Jean-Michel Basquiat

Since I was seventeen, I thought I might be a star. I'd think about all my heroes, Charlie Parker, Jimi Hendrix... I had romantic feeling of how people had become famous.

- Jean-Michel Basquait, n.d

Upon reflection of Warhol's determined business-like approach to art making and becoming famous through a created persona, a well-suited second artist to discuss would be Jean-Michel Basquiat.

There have been countless articles and critical debate surrounding Jean-Michel Basquiat and his oeuvre. Was it actual good fortune for him to be part of the New York art scene of the late 1970's and the early 1980's? Was he just at the right place at the right time? Was he talented? Or was he persistent and prolific to make himself famous? Was it perhaps to make sure he becomes a celebrity artist?

Roberta Smith (2005) reflects on Basquiat:

"While alive he was variously viewed as a genius, an opportunist, an untrained primitive or idiot savant, and because of his blackness was once called the exotic and exploited mascot of a mostly white downtown art world. After his death, many saw Basquiat as a victim of his own success; his rapid ascent and early demise in the 80's became emblematic of everything that was wrong and dangerous in that overheated decade, with its seeming overnight successes and waiting lists for unproduced works and rocketing art prices."

Jean-Michel Basquiat rose to fame in the art world during the turbulent eighties where art buying and selling had taken over the main art and culture centres. Fine art had become a commodity and art prices rocketed and made immediate stars of some of the younger artists who had started to exhibit in a few select galleries in SoHo. Art collectors and buyers negotiated extravagant prices for artworks and gallery owners soon began to represent many of these rising star artists.



Figure 6. SAMO
Untitled (SAMO/ Anti-art)
 Felt tip pen/ pencil on paper
 26.5 x 20.5 cm, 1979
 Robert Miller Gallery, N.Y



Figure 7. SAMO
 SAMO Graffiti, New York

Basquiat frequented SoHo firstly as a graffiti artist known as Samo who painted mysterious phrases on the sides of buildings but was later taken into the art world and turned into the mythical genius artist, the Basquiat we read of today (Emmerling, 2003). SAMO was a collaboration between Basquiat and Al Diaz, another Graffiti artist and friend. With SAMO, they commented on issues of consumerism and popular culture, advertising and marketing and memory and history. They however had different ideas for SAMO, where Diaz was committed to Graffiti and anonymity; Basquiat was more committed to art and publicity.

It is believed that SAMO was Basquiat's vehicle to penetrate the art world. He was described as being one of the most remarkable talents that arose from the Graffiti movement, moving in from the periphery by strategically 'tagging' specific walls in Manhattan's SoHo where famous celebrities and art gallery owners would take notice of it. Considered a deliberate strategy to launch his career, which was modeled on artists such as Picasso, Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol (Wheeler, 1991). Leonhard Emmerling, (2003) reflects on Basquiat's celebrity artist status by describing it as a meteoric rise and early death, adding fabulously to the mythmaking of Basquiat as creative genius.

Basquiat had a comfortably middle-class upbringing and determined early in his life that he wanted to be famous (Smith, 2005). Born on the 22nd of December 1960 into a comfortably established family in a good Brooklyn

neighbourhood, to Haitian father and Puerto Rican mother. Jean-Michel Basquiat was influenced artistically by his mother and grandparents and was taken on many excursions to the city's museums. When he was seven he was hit by a vehicle in a hit and run and was hospitalised for some time because of injuries. While in hospital his spleen had to be removed and during his stay in hospital was given the classical anatomical work Gray's Anatomy by his mother. Basquiat studied the book closely and the influence is very prominent in his art making, as there are many references to internal organs, skeletons and human anatomy (Emmerling, 2003). At seventeen, he dropped out of school and left Brooklyn and his family home to pursue fame in Manhattan. After three years of struggling, living on the street or staying with friends, while tagging buildings with Al Diaz as SAMO, Basquiat was featured in a group show, which set off his rise to fame. He was able to exhibit 15 works, which to many brought to mind children's drawings – skeletal figures combined with letters, cars and airplanes (Emmerling, 2003). Roberta Smith (1992) describes Basquiat's career as, '*one of the most sensationalized careers of the now notorious eighties*' (Smith, 1992:1). Basquiat was well aware that exposure through the right channels would make him more well known and is quoted as saying that he was intent on becoming a mainstream artist and that he wanted to be famous.

Basquiat's rise to fame coincided with the emergence of the Neo-Expressionists. Danto (2005) describes Neo-Expressionism as mostly large paintings consisting of brushy, urgent and figurative elements. Smith (1992) further explains the style as a process of hybridization where the distinctions between painting and drawing, abstraction and representation and high art and popular culture were blurred, a combination of "the passion of abstract expressionism and the cool handed savviness of pop art" (Smith, 1992).

Basquiat referenced his own life in many of his paintings. His body of work is described as an 'anatomy of himself' (Smith, 1992). Whilst using a variety of mediums including spray paint, acrylic paint and oil sticks, he created a distinct visual language, which included text and imagery reminiscent of street art. Basquiat combined his love for popular culture and music with his passion for knowledge and language to create a body of work commenting on social,

political and economical issues. His work is described as being 'art of rage and rebellion' (Emmerling, 2003: 36). He successfully weaves together a number of parallel meanings, using references, signs and phrases, exploring themes such as heritage, heroes, justice and equality and cultural identity.

Basquiat drew most of his inspiration from television and popular visual culture, insisting on having the television and radio on while he worked. He referenced comic book sources such as Batman, Superman and Popeye in his work (Emmerling, 2003). This is what makes his work so evocative of its era, which is described as an age mainly shaped by mass media.

Basquiat wanted to be a celebrity, and was quoted as saying that he was going to be the next Warhol. He actively sought after Warhol, leaving messages at Warhol's studio and made attempts to gain access into the Warhol Factory. Warhol however showed little interest until he became convinced of the advantages of working with Basquiat. At this point, Warhol's career was described as being 'rock bottom' whereas Basquiat's was on the rise (Emmerling, 2003). Whilst the collaboration and association with Basquiat was very valuable to Warhol, Basquiat had gained a mentor.



Figure 8. Andy Warhol/ Jean-Michel Basquiat
Dos Cabezas
Acrylic and Oilstick on Canvas on Wooden Mount
154 x 155 cm, 1982
Private Collection

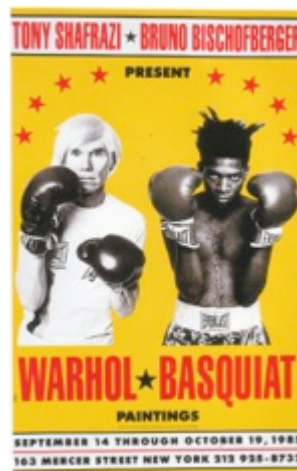


Figure 9. Warhol – Basquiat Paintings, 1985
Poster for Collaborations Exhibition
Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York

Both Warhol and Basquiat enjoyed fame. Jay Shriver commented on the celebrity status of Warhol and Basquiat when he said that the celebrity was as

important as the money and the ability to walk into a club and have the room start buzzing was something that they both seemed to enjoy (Wines, 1988). After Warhol's death, Basquiat became reclusive whilst his depression and heroin addiction became more severe. Basquiat died of a heroine overdose in his art studio at age 27.

What makes for a more wonderful story? A struggling artist, living off the street scribbling his way to fame, becoming a great success and then dying tragically at a young age and even through this adds to his legend by joining the 27 club. Seven years after his death, a biopic titled *Basquiat* was released, directed by personal acquaintance and fellow artist Julian Schnabel. The film was criticized for mythologizing the artist whilst adding to the controversy and contradictions debated by art historians and critics. 'In death, as in life, Basquiat has become a commodity' (Armand, 2001: 106).

Richard Marshall (Armand, 2001) comments on Basquiat as a figure,

"First he became famous for his art, then he became famous for being famous, then he became famous for being infamous – a succession of reputations that often overshadowed the seriousness and significance of his art".

Not only did Basquiat manage to fulfill his goal of becoming rich and famous, but he also managed to become one of the most important artists of the late twentieth century (Galenson, 2013).

Basquiat claimed his fame through successfully creating a myth about who he really was. Initially receiving attention through his Graffiti identity SAMO, and then through the agents and collectors of the New York Art World. He surrounded himself with celebrities, went to all the right parties and exhibition openings and made sure to be noticed. Although he referenced his own life in his work, he was also very much aware of how media coverage could assist in his rise as a celebrity.

PART THREE

Famous for being infamous! Tracey Emin

Emin has turned her life into a public spectacle, like no artist before her.

- Patrick Elliot, 2008

In Part Three of this chapter I will be discussing Tracey Emin, her life story and how she narrates it through her art and actions. I will question Emin's modus operandi with regards to her art making and why she tells her biography in such a visceral way. As Emin is one of the most important influences on my own work, an in-depth unpacking of her work, themes, materials and mediums she uses will assist me in finding resonance within my work, which will be discussed in Chapter four.

An initial reaction to Tracey Emin's work places one's verdict ambiguously between where the work created stems from a sincere narration of a tragic biography and a place where all actions are somewhat pre-meditated, mediated and constructed. The central and critical purpose of this section of the chapter is to determine whether Emin does, and to what extent, employ mediation and construction as part of her work. I will reference critics and writers who either support or disagree with the phenomenon of Tracey Emin, the celebrity artist.

It is argued that even though Emin was not central to the forming of the young British artist movement (yBas) she has exceeded the movement's greatest aspirations of promotional success (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Merck and Townsend describe Emin as an 'erratic, overwrought, oversexed, impulsive woman, rising from her soiled, unmade bed to grab time on a talk show' (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002: 11). According to Mandy Merck, Emin is Britain's best-known artist, abruptly rising to celebrity status with the publicity gained through the young British artists (yBas) as well as her great ability to self promote (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Emin has an uncanny ability to share her opinion and she consistently positions herself in discussing, defending or promoting her work and claiming that her work is 'her'. The convergence of biography and creativity has configured her as Britart's very

own celebrity. The strategy of self-promotion can be easily recognized as a reiteration of the 'famous artist' pose cultivated by celebrity artists such as Andy Warhol and Salvador Dali (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Jean-Michel Basquiat, also insisted on becoming famous and cultivated his own 'famous artist' pose too to be recognized and celebrated.

Occasionally an audience's knowledge on the background and upbringing of an artist assists in understanding the artist's work, but Tracey Emin's art reflects her life. An understanding of her roots place context within her work. Emin's life and art are inseparable, as her daily experiences drive her creative work. It is therefore important to know her life story as one will get a better understanding of decisions made, contexts referenced and materials used. According to Deborah Cherry (2002) in her paper, *On the Move: My Bed, 1998 to 1999*, Emin's life story makes good content for press that thrives on sensation. Current popular culture enjoys autobiographical revelations and controversial subjects, placing the audience in the seats of the voyeur and the narrator into the docu-soap reminiscent of daytime television. It is however noted by Cherry that the story told is one that critics and journalists have heard and retold from time to time – the story of the poor girl moving from a small town and difficult upbringing to become a success in the big city (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002).

Upon reflection of the story mentioned, the story of the poor girl moving from a small town and difficult upbringing to become a success in the big city, a strange and almost familiar déjà-vu feeling arises: – Have I myself heard a story like this before? This could sway one to the side of the pre-meditated, mediated and constructed story and work. One may lean towards the belief that none of Emin's tales are authentic. However, Lorna Healey, in her essay, *We Love You, Tracey* (2002) argues that the use of personal testimony is always open to criticism even though it is often used as part of therapy. Healey unpacks Emin's self-narratives and how these organize chaotic daily experiences to produce a sense of identity. Furthermore she adds that the very act of narration that contributes to the performance, and confirmation of identity, assists with the individual's sense of self-understanding (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Emin continuously argues that her work is authentic,

and narrated from pure emotion. Her work is described as positioning itself both in high art and mass culture, but also with a tendency to criticize both.

Emin risks being called egocentric. Peter Osborne, Professor of Modern European Philosophy describes her work as a shameful display and solipsist (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Solipsism literally translates as 'one-self-ism', further explained as a theory that one can only be aware of one's own experiences, states and acts (Fay, 1996). This theory could be supported further by Julian Stallabrass' observation of Emin's oeuvre where he states that every statement she makes and any act she performs (such as behaving drunkenly on television), becomes art. The failure to mark out a separation between life and art is what Stallabrass calls 'high art lite' (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002: 41).

Emin was born on 3 July 1963 in Croydon, England to unmarried parents. With a British mother and a Turkish Cypriot father, Emin has a twin brother Paul. Her father was married to another woman with other children and thus had a strange arrangement of only spending three nights a week with Tracey, her mother and brother. The remainder of the week he would spend with his other family in London. He was wealthy and owned a hotel in Margate, called the Hotel International, where Tracey, her mother and brother resided between 1966 and 1972. When, in 1972, her father went bankrupt, Tracey, her mother and brother moved out of the Hotel into servant's quarters at the bottom of the property. The Hotel International was boarded up and locked down (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008).

As a result of her jarred upbringing, moving a lot, her father going bankrupt and her mother's many boyfriends, Emin experienced a volatile youth of early promiscuity, alcohol and drugs, which she unpacks through her art and as a result her autobiography becomes very public. Thus Emin's work is often misunderstood whereby the main misconception is that it is about sex and not her autobiography (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008).

Emin's schooling just as the rest of her life was unstable as she rarely attended school but managed to stay under the radar. After a disco on her way home one night, at age thirteen, Emin was raped behind a shop in an

alleyway. After that she entered what she called her 'shagging years' (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008: 19) and then soon after made her way to London where she worked in shops during the day and explored London's nightlife after hours. She met up with art students and musicians and soon after applied for a Foundation Course in Fine Art, which was turned down, because of her lack of A-levels. She was, however, offered an interview for a two year Diploma in Fashion, which she was accepted for this then led to the School of Fine Art in White Chapel and then getting entry into The Maidstone School of Art (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008).

Emin's fame was elevated after her entry into the British Turner prize where she immediately rocketed to celebrity status. Her actions while being watched during this time did, however, assist her in becoming, according to Townsend and Merck, 'the most famous living artist in Britain, a celebrity more familiar to us from television and the tabloids than the fine art library' (2002:6). Further research on her television appearances and newspaper articles suggests that Emin does push the envelope in her personal and her professional life. Does she however do this because of a specific reaction she wants from the audience? Townsend and Merck (2002:7) later discuss Emin's age and gender 'combined with her thematization of intimate relations and artist production, (which) make her a spectacular emblem of her own oeuvre' (2002:7). Upon reflection on Emin's body of work, Townsend and Merck (2002) conclude that it contains extreme visualizations and revisits of her life experiences that combine raw emotion with severe honesty. They claim that Emin's choice to use media such as "video, to model fashion and (to) appear in advertisements," indicates "she has gone with the grain of mass celebrity, reaching a status previously unimaginable for a contemporary British artist" (Townsend and Merck ed., 2002:6).

From a small shop opened by her and an artist friend, Sarah Lucas, to her own concept store, Tracey Emin has grown from strength to strength. She has become a celebrity, endorsing famous brands such Vivienne Westwood fashion (Figure 10) and Fiat.

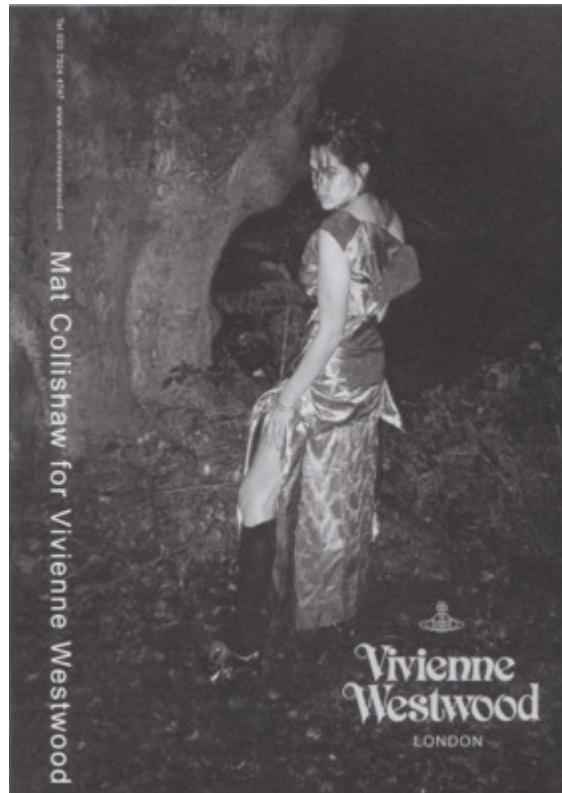


Figure 10. Advertisement for Vivienne Westwood,
Spring/ Summer 2001 Collection November 2000
Photograph by Matt Collishaw (for Vivienne Westwood)

By tapping into the mainstream of public consciousness, Emin has allowed for her art to connect with people in a very direct manner, which has resulted in her work transcending into a pop-cultural consumable. A shared sphere of popular consumption has increasingly shaped contemporary artistic identities (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002: 24). Reflective of this statement, it has been proven that artists born in the 1960's and who grew up in the 1970's received unparalleled exposure to television, video, magazines and the tabloid press. It is believed as consumers define their identities through cultural artifacts, artists of the same generation define their artistic subjectivity in terms of a shared consumption of mass culture (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002).

As previously mentioned, it is said that Emin has attracted more press gossip than serious critical analysis, which she has made work to her advantage. Her work is autobiographical; she looks at her history by retelling the intimate details of her family. Emin's oeuvre has been offered to the world with the tear-stained and torn guarantee of authenticity (Merck & Townsend ed.,

2002). Her themes are highly personal. She explores her childhood through jagged narratives revealing trauma, abuse and confusion. She uses a childlike retelling, which emphasizes the innocence lost. According to Rosemary Betterton, Emin's work inhabits a gendered territory of a girl child and the artist, who struggles to find her identity as a working class girl growing up in Margate in the seventies (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002).

By refusing to separate her life and her art making, and by fusing together her autobiography and art, Emin creates a world where personal truth telling moves beyond the me-culture into a collective catharsis. According to Jeanette Winterton, at a point where society is drowning in reality television and live confessions, when everything in life is about display, Emin has managed to turn the popular agenda into a new kind of cultural challenge. Emin is trying to draw her audience away from the superficial and peripheral experiences of modern life, into what can be described as something that can be felt deeply, even if it is disgust. Emin therefore adopts a confessional mode in which she herself is the star of her own narrative (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002: 25).

Common themes, which run through Emin's work, include love, the angst surrounding it, the loss of it and the finding of it. Emin explores sex and intimacy by referring to her own sexuality, promiscuity and her femininity. There is a constant searching for a true identity and belonging. Emin's honest approach to her emotions and mediums reflect in the raw and visceral way her autobiography is presented. This honest approach is counter argued by Betterton who describes Emin's approach more as a purposeful reconstruction of the past and as a set of stories rather than the 'truth' of a life (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002: 25). Emin uses images, objects and materials from her own life while according to Betterton, she consciously reworks her 'life story'. Betterton further argues that Emin deliberately produces her life as a series of texts in an unrefined autobiographical form (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Thus reconstructing the experience it recalls.

In conversation with Carl Freeman in the book, *Tracey Emin Works 1963 – 2006* (Rizolli New York) Freeman comments on Emin's use of mediums,

“Many of the devices you use would suggest that what we are experiencing is authentic. The frank revelations are delivered as truth-telling confession. There’s the documentary-video style and narrator voiceover of your films. The home-movie Super-8 footage. Your writing is presented as hand-written, unmediated, and dyslexic. And it’s the potential instability of all this which sometimes makes me uneasy, like I’m witnessing a car crash in slow motion...” (Freeman, 2006: 165).

Emin uses mediums, which are easily accessible and simply understood by the public. She uses elements we all know and have in common such as the large blankets she appliques. Even though Emin’s works rarely reflect expected appliqué blanket subject matter, she successfully narrates her emotions and experiences in a pseudo-childlike way which makes the blankets seem much more approachable. Once the subject matter is revealed or realized it has a shock factor which challenges the audience’s ideological disposition and in that moment makes the personal rather political.

As Emin’s appliqué and embroidery interest started at a young age, one of her first works was an elephant she appliquéd at age nine. Her break out work was the tent, which was appliquéd with all the names of people she ever slept with. Through her installations and sculptures Emin reflects popular culture and uses objects we all recognize. Just as the use of the tent in *Everyone I ever slept with* 1963 - 1993, Emin exhibited her own unmade bed as part of the Turner prize exhibition at the Tate Britain. The bed with unmade sheets and other used paraphernalia of the 21st century party animal such as used condoms, cigarette boxes and medication was on display for all to look at and give their comments. *My Bed* reflected the idea of the ‘Mad Tracey from Margate’ and heightened the infamous nature Emin was slowly nurturing.

Emin likes the quality of line she gets with monoprints (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008: 27). The technique gives a quality of line, which cannot be achieved by any other means. It is a dark and nervous line, which is shadowed by marks and smudges, caused partly by the pen or the artist and the pressure put on the paper. A monoprint line suggests a fragility and vulnerability almost like a wound, a cut or a scar. The mark made is permanent it cannot be erased and redrawn, which makes it immediate and in the moment. This technique suits

Emin perfectly and she says that she likes the alchemy, and the fact that it is in reverse and the magic of never really knowing what the final drawing will look like. Also there isn't much time to do a monoprint so it's a stream of consciousness (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008).

I conclude by suggesting that Emin's creative outputs are simultaneously authentic personal expressions as well as carefully meditated and constructed artworks thereby supporting my thoughts on how an individual can achieve celebrity status.

A central purpose of this chapter was to gain an understanding of each artist's biography, their claim to fame and their attempts to achieve celebrity status. In addition to my investigation, this chapter was aimed at attempting to find resonance between my art practice and life stories and that of Warhol, Basquiat and Emin.

Through the research it has become apparent that it would be a much more lucrative career as a *celebrity artist* (Schickel, 2000). A *celebrity artist* in this context would be defined as an individual who, within their lifetime, has gained recognition and fame through or because of their artistic capabilities. This fame and recognition is only comparable to that of film and pop stars. If the artist's names are recognized outside the realms of Fine Art Departments and Art History books they have managed to transcend from artist to *celebrity artist*. Schickel (2000) points out that celebrity is believed to be a function of prosperity. Celebrity status leads to high priced artworks and affluence.

According to the insights gained through this inquiry, becoming a *celebrity artist* relies on a combination of various factors, personality traits and society's buy in. Although the combinations may differ slightly, all the components are important and have ensured success for each of these artists. With this research it has been established what constitutes an ego and concepts such as exhibitionism, narcissism and navel-gazing. It is difficult to believe that *celebrity artists* don't have strong egos to guide them. Tracey Emin has been quoted as saying that she'd pay ten pounds if she were shown an artist without an ego (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002).

The ability to self promote requires some narcissism. Narcissism is described as having a high sense of self-worth and self-importance. Surely, only with such self-belief is it possible to promote oneself.

Another important factor, which all three artists have shown, is an understanding of popular culture and mass media. Warhol, Basquiat and Emin have all managed to tap into their era's culture and use it to their advantage. It appears they are all well aware of the power of mass media and popular culture, independently; they have all cultivated an image and created a myth, which they present(ed) to and maintain(ed) for the media. Schickel (2000) believes that artists assert their claims to heroic status by appealing to the general population. He further emphasizes the essential link is to have an easily understandable drama, something that would attract the attention of the general public, something that would make one stand out from the rest of the visual art world as well as the rest of the general public. The drama would somehow attach a tragic myth to the artist. Myths enhance an individual's social standing and the moment the audience can relate to a story, the interest will enable the makings of a celebrity (Gabler, n.d).

As part of the concept of the artist narrative and construction of a persona solely for the attention and acceptance of the audience, I have attempted to construct narratives which describe the rise to fame for each of the selected artists, these narratives although composed by me will however be similar to other myths and stories created by an artist to possibly appeal to an audience who would relate to some part of it. Starting with Andy Warhol, then Jean-Michel Basquiat and finally ending with Tracey Emin.

The story about a hard working, talented nobody who moves from a not so wealthy family life to the big city, craves fame, re-invents himself and becomes an instant celebrity. From rags to riches.

The story about a young, untrained but talented artist who is discovered by the art world and becomes the next genius artist. He is a great success and has exhibitions all over the world and dies of a drug overdose. With raw talent to riches.

The story about a poor girl from a small town. She had a difficult upbringing. Abused and molested but overcomes her problems and becomes a success in the big city. Overcoming obstacles to riches.

These three stories reflect many (clichéd) screenplays of films we are all aware of. These artists do however know how to tap into popular culture and make it work for them. Warhol intentionally cultivated a particular image, which would set him apart from others (Faerna, 1997). He decided to become a star and masterfully used popular culture and mass media to gain the recognition he craved. He is described as one of the most self-promoting artists of his time (Wheeler, 1991). Emin and her great ability to self-promote has gained her lots of publicity which has assisted her in gaining celebrity status (Merck & Townsend ed., 2002). Furthermore as Kathy Noble suggests, 'Emin has willfully attempted to create her own myth' (Noble, 2011). Similarly to Emin's carefully negotiated fame after the initial graduation into Britpops yBas, so did Jean-Michel Basquiat plan his rise to stardom? Yale University Professor of Afro-American art, Robert Thompson (Wines, 1988) comments on the image Basquiat created, 'He was also distinguishing himself from the crowd. Because let's face it, he had very significant ambitions as an artist' (Wines, 1988). By specifically tagging buildings in Manhattan's SoHo, he placed himself into the context he was craving to be in.

Along with having the right mix of ego, narcissism, understanding of the popular culture, determination and the know how to create a myth, all three artists have pioneered various techniques, mediums and styles that have made them the frontrunners of their time and famous as a result.

In the attempt to locate a specific *modus operandi* which artists follow to become celebrity artists I have discovered many different interwoven processes, which are determined by the specific artists.

CHAPTER 4: *Almost Famous!*

A reflection on my work and studio practice

By looking into the soul of another we often find ourselves delving just as deep into our own private worlds of identity and place.

- Cowell, 1997

In order to understand the autobiographical nature of my work I have embarked on a study of my studio practice and theories relating to the work I create. The study in its entirety has become an extensive challenge, which has required me to unpack and analyze various factors, which have impacted on not only me as an individual but also as an artist. In this chapter I will reveal a short autobiography, unpack my studio practice, the themes and material I choose to use, and artists I find resonance with, be that emotionally, creatively or famously. I will explain the concept behind my solo exhibition and works created for the exhibition, which combined with this dissertation, culminates in my final submission. Thereby I include an investigation into the mediums I choose to work with, the visual imagery and semiotics I incorporate and the way I reveal my autobiography.

I intend to use this research as an interactive process where I can become aware of elements that influence my creative production, such as my personal history, gender, social and economic class, race and biography (Barrett & Bolt ed., 2010). The study will also enable me to engage with a reflective process where I can engage with these elements in order to improve my creative production.

Through practice based and –lead research and a studio-based enquiry it will be possible to establish whether I embellish my autobiography to make for more sensationalist imagery whilst gaining greater interest from a public audience. In addition I will discover why I select the mediums I work with and how I establish the concepts I explore.

As a practice-based research practitioner I continuously reflect, contemplate and attempt to find answers. Reflecting on my work involves various processes. I constantly work in visual diaries and journals, which reflect my

process pathways and explorations of medium, layout and concepts. I prefer to create reflections than to write them and most of the images, doodles and collages are either pre or post an artwork. Most of the research for my work is grounded in the process of my visual journals.

Through this enquiry I will establish various contexts, that of the different artists, the audience, the celebrity artist and myself. This will locate the research and findings in both a historical and contemporary discourse.

Autobiography

As with the other artists I have discussed in this paper, it is important to reveal my own biography. My work is situated in an autobiographical discourse thereby knowing my background will assist in unpacking and understanding whilst contextualizing the work.

Born on the 30th of December 1980 to Afrikaans parents Koos and Nellie, I was the last-born in a house full of girls. I mainly grew up in Northern Natal towns such as Dundee, Vaalbank and Vryheid.

After the tragic loss of my middle sister in a car accident in 1984, the relationship between my parents shifted until it was decided they would separate. As the youngest I was innocently unaware of the upcoming changes and was in pure disbelief when my mother informed me we were relocating to another town, where my eldest sister had started working. I was twelve, in standard 5, achieving great marks, selected as prefect and was about to debut as the 1st team hockey goalie. My reality had disintegrated with one casual conversation.

During 1993, we relocated to Empangeni. We moved into a 2-bedroom duplex apartment with my sister Belinda. This is how our new life started. It didn't last long as my father had made his way to Empangeni and managed to win my mother's heart over. He moved in and my sister moved out. The relationship between my father and sister was rocky and her departure was marked with a very vocal accusatory argument, which has remained with me until today.

I was however very unaware of what was going on and what had happened before my parent's initial split. Their reconciliation didn't last long and we (my mom and I) hastily packed our belongings one morning after my father left for work in the morning and had to make sure we had evacuated the apartment before he returned.

We relocated to a small holding a distance outside town and so we started again. Me again not knowing exactly what had happened. Finally in 1995, two years later, they officially got divorced and so my father became scarcer in my life, remarried and then severed all ties in 2001.

I moved to Durban to study Fine Art after completing a Foundation Course in Design and am currently lecturing Creative Development at a private branding and design college. I have recently contacted my father and have seen him twice.

Themes and memories

As an autobiographical art practitioner, I derive most of the concepts for my work from my childhood memories, family memorabilia, experiences and my emotional reactions based on these.

By creating autobiographical art, I rely strongly on memories and the recollection thereof and therefore have to constantly make a connection between my autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative. As discussed in the second chapter, Andrea Smorti (2011) in her paper, *Autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative*, states that autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative are not the same. She explains that autobiographical memory is internal whereas autobiographical narrative is external. They are however connected and when we understand the connection, that the narrative by creating a story externalizes the memory, helps with dealing with memory and experience in a more positive way. Smorti (2011) states that autobiographical memory is transformed into a cultural artifact through autobiographical narrative, she further explains that by narrating internally stored memories they are

externalized in a different format, which is understood not just by the self but also by others.

Andrea Smorti (2011) believes that autobiography is a double-sided process of continuous constructions, with memory on the one side and narrative on the other. This process of continuous constructions are deeply linked to social interactions. The whole nature of autobiography is therefore subjective, even more so when authors reveal an inability and/ or unwillingness to accurately recall and retell memories, leading to misleading (embellished?) or incorrect information (Smorti, 2011).

Creating allows me to modify and manage my emotions and even though most of the time I yearn to find resolutions, the process helps me understand who I am. The process is a means to understand incoherent emotional contents of my individual psyche and allows for me to articulate my feelings to my viewer and audience. There are benefits to the social sharing of emotional events and they suggest that social sharing assists the individual to process emotional information (Smorti, 2011).

In their paper; *Why people rehearse their memories: Frequency of used and relations to the intensity of emotions associated with autobiographical memories* (2009), authors Walker, Skowronski, Gibbons, Vogel and Ritchie argue that people use different ways to rehearse their memories and that this can affect the memory and emotions attached to it. They have deduced that there are five types of memory rehearsal, namely, involuntary rehearsal, rehearsal to maintain an event memory, rehearsal to re-experience the emotion of an event, rehearsal to understand an event or rehearsal for social communication. As a highly nostalgic individual, I am very aware of the fact that I have employed all five types of memory rehearsal. I would however focus firstly on the rehearsal to understand an event as the basis of the explanation of my work created for the exhibition titled, *when I grew up, nothing was the same*.

Exhibition

The title of the exhibition is *when I grew up, nothing was the same* derived from an artwork with the same title.



Figure 11. anet norval
When I grew up nothing was the same
Spray paint and marker on wood
47,5 x 91 cm, 2013
© anet norval 2013

The title of the exhibition emphasizes a sad realization that my perspectives and perceptions have shifted from when I was a child. It is the culmination of a journey of explorative and emotional attempts to stitch together the biography of my family unit. It explores the relationships within my family, the relationship between my parents, the relationship between child and parent, parent and child and the relationship between a believed reality and reality. The works narrate memories, myths created and the juxtaposed emotions of me as a child versus me as an adult. I have grown up and have switched the hero worship I had for my father to indifference. I constantly question the happenings of my childhood, things I understood then, and how I articulate and negotiate them now.

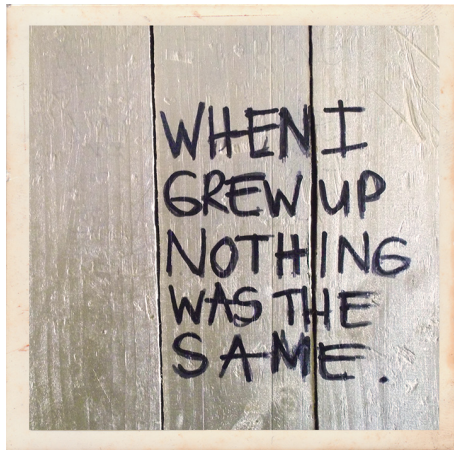


Figure 12. Exhibition invitation
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 13. Original photograph, 1971
© P.E Norval, 1971

The visuals of the invitation (Figure 12) to the exhibition are created to have the nostalgic feel of the seventies and eighties. It was created on Photoshop using the frame from a photo of my mother in the early seventies (Figure 13). The image in the faux photograph is a detail of the title work, *when I grew up, nothing was the same*, 2013 (Figure 11). The work references my version of a white picket fence, however, it is rudimentarily made and painted gold.

I employed the memory rehearsal type, which is understood as the rehearsal to understand an event. According to authors Walker, Skowronski, Gibbons, Vogel and Ritchie, 'people rehearse life events in many ways and for various purposes'. They point out that there is considerable evidence to suggest that people think about life events that puzzle them or that represent life failures (2009: 763). I have realized that I rehearse my autobiographical memories as well as the biographical memories of my parents to better understand events. I constantly revisit particular happenings and events, which I think I have sure understanding of and which puzzle me profusely. As the youngest member of my family I was never informed about family issues, and therefore constructed narratives in my mind, which would make sense of all the happenings. As I matured, the narratives became harder to believe.

The exhibition focuses mainly on my childhood and the politics of relationships within a family unit. I engage with emotions I have internalized focusing on the loss of my father (when my parents divorced) and how in my mind he shifted from being a hero (when I was child) to becoming a monster (in my mind) through the memories I replayed and bits of information I could

gather. Along with this I reflect on how I have matured and changed from a 12 year old to an adult.

Consisting of fifty-one artworks in total, the exhibition can be described as an anthology of emotions, reactions, comments and memories in a range of mediums, from painting to sculpture to video pieces. It could be described as a nostalgic album filled with disjointed snapshots of my life.

The artworks move between a raw and visceral naivety and a polished, controlled aesthetic, juxtaposing emotional responses with a tongue-in-cheek sarcasm. *When I grew up, nothing was the same*, is a pieced together set of representations reflecting details of an overall complex situation.

Artwork titles

I take great care in constructing titles for the artworks, as these titles act as clues for the viewer as well as situate or contextualize the piece within the exhibition. Some of the works are more obscure than others and therefore need a title to hint in the direction I would like the viewer to interpret them from. The titles are intended to add a subtext, which runs parallel to the imagery. This could be seen as a supporting narrative to the visual narrative. Some of the titles reference popular culture and hint towards inter- and intra-textuality within the work

I do however believe revealing the full story through a detailed explanation will remove some of the intrigue of the artwork. As I am dealing with disjointed recollections, not revealing all partly places the viewer in my shoes and forces them, with very limited information, to create their own myths. Walter Benjamin (1986) believes that half of the art in storytelling is to keep a story free from explanation when it is reproduced (Barret & Bolt ed., 2010). As some of the work is difficult to interpret and the narrative is not as apparent and transparent, this is an attempt to implore the viewer to look beneath the surface for other clues such as recurring symbols, patterns and connections between different symbols.

Semiotics, logos and famous brands

In an attempt to connect with my audience I employ semiotics within my work. As my work is of a personal and autobiographical nature, I consciously leave signs as clues to allow for my work to be more accessible to the audience. By intentionally employing recognizable signs I depend on the connotative qualities they possess to allow for a greater understanding and engagement with my work.

In the second edition of *AS Media Studies: The Essential Introduction*, Semiotics is described as being a “science of the study of sign systems and their role in the construction and reconstruction of meaning in media texts” (Rayner, Wall and Kruger, 2004: 28). Further described by Hall (2007), semiotics includes the processes, contexts and tools individuals employ to create, interpret and understand meaning. Translated from the Greek word *semiotikos*, semiotics means an interpreter of signs (Hall, 2007).

“Signs are vital to human existence because it underlies all forms of communication” (Hall, 2007: 5). Signs are explained as consisting of a *signifier* and *something that is signified*. The *signifier* is understood as the physical object whereas the *signified* is explained as a mental concept or meaning conveyed by the *signifier* (Rayner et al, 2004). Signs have great importance as they can convey more than one meaning depending on the context within which they are read and understood. In fact, it is important to note that signs are shaped by different societies in different ways as they are produced and consumed within the context of these specific societies whilst reflecting its dominant views and ideologies (Hall, 2007).

I repeatedly work with a number of signifiers, which have become main *characters* in my work. In this body of work, one of the most important signifiers would be that of the wolf. Depending on the culture, wolves can be seen in either a positive or a negative light. I employ the signifier of the wolf to represent my father. According to Western semiotics and culture, a wolf signifies a womanizer and is a symbol for an outlaw or rebel. In Western culture one immediately references the children’s fairy tales of *Little Red*

Riding Hood and *The Three Little Pigs*. In both these stories, the wolf is depicted as being bad and sly.

“When it comes to the interpretation of signs, our understanding is mediated through the various concepts and conceptions we have of different kinds of subject matter, the various connotations and denotations that objects and images and texts can have” (Hall, 2007: 113, 114).

I use the imagery and symbol of the wolf in many of my works. I use the wolf, a wolf-mask and a wolf skull as the main signifiers. The viewpoint from which we choose to present a story will influence how the audience reads it. In most of the works I position the wolf whereby the signified would have a negative connotation such as a womanizer, loner and rebel, reflecting the perspective I have of my father. The character of the *wolf* came into being in an initial digital illustration in the series, *canis lupus (erratus)* 2012 (Figure 14), where my father is depicted with a wolf skull. This signifies the lone wolf and draws on the ideas of fear and death. The title is loosely translated from Latin as the *lost* wolf or the wolf who has gone astray.



Figure 14. anet norval
Canis Lupus (Erratus) detail
Digital Illustration printed on cartridge paper
25.5 x 19.5 cm, 2012
© anet norval, 2012

This drawing was then used to create a stencil (Figure 15), which recurs in many other artworks. As I have used the wolf skull I have also used a wolf-mask in other works, here my father is represented with a wolf-mask (Figure 16) instead of a wolf face. This has doubled the negative connotations, not only is he signified as a wolf, he is now signified as someone wearing a wolf mask.



Figure 15. anet norval
untitled (if only) detail
Mixed media on canvas
91.5 x 30.5 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 16. anet norval
Big Fish (the one that got away) detail
Mixed media on 2 canvasses
30.5 x 30.5 cm and 50.5 x 40.5 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

Other symbols I use are birds, hearts, halos and a baby. These all have immediate meanings and viewed within the correct context convey my messages effortlessly. Symbols are understood as a sign that represents an object and concept, which is understood by a certain group of people. On this occasion, I believe the group of people to be a wide selection of western culture.

The birds in my work should signify freedom. Even though this would be an initial interpretation; they are much more layered as signs. Personally they signify my father's homing and racing pigeons, which he used to have when I was a child. As a family our lives revolved around the pigeons and the pigeon club. I only realize now upon reflection that my father's involvement with the pigeon club contributed partly to the break down of my parent's relationship. The concept of homing pigeons in itself is layered with meaning. A homing pigeon is trained to be free for only a short time, where it is set free but expected to come back to its cage and master every time. In some of the works, the birds are crows and ravens (Figure 18), which have more negative connotations such as death, partly referring to the death of their love and

relationship. On other occasions, a swallow/ sparrow is illustrated to symbolize innocence or as a symbol of finding true love.



Figure 17. Flying birds stencil
anet norval
Everything I had (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
61 x 30 cm
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 18. Ravens
anet norval
One for Sorrow, Two for Joy (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
60.5 x 76 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

Hearts are prominent symbols in my work. The heart represents an individual, unless it is part of a portrait. I employ several styles of hearts including a sacred heart, anatomical stenciled heart and sculptural hearts (tangible). For me the heart represents opposite states, fragility (a possibility to be hurt) and resilience (overcoming hurt) and impossibility to actually experience one without the other.



Figure 19. anet norval
Sacred Heart, Break it Heart series
Mixed media on 9 canvasses
Dimensions variable
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 20. anet norval
Sacred Heart
Mixed media on canvas
12 x 16 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

In the series *Sacred Heart, Break It Heart*, 2013 (Figure 19), significant objects reminiscent or representative of hurtful experiences or memories, replace the innocence and purity associated with a sacred heart (Figure 20). Objects such as my mom's suitcase (*Atlanta Softop*, 2013), my father's pigeon racing clock (*Pigeon Clock*, 2013), a fishing reel (*Penn Reel*, 2013) and the Ford Escort (*Escort*, 2013) all evoke certain memories but also speak of a specific era in my family history.

The hearts move between figurative and literal planes, in some of the works they are actual physical hearts and in other works they represent emotions, state of minds or memories.

Throughout the work I explore how the heart as an organ (emotionally and physically) is affected by memory and circumstances. The ways I depict hearts are clues for the audience to detect emotions. For example, the hearts depicted in *Canis Lupus Perditus*, 2012, *The Antelope*, 2012 and *The Saint*, 2013, portray emotional states of the individuals. Firstly, in *Canis Lupus Perditus*, 2012, the heart is a knot in the wood, stained red (Figure 21). Then in *The Antelope*, 2012, it is removed scorched and replaced but doesn't fit properly into the cavity that was left open (Figure 22). Lastly, in *The Saint*, 2013, it is depicted as a sacred heart, holy and pure (Figure 23).



Figure 21. Wood Knot heart
anet norval
Canis Lupus Perditus
Mixed media on board
20 x 50 cm, 2012
© anet norval, 2012



Figure 22. Scorched heart
anet norval
The Antelope
Mixed media on board
20 x 50 cm, 2012
© anet norval, 2012



Figure 23. Sacred heart
anet norval
The Saint
Mixed media
20 x 50 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

As much as I use personal symbols, I employ well-known logos and famous brands. These logos and famous brands play an integral part in situating the work within a specific context. As pointed out earlier, my intended audience is

mostly from a Western Culture, but furthermore, those relating to the famous brands and logos are very much from a South-African context.

A prominent brand and logo featuring in several of the works is that of the Ford brand/ logo, immediately placing me in a specific social and economic class whilst revealing parts of my personal and family history. The Ford logo appears in three separate pieces.



Figure 24. anet norval
Ford
Mixed media on canvas
10 x 10 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 25. anet norval
Everything I had
Mixed media on canvas
61 x 30 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 26. anet norval
The big Ford in the Sky
Mixed media on canvas
25 x 20 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

Firstly, I have used the original and actual logo from my mother's car in *Ford* from the *Sacred heart, Break it heart series*, 2013. Here the logo replaces the sacred heart (Figure 24). Furthermore the logo appears *worn away* in *everything I had*, 2013, (Figure 25) revealing not only the loss of the vehicle, but the memory of it. The logo changes to red in *the big Ford in the sky*, 2013 (figure 26). It takes the place of the sun in the composition, prominent and important.



Figure 27. anet norval
Corona
Digital printed canvas
30 cm in diameter, 2012
© anet norval, 2012



Figure 28. anet norval
Escort
Mixed media on canvas
15 x 15 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013



Figure 29. anet norval
Cortina
Mixed media on canvas
30 x 40 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

As the logo appears in several pieces so do numerous Ford vehicles. The vehicles form a timeline as well as situate the work in a socio-economic context and time frame. These vehicles are prominent in my family's personal history and make up a great deal of my memories.

I attempt to achieve a visual tension within single pieces of work and within the body of my work. Tension is created in works by mixing different styles, materials and processes together (Hall, 2007). By creating tension in my works, I change their meaning in terms of positioning the works as solely painting or drawing etc. and deny easy categorization.

Artworks

The artworks sit uncomfortably between memories, emotions and depictions of experiences. Some of the works directly reference memories while others depict reactions to emotions and/ or memories. To illustrate the different ways in which I depict my autobiography I will discuss a number of artworks from the exhibition, *when I grew up, nothing was the same*.



Figure 30. anet norval
Atari broke my mom's heart
Mixed media on canvas
76 x 50.5 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

Atari broke my mom's heart, 2013 (Figure 30) is an autobiographical narrative derived from an autobiographical memory. When I was very young, my father

purchased the new (at that time) Atari gaming console. The games were basic and rather repetitive but enough for him to not want to do much else, nonetheless let any one else in the family partake in the fun or watch television (as the console had to be connected to the television to be played). He spent many nights playing until the early morning hours, mostly ignoring the rest of his family and obsessing to achieve a high score.

The artwork features a few recurring signs such as the hearts and a skull. Furthermore it includes many visual styles such as the dripping paint, stenciling and spray-paint, and hand written text. The image includes one pristine white joystick (the controller for the gaming console) emphasizing one player. Even though there is an attempt to make it pristine white, one can see the dirt below the surface. The 3 hearts represent my mom, sister and myself. Red paint dripping down the painting (reminiscent of blood dripping) runs through the one heart and then forms the Atari logo - literally breaking my mom's heart, while a bird skull indicative of death, hovers slightly in-between the realm of the hearts and the joystick signifying the breakdown of their relationship.

Many of my artworks include text and phrases mostly directed straight at the viewer. I also use recurring words and phrases, repetitively to emphasize the message and highlight the importance. Two examples using the same phrase but in a different context and style illustrate the use of text and different mediums.

I never hated you, 2012 (Figure 31), is directed at my father. As a child, my father was a hero and although my mother and sister had become extremely indifferent towards him, I didn't. So in a sense I am telling him I never really 'turned' on him. The painting contains other recurring signs such as the birds, but in this painting they are all wounded, spiraling down to the ground. There are five birds, each signifying a family member. At the top of the painting is a line drawing of my hands, with red paint splatter over them to signify blood on my hands. This indicates the uncomfortable guilt I may feel for not hating my father completely or alternatively the blood on his hands for the break down (crash) of a family. The violence is juxtaposed with elegant font spelling out

the phrase I never hated you. *The Love Letter*, 2012 (Figure 32), plays on the idea of the opposite of a love letter. In a sense, there is a possibility if you've never hated someone you might love them. This, as the previous work, is directed at my father. In amongst all the confusion, blame and family arguments, I never hated him.

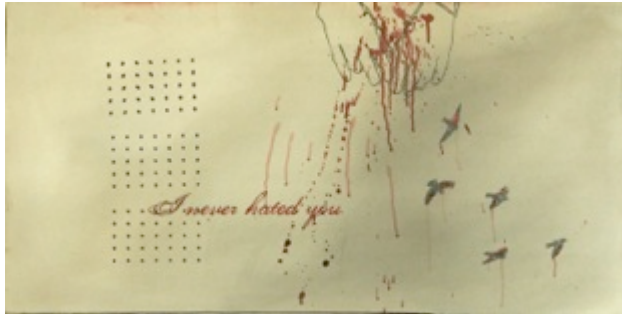


Figure 31. anet norval
I never hated you
Mixed media on canvas
76 x 38.5 cm, 2012
© anet norval, 2012



Figure 32. anet norval
The love letter
Board, paint, varnish
135 x 120 cm, 2012
© anet norval, 2012

I switch between English and Afrikaans constantly, intentionally revealing my personal history but also causing a sense of tension and a language barrier for some. I include cultural phrases such as *beloftes maak skuld*, (Figure 33) roughly translated as promises make debt. I later distort this phrase into *beloftes maak skuldig* in the painting *One for Sorrow, Two for Joy*, 2013 (Figure 34), which is roughly translated, as promises make guilty. In reference to my father's second marriage.



Figure 33. anet norval
Beloftes
Mixed media on canvas
20.5 x 20.5 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

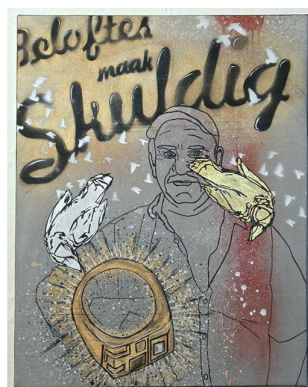


Figure 34. anet norval
One for Sorrow, Two for Joy
Mixed media on canvas
60.5 x 76 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

The painting depicts my father as he is now. This portrait is one of only three where my father appears without a wolf skull or mask. I have included two ravens pecking at a glowing ring, my father's second wedding ring. The one raven is white, representing his first marriage and the other gold, representing his second marriage. The title *one for sorrow, two for joy* is appropriated from a well-known rhyme, but used in this context, it describes the two marriages.

In a similar manner to the three artists selected for this study, I also include popular culture and cultural artifacts into my work. In the piece, *In the shadow of your heart*, 2013 (Figure 35), I have used a line from a popular pop music song performed by contemporary band called Florence and the Machine. The concept behind the artwork is more an emotional response to my childhood and the decisions my mother made on behalf of the both of us. Even though she made the right decisions, they were hers, hence 'in the shadow of your heart'. The painting contains four hearts, one large sacred heart referencing tattoo culture, positioned centrally in the front of the work. In the background the other three hearts almost disappear in the light shining from the large heart.

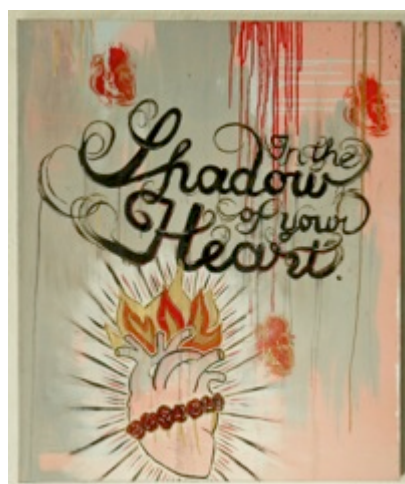


Figure 35. anet norval
In the Shadow of Your heart
Mixed media on canvas
76 x 101 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

Mediums and Chosen Media

I create constantly whilst experimenting with different mediums, media, styles and approaches. Prominent mediums in my work include oil paint, spray paint

and paint markers. I experiment with how different types of paint react on different surfaces. Through this I am able to create rich surfaces with depth. These surfaces are created by the layering of different mediums, thereby creating a 'history' within the surface of the artwork, possibly referencing the idea of a palimpsest. A palimpsest is easiest described as something reused or reworked but still bearing traces from the earlier or original form.

Many of the works are created to reference billboards and movie posters. This is an attempt at a tongue-in-cheek hint that the autobiographical exhibition is very much idealizing a regular life, in other words, a hagiography.

Resonance

By reflecting on other art practitioners working in a similar field and researching available data I can construct my own theories and interpretations. Why do the artists use the mediums they choose? How do they establish the concepts for their work and how do they maintain their artistic practice. After researching and unpacking the biographies of Warhol, Basquiat and Emin, I have found resonance with each artist.

It was also very intriguing to discover that all the selected artists are or were a representation of the *other* during their respective era, Andy Warhol a homosexual, Jean-Michel Basquiat an African American and Tracey Emin, a woman. As a lesbian I am also categorized as the other.

Resonance with Andy Warhol

I have always been intrigued by POP art as a movement. My interest in popular culture and mass media amalgamated with art is a perfect match. Warhol's imagery, which is derived mostly from popular culture, has an immediate visual impact, which has the possibility and power to project implications through the associations tied to the imagery. Warhol undoubtedly understood popular culture and made it work for him.

Warhol's foundation in design assisted him in successfully creating interesting compositions with good colour sense and visual rhythm. When initially planning my own studies, I was set on Graphic Design but was referred to do

the Foundational Course in Design to tweak skills before applying for the Graphic Design Degree. Warhol's formal training has assisted him in the creation of his work. I find resonance with Warhol through my interest in design and use of commercially produced imagery.

Whilst investigating my own work with reference to Andy Warhol, I have discovered similarities, in Warhol's work as well as in his personal life.



Figure 36. Andy Warhol
Double Self-portraits
Silkscreen ink on two panels
Each 55.9 x 55.9 cm, 1966-67
The Brand Foundation Greenwich

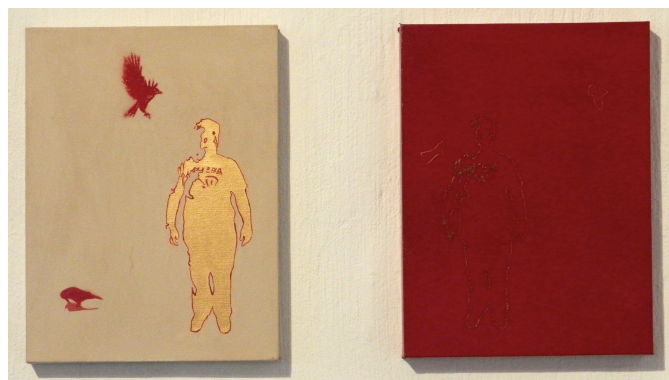


Figure 37. anet norval
Attrition (gold), 2012 and *Attrition (thread)*
Mixed media on canvas
30.5 x 41 cm, 2012
© anet norval 2012

Warhol's use of a limited palette in his *Double Self-portraits*, 1967 (Figure 36) and the block out style of how the image is composed has a similar feel to the self-portrait I have created for *Attrition (gold)*, 2012 and *Attrition (thread)*, 2012 (Figure 37). The basic structure of the image is composed out of blocked colour. The concept of the *double* self-portrait, with the same pose but just

slight colour differences come across in my own 'double portrait'. I have however mirrored the image where Warhol kept it uniform.

Furthermore, I share my interest in commercially produced images, from magazines and newspapers, with Warhol. His reproduction of commercially printed material appeals to me visually as well as conceptually. My pieces, *The Colour of my Blood (restive)*, 2013 and *The Colour of my Blood (pensive)*, 2013 (Figure 38) are reminiscent of Warhol's silk-screens of disasters (Figure 39). I tend to use repetition in my work, one image is used in different artworks and contexts.



Figure 38. anet norval
The Colour of my Blood (Restive), 2013 and *The Colour of my Blood (Pensive)*
Digital print on canvas
Each 76 x 76 cm, 2013
© anet norval 2013

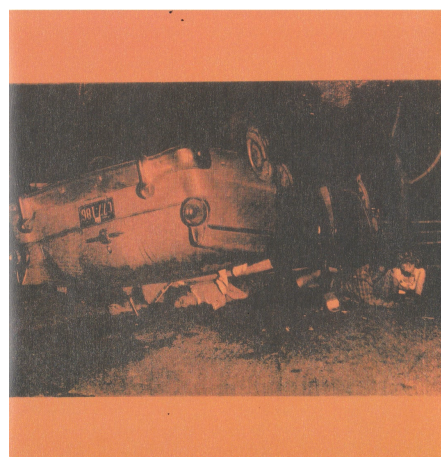


Figure 39. Andy Warhol
Deaths on Yellow (Yellow Disaster)
Silkscreen on canvas
76.5 x 76.5 cm, 1963
Sonnabend Collection

I share Warhol's interest in popular culture, as well as his use of commercially produced products and imagery. As Warhol referenced popular American everyday products such as Coca-Cola, Campbell's Soup and Brillo, I reference Ford and Atari.

Resonance with Jean-Michel Basquiat

The initial draw to Jean-Michel Basquiat is the quality and surface of his paintings. The works are often urgent, unplanned and impulsive. The way he approaches an artwork by narrating stories through using symbols and phrases link closely to my manner of working. The spontaneity of how both of us work, reflects an urgency to tell the story, instantly like graffiti. Basquait often creates a protagonist in his work, many a time it is himself, but there is usually an individual and their story is somehow referenced.



Figure 40. Jean-Michel Basquiat
Gravestone
Three panels, acrylic and oil on wood
139.5 x 172.5 x 156 cm, 1987.
Private Collection
Courtesy Tony Shafrazi Gallery, NY



Figure 41. anet norval
Antelope (heart pumping blood)
Mixed media on wooden door, lights
75 x 197.5 cm, 2013
© anet norval 2013

Basquait's use of everyday objects as a surface very much appeals to my own creative process – no surface is untouched. The use of different mediums as surface also suggests Basquiat's power of observation, and how each surface brings another level of *consciousness* to his works (Figure 40). I have explored working on found objects and surfaces and have attempted to push the way I look at surfaces and which mediums can work on them or not (Figure 41). As for the use of different scale in his work, Basquiat explored artworks consisting of various panels composing artworks more than five

metres in length. This has inspired my own pushing of boundaries by creating my largest work to date, *Everything that hurts you, is locked up inside you*, 2013 (Figure 42) is almost two and a half metres in length and over one metre in height.



Figure 42. anet norval
Everything that hurts you, is locked up inside you
 Mixed media on shutter board, lights
 244 x 122 cm, 2013
 © anet norval 2013

Many of my own works rely heavily on text as the only visual in the work. These almost become mantras, phrases that can be repeated and used in graffiti. Both examples below, *To Repel Ghosts* by Basquiat (Figure 43) and my own piece, *when I grew up, nothing was the same* (Figure 44) are reminiscent of the urgency and the in-the-moment of scribing something onto the side of a building.



Figure 43. Jean-Michel Basquiat
To Repel Ghosts
 Acrylic on wood
 112 x 83 x 10 cm, 1986
 Collection Pierre Cornette de Saint Cyr



Figure 44. anet norval
When I grew up, nothing was the same
 Spray paint and marker on wood
 47.5 x 91 cm, 2013
 © anet norval 2013

Basquiat and I both reference popular culture in our work. Basquiat, as mentioned before, uses imagery such as Batman and Popeye where I use imagery such as Atari.

Like Basquiat, many of my works can be described as Neo-expressionist. Neo-Expressionism as described by Smith (1992), is a process of hybridization where distinctions between painting and drawing, abstraction and representation and high art and popular culture are blurred.

Resonance with Tracey Emin.

I have always been drawn to the confessional truth-telling work of Tracey Emin, and the intensity that she approaches her work with and the commitment she has to it.

The way Emin translates her subject matter and themes into the correct mediums to convey her message, and often to contradict notions has a strong appeal to me. She effortlessly moves between mediums and successfully translates artworks from one medium to the next. For example how she translates her monoprint and drawings into embroidery. Emin has also successfully transcended the traditional mediums of the great masters and artists and voices openly what many can't or won't.

Her themes are highly personal. She explores her childhood through jagged narratives revealing trauma, abuse and confusion. She uses a childlike retelling, which emphasizes the innocence lost. By refusing to separate her life and her art making, and by fusing together her autobiography and art, Emin creates a world where personal truth telling moves beyond the meta-culture into a collective catharsis.

Both Emin and I work with an unexpected contrast, Emin's childlike manner in creating adult content and my 'glorification' of negativity.

As I have always used text and mostly my own handwriting in my own work as a sub layer of clues I leave for my audiences, I find resonance in most of Emin's work containing text (which is a large part of it). I connect with the immediate and visceral honesty she uses. The directness of the *phrases* she

uses and the manner in which it either comes across as blame, a scolding, or a love note to some lost lover. The direct address of most of her texts, as if she is directing it at a particular person is very much a way I also employ texts in my work.



Figure 45. Tracey Emin
As always
Embroidery on fabric
25.8 x 29.3 cm (framed) , 2005
© Tracey Emin, 2006



Figure 46. anet norval
Succumb
Spray paint and oil on canvas
21 x 10.5 cm, 2013
© anet norval, 2013

In Emin's as well as my work, there is constant searching for a true identity and belonging. Emin's honest approach to her emotions and mediums reflect in the way her autobiography is presented, raw and visceral. Emin speaks about her art as being emotional. She believes emotion is not sentimentality or artificiality. She says that really feeling something deeply is an intellectual experience as well as a visceral one.



Figure 47. Tracey Emin
My Future, 1993-94
Three framed items of memorabilia
20 x 27.3 x 6; 13.6 x 20.3 x 20.5; 29.5 x 20.5 cm
Private Collection
Courtesy Jay Jopling/ White Cube London

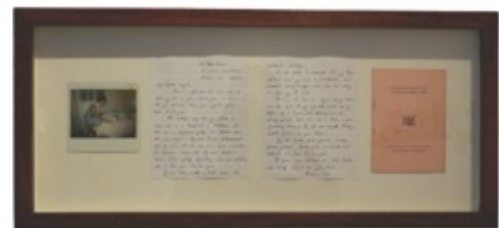


Figure 48. anet norval
Baba Briewe
Photograph, letter, immunization
60 x 20 cm (framed), 2013
© anet norval, 2013

In the attempt to find resonance with each artist I have not only found similarities but have also been inspired by each artist throughout my art making career. Each artist has informed my approach to art making, visually and emotionally.

Shameless attempt at self-promotion

As I have discovered, all three artists I have researched and analyzed as my case studies were (and still are) extremely successful at self-promotion. Being in touch with current popular culture and mass media is key to gaining some attention and fame.

For my exhibition I have employed several media channels to access the greatest amount of audience members as possible. Taking my cue from the case studies, I have embarked on several marketing strategies by using current popular avenues. Modern day technology has made it much easier to access a larger audience. With social media and online networks gaining popularity, causing hype and promoting one's work can be run from an office or even more convenient a smartphone. In this day and age, online social media has become an important avenue of communication; therefore, as part of my own campaign, my first contact point was Facebook. I created a Facebook event, combined it with artSPACE Durban as a host to the event and created hype through daily posts of images of work as well as a daily count down to the opening of the show along with Facebook reminders, I employed Twitter as well as LinkedIn to invite and remind individuals of the opening event as well as start a blog.

In a more traditional sense I designed and printed invites, which were left at local galleries, art supply shops as well as handed out to individuals. I also created an email invite, which was sent to databases and several of my contacts.

Not only does the self-promotion play a large role in gaining recognition, there are other contributing factors such as medium, subject matter and how it is presented that add to the overall event. Connecting with the audience through popular culture and imagery that speaks of universal issues is an important factor to consider.

Through this process of unpacking and analysis factors, which have impacted on my art making, I have discovered some truths, established various aspects and have found resonance with three very influential artists.

I incorporate various mediums, methods and approaches in order to avoid classification under artistic medium or movement. I constantly and continuously explore and experiment with different mediums and approaches to art making.

Even though the work I create is highly personal, it does deal with universal concepts such as love, heartbreak, relationships and loss. I include and employ well known 'artifacts' in order to contextualize the work but also to connect with the audience on a personal/ social level. Many of the 'artifacts' evoke a deep sense of melancholy or nostalgia thereby forging another link with the audience.

Through the research I have become aware that translating an autobiography into visual art does influence and/or change the initial narrative, but I have also discovered that the narrative is in constant flux, depending on circumstance, experiences and the present moment.

I have discovered that instead of embellishing my autobiography I present it in an obscure manner allowing for ambiguous interpretations from the audience. As much as I find joy in narrating my life to the world through visuals, I have no urge to pursue a celebrity artist career. The fame bug did not bite.

CHAPTER 5: *From zero to hero* A causal analysis.

Of self-creation, in our time, there is no end.

- Richard Schickel, 2000

Being a celebrity artist in this day and age has its advantages. Career-wise and economically speaking, it has a much more successful and lucrative outcome, not to mention other advantages such as being invited to exhibit internationally, being invited to judge competitions, or becoming a brand ambassador for famous brands.

As a means to better understand the complex composition of influences and causes, which lead to the making of a celebrity artist, in this chapter I will conduct a causal analysis. The purpose of a causal analysis is to determine whether or not a cause-and-effect relationship actually exists (Dietsch, 2000).

When conducting a causal analysis, establishing the contributing factors is paramount to the rest of the process, in fact determining *what* the cause-and-effect relationship consists of is most important. According to Dietsch (2000) the challenge is to determine what the relationship is through establishing influences, ascertaining the impact of the cause and thereafter evaluating the result (the effect). Through this process any alternate explanations can be eradicated thereby substantiating the original enquiry.

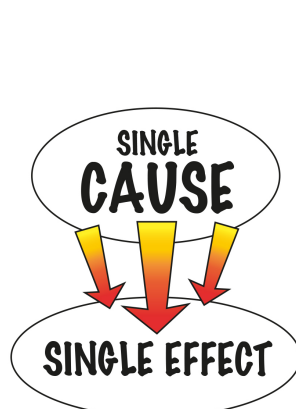


Diagram 3. Single Cause with one Effect
© anet norval 2013

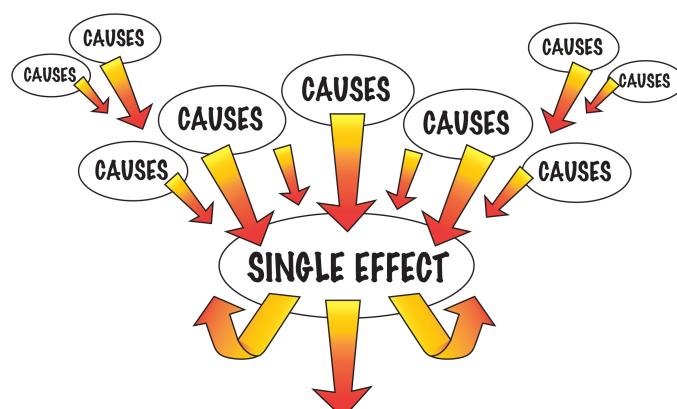


Diagram 4. Multiple Causes with one Effect
© anet norval 2013

Through this enquiry I have established various factors, which are all possible causes leading to one ultimate effect, *the celebrity artist*. Whether an artist consciously decides to pursue a career in the limelight or not, the possibility of becoming famous depends on a series of variables which fluctuate according to demand of the media, society and the artist. There are several factors that artists can possibly employ to gain celebrity status. The research has deduced the following factors, illustrated in Diagram 5. (I need to however point out that the factors and how the individual employs it fluctuate depending on the artist in question.)

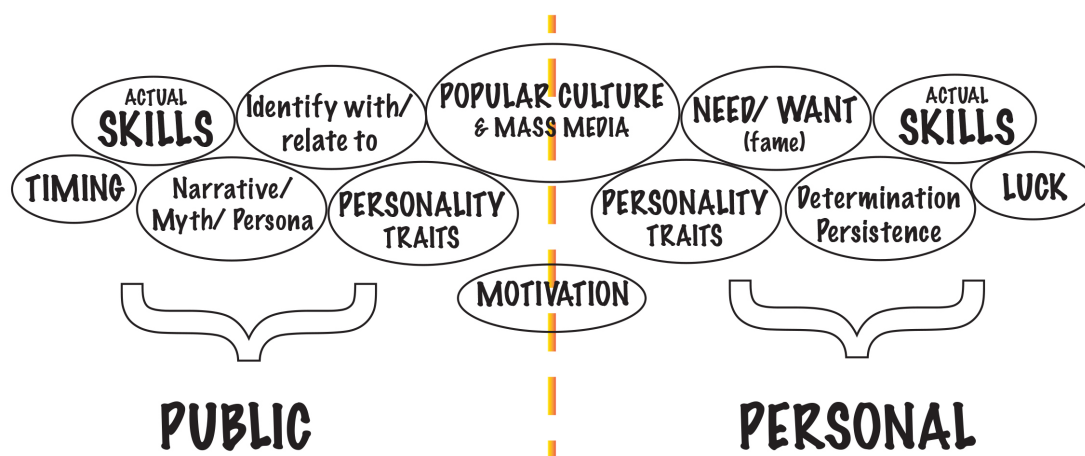


Diagram 5. Diagram illustrating the various factors, which contribute to the creation of a Celebrity Artist
© anet norval, 2013

Firstly, a conscious decision to pursue a celebrity career is an important factor to establish. Is there a pre-meditated plan to achieve celebrity status? Does the individual have a great knowledge of popular culture, mass media and how these avenues can be used to their advantage? The individual should somehow have an inherent need to become famous. This need will enable the individual to employ through possible determination and persistence, their knowledge of popular culture and mass media to appeal to the general population and thereby become famous. Obvious other factors include; actual skill in their art, strong personality traits, a possible myth/ narrative or persona which is often fabricated to make the individual stand out (Schickel, 2000).

Diagram 5 (above), illustrates the various factors and causes which could possibly influence an individual to pursue a celebrity career. I have attempted to establish which factors and causes are internal (personal) and which

factors and causes are external (public). Some of the factors and causes are internal as well as external. Motivation, popular culture and mass media however, bridge the gap between internal and external. Popular culture and mass media have assisted in the creation and maintaining of the celebrity artist (Gabler, n.d). The idea of the famous and successful artist has been forged through television, magazines and press (Schickel, 2000). Celebrity artists have learned to employ the press tactics to their advantage, not only to promote their work but themselves as well. This indicates a sense of motivation, whereby the individual is internally motivated (by themselves) as well as externally motivated (by other individuals) to pursue a career as a celebrity

When conducting this causal analysis there are many variances to consider. Firstly one needs to establish whether one event, condition or situation led to another and whether there was more than one cause, then determine how the change occurred and lastly what the outcome was. In the attempt to establish a credible equation for the cause-and-effect relationship, I have processed the following possibilities. For reference sake, I will refer to *equation 1* (diagram 6), *equation 2* (diagram 7) and *equation 3* (diagram 8).

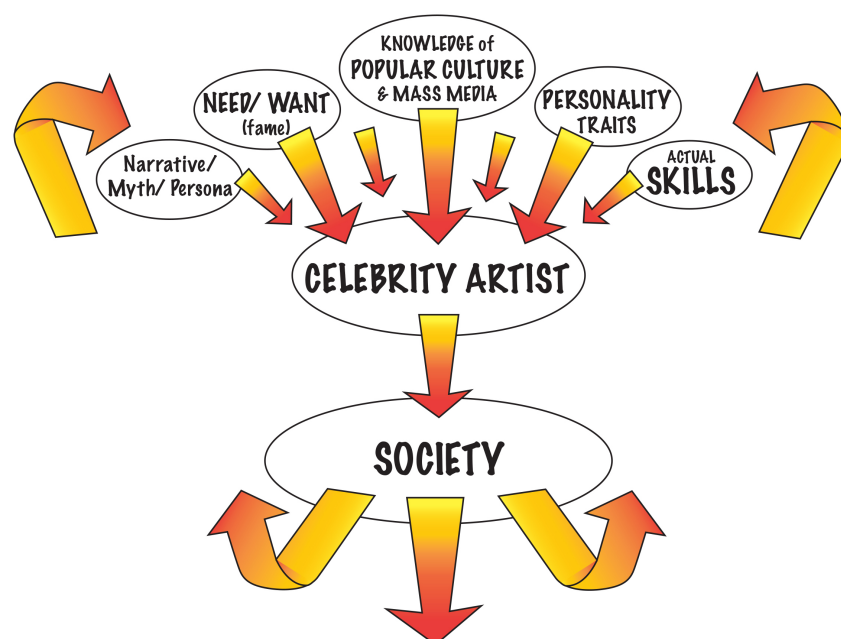


Diagram 6. Diagram illustrating the various cause of the celebrity artist (1)
© anet norval, 2013

Upon reflection, *equation 1* seems incomplete and too naïve to represent the complex nature and process that enables an individual to become and remain a celebrity artist. It is a one dimensional and linear representation of the cause-and-effect relationship.

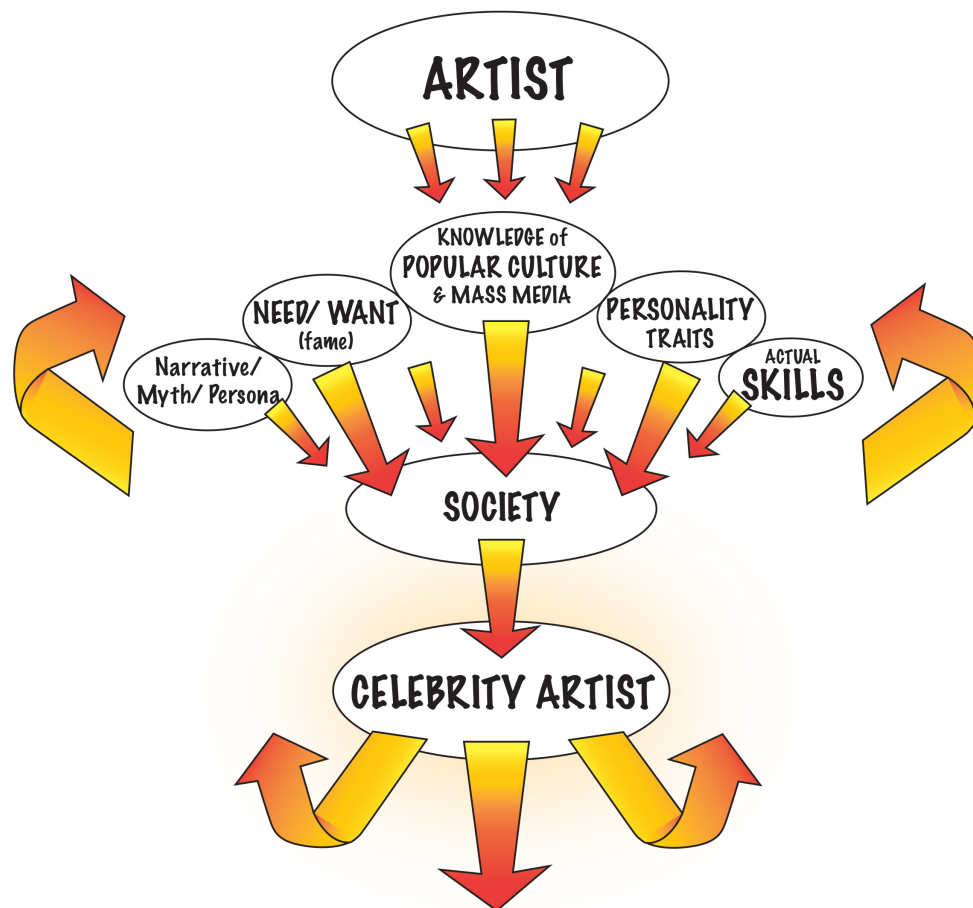


Diagram 7. Diagram illustrating the various causes of the celebrity artist (2)
© anet norval, 2013

Equation 2 presents a more credible attempt in establishing the possible factors and causes. It includes an extra dimension illustrating the transformation into a celebrity artist whilst implicating society as a core factor and influence. The process, according to the research is a much more complex series of events which includes personal and public causes and factors that could possibly influence an individual into pursuing a celebrity career.

In the attempt to understand the complex intricacies of this phenomenon, I have combined the information from previous diagrams to construct, in my opinion, the equation that reflects the process most realistically.

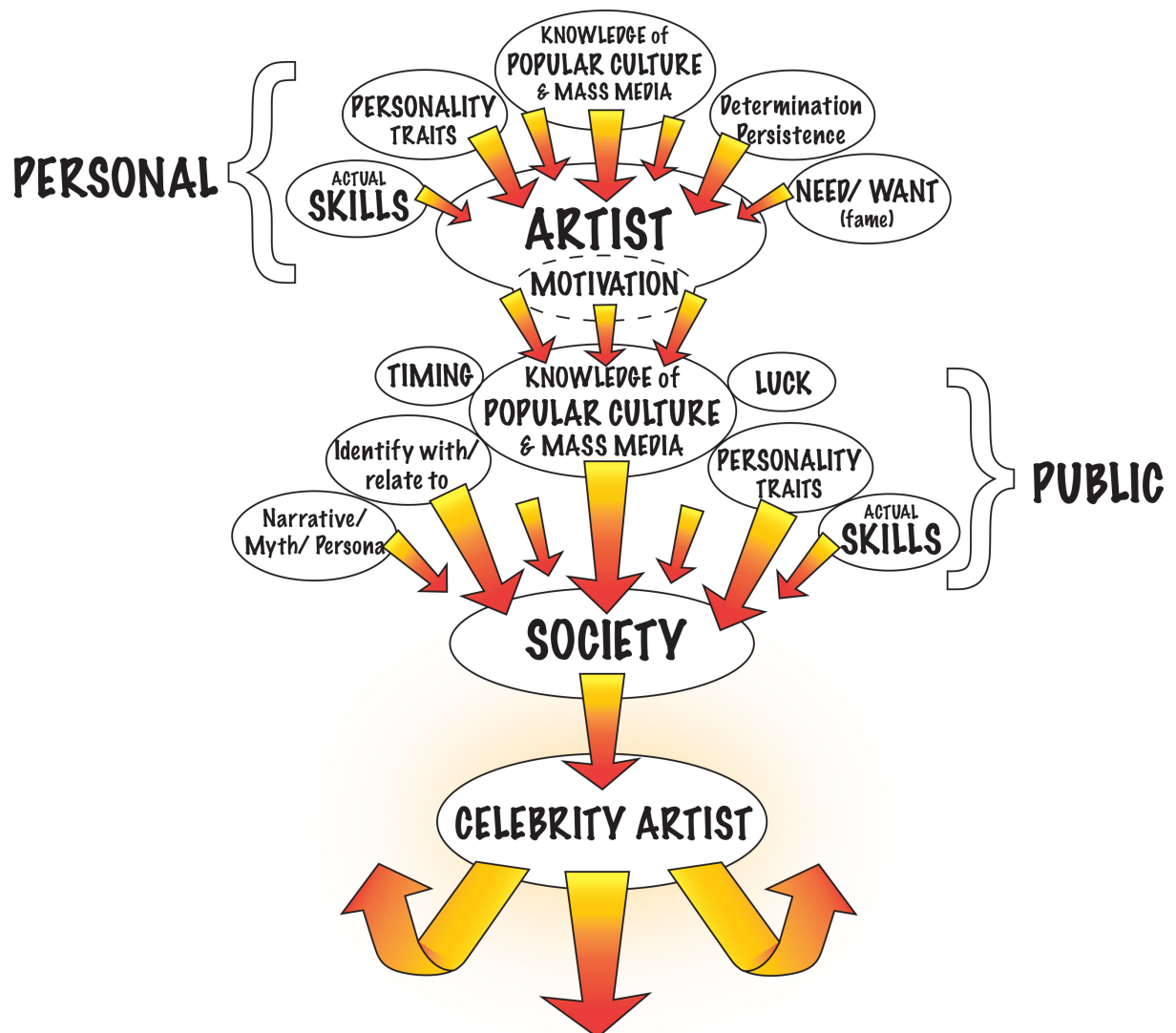


Diagram 8. Diagram illustrating the various causes of the celebrity artist (3)
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Equation 3, represents the public and personal causes and factors and how these influence the individual at certain points within the process. As I have mentioned earlier, there are certain factors in place such as determination and the need to become famous, which should influence the individual first before they embark on creating a persona and so forth. All the factors and causes do however also depend on motivation. It has become apparent that an individual needs the motivation to actually set a celebrity career in motion, mostly

followed by determination and persistence. Motivation is therefore a key factor. This equation provides a credible approach as to how the process of the cause-and-effect relationship functions.

By unpacking the cause-and-effect relationship of each of the selected artists we can establish their *modus operandi*. I do however believe the outcome would be rather complex and not an expected one-dimensional, straight forward formula.

After establishing the determining factors through the research, I have created a checklist in the form of a table that reflects whether or not these factors were present in the rise to fame of the selected artists.

| | | Warhol | Basquiat | Emin |
|---------------------------------|--|--------|----------|------|
| F A C T O R S | People identify with/ or relate to | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Narrative | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Myth | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Persona | ✓ | | |
| | A Knowledge of Popular Culture & Mass Media | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Personality Traits: Ego, Narcissist or Exhibitionist | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Need / Want to be famous | ✓ | ✓ | |
| | Actual Skills | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Determination/ Persistence | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Timing | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Luck | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Motivation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Table 1. Factors Checklist
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The research has substantiated the possible orchestrations and embellishments artists employ to achieve celebrity status. It has however also introduced several internal as well as external factors, which fluctuate, shift and change the outcome as well as the origins of *the celebrity artist*. In the attempt to find one possible situation or circumstance I have discovered several possibilities.

An important factor that has become apparent throughout this enquiry is the presence of popular culture and mass media; it's influence on the individual and the general public. An obvious assimilation would be that celebrity artists would not have originated if there were no such thing as popular culture and mass media and the influence it has on an individual and the general population.

CONCLUSION: *Take a Bow*

There indeed is a vast difference between a story told and a *great* story told. As a species, humans seem to possess an inherent need to share narratives and the possibility to gain fame because of it, in itself is an intriguing subject, one that has been a pivotal part of this enquiry.

In the attempt to establish how artists translate their autobiographies into their chosen media and whether they construct identities and narratives that could attain enough media attention to gain celebrity status this enquiry has incorporated a broad investigation into contemporary social sciences, philosophy and psychology, media studies and history of art.

Stemming from the title of this dissertation, *Autobiographical Narratives: An investigation into the artist as celebrity*, as well as my personal and professional interest in popular culture, mass media and narratives, I established two theories of possibilities.

1. *Artists possibly embellish their life stories; construct public identities and personas whilst strategically employing their knowledge of popular culture and mass media to gain celebrity status and fame.*
2. *The discourse of autobiography relies strongly on how and what the narrator chooses to reveal and how the audience receive as well as perceive it.*

It was however soon deduced that both theories of possibilities comprised of several multi-layered subtexts and in order to successfully comprehend these notions, the research had to be conducted and presented in a certain order. In the attempt to guide the process, the following questions were intended to establish contexts of relevance.

1. What is a celebrity?
2. What is an autobiography and narrative?
3. What is the link between celebrity, mass media and popular culture?
4. What could influence an individual to want to be famous?
5. Which aspects need to be present to create a celebrity?

6. How does memory affect the way a story is told?

By means of secondary research I have established an understanding of the phenomenon of celebrity, what constitutes a celebrity artist and whether it is possible for an individual to embellish or even construct a narrative, which could gain them fame.

The phenomenon of the celebrity artist is something we as a society have witnessed over the decades. Earliest celebrity artists date back to when artists were believed to have a gift bestowed upon them from the gods to be able to recreate likenesses so real that the audience was in pure disbelief. Artists were also believed to be the direct storytellers of the gods. The phenomenon of the celebrity artist has however been amplified during the twentieth and twenty first century because of mass media and popular culture.

It has been established that memories and autobiographies seldom materialize exactly as it happened initially. This is due to various factors which influence the narrator and how an audience perceives the narrative. The moment a memory is externalized it is changed from a personal experience to a cultural artifact – meaning other individuals attempt to relate to the narrative thereby reading it in their own terms. Another factor that influences an audience and the narrator is the manner and circumstances in which the narrative is shared, the narrator can elicit a certain reaction from the audience because of how the story is presented.

Through discussing the autobiographies, rise to fame and how their work has been received by society I have introduced three celebrity artists, Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Tracey Emin. By using these three artists as case studies, along with the knowledge I have gained with regards to celebrity, fame, narrative and so on, I was able to conduct a causal analysis where I explored the possibility of the need to become a celebrity as a base from where these artist have constructed their identity.

The process included an in-depth exploration to gain an understanding of each artist's biography, their claim to fame and their attempts to achieve celebrity statuses (if there are any). According to the insights gained through

this enquiry, becoming a *celebrity artist* relies on a combination of various factors, personality traits and society. Although the combinations may differ slightly, all the components are important and have ensured success for each of these artists.

A crucial factor, which all three artists have shown, is an understanding of popular culture and mass media. Warhol, Basquiat and Emin have all managed to tap into their era's culture and use it to their advantage. It appears they are all well aware of the power of mass media and popular culture, independently; they have all cultivated an image and created a myth, which they present(ed) to and maintain(ed) for the media. Along with having the right mix of ego, narcissism, understanding of the popular culture, determination and creating a myth, all three artists have pioneered various techniques, mediums and styles that have made them the frontrunners of their time and famous as a result.

My enquiry furthermore assisted me in engaging with my own studio practice, which allowed me to find resonance, draw comparisons and learn from the three selected artists. Through my studio practice inquiry I have critically engaged with my themes, choice of medium, choice of imagery and have had to reflect on how I narrate my own story.

In the attempt to locate a specific *modus operandi* which artists follow to become celebrity artists I have discovered many different interwoven processes, which are particular to specific artists.

In conclusion, several factors and causes influence an individual to pursue a celebrity career this however does not mean all individuals crave a place in the spotlight. As a result of the research Andy Warhol is presented as an individual who consciously created a persona through which he became famous. Jean-Michel Basquait is presented as an individual who was determined to be famous, pursuing a celebrity status with persistence. Tracey Emin is presented as an individual who *by-the-way* stumbled into art stardom.

There however is a subtext, which runs parallel to the above-mentioned ascension to fame. All three artists are in actual fact motivated to be

successful, and know how to engage with the general population, depending on what they set out to do.

Both theories of possibilities have been substantiated through extensive research and exploration. Yes, some artists embellish their biographies to increase their celebrity status or construct personas and myths to appeal to the general population where others share only part of their stories. It is however not a cut and dried case of one or the other, thus the issue remains comfortably in the grey area.

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APPENDICES

REAR VIEW: ART

Remembering to forget

Artist Anet Norval brings her very personal narrative into the public space of the gallery, writes **Peter Machen**

"BREAKING UP IS NEVER easy." So go the words to the 1976 Abba song *Knowing Me, Knowing You*, which has been unfortunately lodged in my head since seeing Anet Norval's latest exhibition, *Epilogue/Naskrif* now on show at ArtSpace Durban.

I shouldn't blame Norval, though, for the canniness of the songwriters, and while she works in a territory that could be considered pop, her aesthetic is a very different one from that of the Swedish supergroup, favouring grit over glamour and intimacy over epic.

At the same time Norval's work does capture some of the bittersweet tonalities and ambiguities at the heart of so much pop music.

For the past few years, Norval has painted the narrative of her own life on to large canvases in which the backgrounds, textured with dripped paint and layers of sometimes dirty colour, threaten to overwhelm her subjects. Although her treatment

echoes some of the narratives of modern art, these meta-narratives are contrasted with the evidently highly personal nature of her own tale; short stories reminiscent of Raymond Carver superimposed on to the arc of art history.

In her current exhibition, far smaller canvases than we have come to expect from Norval predominate, although she tells me these small pieces are a temporary detour and that she is returning to her use of larger canvases and dirtied white space.

But the extension of her own life into the gallery continues. Where her last few exhibitions dealt with her relationship with her absent father and her memories while exploring the construction of masculinity and femininity, this latest show says goodbye to the father complex and, at the same time, bids farewell to a lover, someone with whom she has had a relationship for the past five years. *Epilogue/Naskrif* is an



Anet Norval's confessional art – *Fortress I had to Burn* (above) and (right) detail from *Reality Killed the Cowboy*.



autopsy of an aftermath.

For Norval, this break-up comes as a release and a relief, although it seems that the same is not true for her former lover. And while the work is intensely personal – in some ways confessional – she asked me not to write about the explicit meaning of some of the more oblique works. This is partially a secret narrative told in public, but also a very public ending of a relationship. If this seems like a strange kind of revenge, that's not the case when talking to Norval. Instead, it's about resolution.

This kind of confessional art exists in an age where people are prepared to broadcast the most intimate details of their private life on to the public space of the internet. But while the work is no

This is partially a secret narrative told in public, but also a very public ending of a relationship

doubt linked to an age of self-exhibitionism, Norval's paintings are not exhibitionist or sensationalist. Instead they point to smaller, more poignant narratives, particularly the conflict between reality and our profoundly human desire to self-mythologise.

If, as the saying goes, everyone in the dream is you, then in ending her obsession with her father, Norval must, on some level, have healed a part of her self, or at least decided that she was healed, and it's possible that this is linked to her break-up.

One of the central pieces in the show, titled *Reality Killed the Cowboy*, shows a cowboy standing trigger-ready. He appears to be looking down at his own shadow which is disappearing, literally being washed away by the painter. The effect is of a fictional character pondering his own demise, a demise that involves not death, but more simply and absolutely the end of existence.

While Norval is kicking her dad out of her stable of iconography, her mother (whom I met at the show's opening) is entering the picture, representing most obviously a return to the feminine, and perhaps subconsciously the notion of rebirth – which might sound a little high-falutin', but it's something many people embark on in the aftermath of a relationship. It's just that they don't usually do it on the walls of a gallery...

Epilogue/Naskrif is on show at ArtSpace Durban until next Saturday.

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