

**PERFORMATIVITY IN ART AS RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE  
SELF IN ADDRESSING CONDITIONS OF DEPRESSION**

**by**

**Vicki Alexandra Ross van Wyk**

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**SUPERVISOR: Dr J. Roome**  
**CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr K. Wells**

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## ABSTRACT:

The motivation for this research results from the notion that art-making is a regenerative enriching process that can counteract the sense of dislocation that one suffers as a consequence of depression. The study has two objectives: to open a discourse around the transformative function of art for a person suffering depression; and challenge notions of dominant constructed ideals of normality by presenting alternative realities of the performative mind.

*From the earliest memories of my life, I knew I did not fit in,  
I was not part of the crowd.*

Depression has been my companion ever since I can remember. The intention for this self-study is to interrogate the ways in which art can become a self-actualising process in coping with depression. The content for this research deals with *narratives of the mind*, that is, my understanding of *who I am*. I have therefore, positioned myself as the pivot for this research, drawing on authentic personal experiential knowledge. This autobiographical phenomenological study is thus a self-reflexive exploration addressing concepts of *difference* and *belonging* in relation to social constructs of acceptability.

The study looks at contemporary concepts of multiple selves, relationality and the application of therapeutic methodologies within art practice. Art-making becomes games of truth, mind games that offer alternative realities and possibilities for the construction of complex, multi-faceted narratives as dialogues between the self and the inner critic. Of importance is the concept that *self* is not a fixed conclusive notion but one that continues to unfold, shift and become a multi-layered construct. These new narratives examine *how* creativity enables or creates a sense of *belonging* or re-positioning of one's states of mind. The overall intention of the art-making process is its potential for transformative self-recovery processes – the re-construction of who we are, rather than how we are perceived.

This research thus examines the notion of *belonging in this world* through body/land enactments of ritualised behaviour. The body as metaphor investigates rites of passage as the re-tellings of one's story within specific body/site/space relationships. The ideal of connection to site is central as a means of renewal and recovery – these performative relationships become the creative meaning-making processes of locating or positionality.

In support of these ideas and concepts, the work of Ana Mendieta, Magdalena Abakanowicz and Suzanne Lacy are considered in relation to ideals of positionality and as reflecting each artist's ethics or paradigms of equality. Artworks are examined against the notion of locating oneself within social contexts. The aim is to question the intention and outcomes of art-making as social function in dealing with issues of marginalisation and stigma.

Performativity, personal writings/reflections and memory drawings are the quintessential tools of my art-making. The written psychological renderings and unravellings of my mind, questionings that are both reflexive and critical, are intentionally presented in dialogical, conversational and direct modes. This *personal tone* aims to allow a scope into my mind – it is my perspective from the *inside*, my *voice*, my personal understanding of the potential of art as a metaphorical process of transformation.

Lacy asserts that the artist becomes a witness, reporter and analyst for socio-culturally biased concerns; a performance gives public articulation and permission to speak out loud, gives voice to internal dialogues, reveal information that requires questioning and that personal individual experience has profound social implications. Lacy believes that it is an innate human need to reflect on the meaning of one's life and one's work (2010:176-177).

Central to the findings of this study, are both the transgressive and transformative functions of art.

**KEY WORDS:**

Autobiographical, belonging, depression, disengagement, embodied experience, function of art, games of truth, interconnectedness, multiple selves, performativity, practice-led research, re-authoring the self, reflexivity, ritualised behaviour/enactments, self-study, transformation.

## **DECLARATION**

I, Vicki Alexandra Ross van Wyk, declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All information quoted or paraphrased from any source (either printed or online), has been referenced with due acknowledgements. This work has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

**Name:** Vicki Alexandra Ross van Wyk

**Date:**

**Student Number:** 22141400

## **APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION:**

**Dr J. Roome:**

**Date:**



## PREFACE

This preface is in accordance with the requirements of the Visual Arts Department, Faculty of Art and Design.

The following conventions have been used in this dissertation:

- The DUT Harvard Method has been used for the Bibliography as set out in the DUT Library Guide, 2013;
- Quotations marks “ – ” have been used in direct quotes in the text;
- Single quotation marks ‘ – ’ have been used for a quotation within a quotation;
- Longer quotes at the beginning of the Introduction and Chapters 2 and 4 commence with quotations which exceed the accepted length of an epigraph and have been formatted accordingly;
- Long quotes have been placed in double indentations without quotation marks with citations placed in brackets after the quote, followed by a full stop;
- Citations<sup>1</sup> in the text have been consistently placed after the author’s name except in direct quotes where date and page number are placed in brackets after the quotation marks followed by a full stop;
- Artworks with full empirical data, have been recorded in the List of Illustrations<sup>2</sup>;
- All italicised *words*, *phrases* and *reflections* are my own personal writings and/or written equivalents to *emotive experiences* of performative works;
- Exceptions to italicised text: italicised words in direct quotations or my emphasis of quotes which are stated as thus;
- The length of the text in this dissertation is within the stipulated maximum count of 20,000 words excluding the bibliography;

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<sup>1</sup> I have consulted the Harvard Method reference guides from DUT, UP, UCT, UJ and various other online sources with reference to the placement of ‘in text’ citation. All differ in one aspect or another.

<sup>2</sup> I found no comprehensive DUT reference information for the listing of artworks. I have thus complied this list according to Unisa’s Visual Arts Department’s Harvard Method Reference Techniques, 2013, for referencing of Artworks.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Many terms used throughout this study need to be interpreted intertextually within the context of both the theoretical and practical components as they are closely linked to each other conceptually. Various concepts are used as abstract notions that developed as a result of my research and are thus inter-linked and often contain a duality, multiplicity or overlay of meanings. As interpretations of some concepts are philosophical and abstract in nature, italics is used to infer multiple elusive meanings of ideas. Words and phrases written in italics (except in direct quotes) convey my personal inferences of indefinable or complex notions related specifically to this research.

### **Absence/presence:**

Absence references presence; presence becomes absence. Memory is seen as a record of both absence and presence. This duality is also contained in the stains/traces/remnants of performative enactments and carry the memory of these acts. Absence/presence is inherent in the notion of *being in this world*.

### **Abstraction (in artworks):**

Abstraction/simplification allows materiality and visual tactile qualities of media to become metaphorical content. Meaning is embedded in art-making processes such as the quality of the mark-making, application of the media, the fluidity of ink or the rawness of sand, rather than in a recognisable image. Emotive content is inherent in the obsessive repetition of making.

### **All-time-at-once/layered time:**

The idea of layered time seems to me to follow Eliade's and Jung's universalising theories of past consciousness or the collective unconscious that stressed the transcultural and ahistorical unity of humanity including rituals, cyclical time and the importance of spiritual life across civilizations. These concepts are also inherent in Aboriginal cosmology in which past, present and future time and place all exist together as layered time in an overall space (Taylor, 2008:169).

### **Autobiography:**

Autobiographies are personal revelations and self-dramatisations made public. The idea of truth in self-representation or a self-portrait of the self by the self, is relative and tells a story, as understood by the person and often incorporates a confessional element. An autobiography is a witness to one's self and one's existence. However, 'truth' is not a fixed reality, it is conditioned by either a person's or society's understanding or perspective of the truth and may be very different from what the next person understands. In autobiography, in particular, truth is a complex notion of relativity and positionality.

***Belonging/locating/being in the world:***

A sense of belonging is fundamental to human nature and affects the way we live. This study inherently accepts this notion of *being in the world* as essential to our psychological well-being incorporating body, mind and soul/psyche/spirit. *Belonging* is not merely a matter of belonging to a group or family but is intrinsic to our sense of *self*, to our completeness and existence. How we position ourselves in society is often related to other people's perspective of who we are rather than our own understanding of ourselves. In this study, a body/land relationship becomes a metaphor for locating or accepting oneself.

**Body/land relationship:**

In this study, the metaphorical implications of a body/land relationship become the essence of existence. A connection to site equates a sense of *being*, of *belonging*. This relationship becomes a renewal of one's own acceptance of *self*. Each new body/land relationship establishes a renewal. The body/land relationship sets up its own dialogue within the immediate surroundings between body/material/time/space that identifies particularity in creating an emotive context while the performative act within the site constructs both traces of being and layers of transformation.

**Collective unconscious:**

A Jungian theory of a universal consciousness predating the individual. Simply put, Jung saw the psyche as made up of layers or strata. Kazlev (2004) explains: First, there is the *conscious mind* composed of conscious perceptions, memories, thoughts and feelings. Second, is the *personal unconscious* made up of suppressed and forgotten memories, traumas, et cetera and psychic contents that are too weak to reach consciousness. Jung describes the *personal unconscious* or 'the intuition' as being directly related to the experiences of a person. Third, is the deeper *collective unconscious* that is universal and predates the individual person. It is "the repository [sic] of all the religious, spiritual, and mythological symbols and experien[tial structures]". Jung claims that these structures or *archetypes* are inherited biological realities where the conceptual patterns behind all our religious and mythological concepts exist (2004:1-2).

**Concepts:**

Ideas developed throughout this study often contain a duality of an idea. For this reason, certain concepts are written using an alternative italicised format that divides the word into its two components in order to imply/emphasise its binary or contradictory meaning – *[dis]-[engagement]*, *[dis]-[order]*, *[dis]-[connection]*. They are not definitions/explanations nor are they definitive but encompass ideas of interrelatedness within two actions of the idea (see *[dis]-[engagement]*).

**Connectedness/connectivity:**

Connectedness relates to the universal concept of the interconnectedness of all things and thus the need for living in harmony with nature. This is the overall notion (inclusive of *belonging*) on which this study is based. It maintains that a change in one element within the universe will affect all other elements – as in the Buddhist theory of Indra's net (Lacy, 2010:xxxvii-xxxviii). A disruption of this connectedness results in disorder and degradation as seen in the exploitation of people/planet. Connectedness within a person refers to the relationship between body, mind and soul and incorporates the idea of wholeness. The discord of one element results in a ruptured *state of being* creating confusion, loss of soul, an insufficiency of self or symptoms of depression.

**Cultural conditioning:**

Cultural conditioning is based on the dominant supposition or paradigm of a culture. Each culture or group/tribe develops its own set of standards, ethics and acceptable behaviour – these become the constructed norms which society is conditioned to accept from childhood. Such societal control has led to prejudice and intolerance toward those who cannot, for one reason or another, conform to these constructed social standards.

**Depression:**

Although this study refers to depression/bipolar depression, it is to be understood that sufferers of most mental disorders are afflicted by similar depressive symptoms, stigma and marginalisation. Depression is a complex mental illness caused by biological, physiological, psychological and social factors including stress, anxiety, poverty, abuse, illness, loss and rejection/inability to ‘fit in’, among others. There are effective solutions to managing depression including knowledge, medication, support, healthy eating and exercise. However, the fear of being labelled is a major obstacle to seeking help and many people (particularly men) hide their illness.

The World Health Organisation’s classification of symptoms include: sadness/melancholia, lethargy, hopelessness, worthlessness, excessive guilt, obsessiveness, difficulties with decisions, memory, concentration, loss of interest, energy, changes in sleep patterns, changes in weight, relationship problems, isolation, thoughts of death, suicide, anxiousness, unusual fear or feelings of panic, amongst others (WHO, 2012).

**Difference/difference:**

Difference is to be understood as a person being described as being ‘other’ to socially constructed norms of acceptability resulting from any mental or physical afflictions as well as any personality trait or issue that makes the onlooker feel uncomfortable. *Difference* (in italics) on the other hand, is an alternative abstract concept of a particular state of mind in depression. It deals specifically with self-denial and feeling unacceptably *different* physically, mentally, intellectually and socially. This mind-set stems from one’s own negative sense of self, social rejection and other alienating conditions that result in stigmatisation and marginalisation. Italic font is used as *difference* refers to an elusive, fragile and destructive perception or notion of oneself – you are conditioned to accept *who people you think you are* as a result of suffering from depression.

**Disconnectedness/[Dis]-[connectedness]:**

In this study, disconnectedness is synonymous with a ‘disruption of the mind’ or psychosis: a mind in a state of discord between body, mind and soul as in depression. Symptoms would be disorientation or confusion, anxiety, detachment, lethargy, et cetera. Disconnectedness would evoke feelings of not belonging or being out-of-place, being out-of-control, *different* or alienated. Traditional cosmologies claim human’s need for harmony or connectedness – a disruption of this creates dis-ease. *[Dis]-[connectedness]* on the other hand, is used as a term for consciously separating oneself from others in order to connect with the self – see *[dis]-[engagement]*.

**[Dis]-[engagement]:**

Christine Ross (2006) describes disengagement as an aesthetic in which conscious thinking patterns are ruptured as in a depressed state of confusion. In this study, *[dis]-[engagement]* is an abstract concept in which I physically or mentally separate myself

from either people or a particular space in order to engage fully with my *self*, to re-locate my *sense of self*. It is a positive and conscious decision of separation or mental action of placing myself in a detached mind-set or psychological safe-zone as a coping mechanism in dealing with depression or self-denial. It is not a negative condition but a preferred circumstance and is not to be confused with alienation or marginalisation. *I [dis]-[engage] in order to engage the self.*

### **Embodied experience:**

In my art-making processes the body is the site of personal, physical and mental experiences such as: trauma/chaos; *difference* as when covered in clay/sand/pigment; ritualised behaviour as representation of another *self*; and the public/outside/vulnerable body versus the private intimate *self-body*. These experiences become embodied knowledge.

### **Insufficiency of self:**

This is a mind-set in which one takes on feelings of worthlessness. This is mostly due to self-denial or the *inner-critic* that are major obstructions in the transformative process to well-being for people suffering from mental disorders. This is a state of mind incorporating shame and guilt, of an individual who appropriates the negative self-image given to him/her by others, claiming the stigma – the person thus becomes complicit in his/her victimisation and becomes both ‘the victim’ and ‘the culprit’.

### **Intertextuality:**

Intertextuality is the shaping of texts’ meaning by other texts or knowledge, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. The nature of this practice-led research has required the use of various modes of communication in both the theoretical and practical components. These multiple modes of exchange need to be assimilated against each other – they are not isolated, they are the entanglements of the ‘whole’ – one modifies the other in interpretation. Different approaches to styles and tones of *my voice* have been employed, including *writings*, *reflections*, art-making, performativity and projections. These voices are formal and analytical, dialogical, conversational, diaristic, poetic, questioning, reflective and manic. Writings on the walls in an ‘interactive studio space’ during the exhibition, will add collaborative *voices* to the cacophony of *silent voices*. Visual storytelling and recorded memories are presented through performative acts and personal writing. The exhibition includes the ‘seen, heard, projected, imagined, tactile and time-based’ renderings of mind-games. The latter are often silent connections between ideas: visual associations, withheld trauma and states of muteness can all become chaos of the mind and a *state of being*. Raw red earth or caked mud silently but convincingly evokes a condition of vulnerability; overlays of *multiple voices* become cacophonous expressions of disruption.

Visual language is thus the interdependency and interrelationship between image, format, media, projections, writings, performative enactments, movement, walking, meditations, idea, inner silence, context, site, sounds, time, space and place.

### **Meaning-making:**

Creative processes are interrogated as conceptual internal transformative actions of self-reflexion, self-declaration and recovery. This study is centred in the visual arts but other fields of creative endeavour are seen as equally able to empower or inspire transformation, for example, performance, dance/movement, cabaret, creative writing,

poetry, music and sounds that evoke an altered mind-set. This altered state is about the embodied experience of emotive mental games of truths (see: mind-games).

**Mind games:**

Mind games and processes of conceptualisation become the main players in creative processes that challenge stigma, self-denial and self-persecution. Michael Foucault (in Loth, 2011:20) speaks about 'mind games' as constructed ideals, particularly dominant social constructs that are political power games that control social patterning. In relation to Foucault's mind games, psychologist, Michael White (in Loth, 2011:29-31) uses the idea of re-constructing oneself by confronting realities through mind games of personal truths.

**Othering/otherness:**

Othering is defined as an action of discrimination towards one person by another but *otherness* or the alienation of oneself, is a mind-set of someone who is marginalised due to mental disorders or other reasons. You allow self-denial to control your mind and you accept the negative self-image others have of you and thus accept feelings of worthlessness. Within this insufficiency of self, a person deals with negative social attitudes, alienation and stigmatisation. (It is acknowledged however, that there are many issues or 'abnormalities' that result from various forms of othering or marginalisation of people.)

***Self:***

The *self* in this study, refers to my whole being - body, mind, soul and spirit - past, present and future. It is the abstract immaterial essence of who I am – this essence of self does not negate the concept of multiple selves. It is a philosophical intangible concept, external to the physical body and for this reason the word is written in italics.

**Site in body/land relationships:**

The land/site is the matrix for connectedness, a whole entity in its spirit of place or 'locus genius'. The site is selected not for where it is but for what it offers in terms of privacy, isolation, media, elements, space, weather and its sense of place: it is an uncontrolled, sometimes remote, environment. For these reasons the geographical coordinates or location are not given – it is to be considered a 'whole entity' in itself without the necessity of a specific location. Thus no geographical locations are given in the List of Illustrations for my artworks.

Within each site there is an inter-zone or in-between space: the connection between two elements both physical and meta-physical - a contested zone always in flux between land, space and body. It is a philosophical mind space where site/space/body merge. In this study, during a performative enactment, the site is a space in which linear time and cyclical time constitute an overlay; these in-between spaces incorporate temporality, interdependence, dispersal, traces and transformation.

***States of being:***

*States of being*, the insufficiency of self, are my personal states of mind – traumatic emotive experiences and debilitating conditions as a result of depression/bipolar disorder. These states are complex intangible emotions that cannot always be explained and are often outside of my conscious understanding. As intangible psychoses and chaos of my mind, the phrase is written in italics as these states of mind are often indiscernible and the causes unfathomable.



## INTRODUCTION

My life is a story of the self-realisation of the unconscious. Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole. I cannot employ the language of science to trace this process of growth in myself, for I cannot experience myself as a scientific problem.

I can understand myself only in the light of inner happenings. It is these that make up the singularity of my life, and with these my autobiography deals.

At such times I *knew* I was worthy of myself, that I was my true self. As soon as I was alone, I could pass over into this state. I therefore sought the peace and solitude of this “Other,” personality No. 2 [Jung’s alternative preferred self] (Jung 1983:17, 19, 62).

This research closely follows psychologist, Carl Jung’s (1983) ideas of ‘the self-realisation of the unconscious’ and the need to understand oneself ‘in the light of inner happenings’. Thus this self-study is an autobiographical interrogation of the *self*<sup>1</sup> and multiple selves through creative practices, drawing on embodied experiences and the subconscious mind.

The aim of this research is to explore the function of art as transformative in addressing

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<sup>1</sup> The *self* in this study refers to my whole being - body, mind, soul and spirit - past, present and future. It is the abstract immaterial essence of who I am. It is a philosophical intangible concept, external to the physical body and for this reason the word is written in italics.

*difference*<sup>2</sup>, *states of being*<sup>3</sup> and *otherness*<sup>4</sup> within depression/bipolar disorder and dominant social constructs<sup>5</sup> of normality and acceptability. The context<sup>6</sup> for this research is personal, political and universal, supported by an alternative global awareness of the need for mindfulness and spiritual healing. The content for this practice-led research deals with notions of *states of being*, *difference*, stigmatisation and separateness<sup>7</sup> within depression as results of not only mental disorders but any ‘uncomfortable’<sup>8</sup> issue that results in othering. Thus creative processes deal with self-reflexion, self-revelation, self-actualisation and transformation within *states of being* or the insufficient self.

The underlying notion in this research is of the *connectedness of all things*, and particularly, of *belonging*<sup>9</sup>. Interconnectedness is seen as the concept of co-relationship that has significant moral, ethical and personal ramifications. Therefore emerging philosophies or alternative underlying paradigms of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are presented that encompass this need for a harmonious co-existence between people and their relationship to nature, ideas of *belonging* and inclusiveness.

Notions of wholeness, that is, body, mind and soul, relate to the philosophical, psychological and emotive contexts for this research and underpin the ideas of *connectedness* and mindfulness. Social science theorist, Brian Roberts (2008) references Maggie O’Neill and Ramaswami Harindranath (2006) as advocating that artists in

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<sup>2</sup> In this study, *difference* deals specifically with a person feeling unacceptably different physically, mentally, intellectually and socially due to self-denial as a result of depression. See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: *difference*.

<sup>3</sup> *States of being*, the insufficiency of self, are my personal states of mind – traumatic emotive experiences and debilitating conditions as a result of self-denial due to depression/bipolar disorder. As with *self*, these states are complex indiscernible emotions that cannot always be explained and are often outside of my conscious understanding or control.

<sup>4</sup> Othering is defined as an action of discrimination towards one person by another but *otherness*, alienation of oneself, the *inner-critic*, is a mind-set of someone who is marginalised and accepts feelings of worthlessness. See Glossary of Terms, page xx: *otherness*.

<sup>5</sup> Cultural conditioning is based on the dominant suppositions or paradigms of a culture. See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: cultural conditioning.

<sup>6</sup> Context in this research is about a mind-set within the condition of depression; abstract notions of the *self*, *belonging* and existence; and an alternative spiritual understanding of our place on this planet.

<sup>7</sup> Separateness is a choice of being alone/solitary or in one’s own space, mentally or physically. It is not a negative condition but a preferred circumstance. See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: *[dis]-[engagement]*.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Uncomfortable’ for the onlooker or person who perceives *difference* or affliction as ‘not normal’. An explanation of depressive symptoms, stigmatisation and other such issues are discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Belonging/locating* can be seen as the opposite to *states of being* – a knowledge that you accept yourself for whom you are and are comfortable within your sense of *self*.

participatory and practice-led research who represent themselves in reflexive and phenomenological research, create “safe spaces for dialogue” and claim: “Biological narratives can heal, empower, challenge and transform our relationship to the past and the future” (in Roberts 2008:16). This supports ideas of alternative emerging philosophies. Cultural theorist, Michael Scott Peck (1988) supports this need for a more positive framework claiming that “we cannot save our skins without saving our souls” (in Gablik, 1993:12). Many contemporary writers<sup>10</sup> who critique critical socio-political agendas, are in agreement with society’s loss of spirit and support the need to heal the world and re-establish its sustainability. My study is located within this philosophical environment.

Depression is a complex notion<sup>11</sup> which in this study, forms the basis of the context, content, concepts and creative methodologies. While it is a known mental disorder, many misconceptions surround this illness as a result of ignorance and secrecy<sup>12</sup>. It is tainted by fear: it cannot be seen; is a psychological mind-set without specific causes; is too complex to define in any neat explanation; and is globally prevalent (World Health Organisation [WHO] 2012; United Nations General Assembly 2012; dNet 2014; Beyond Blue 2014).

While the philosophical context is to be found in alternative emerging ideas of *belonging*, inclusiveness and a coherent people/planet relationship, the psycho-social context lies within socially constructed ideals of conformity, compliance and status that negate any form of difference. *Difference* is measured against these constructs of cultural conditioning. The intention is therefore to question notions of *difference* in *states of being* by challenging social and personal perceptions. This is supported by art critic, Tracy Warr’s (2012:13) claim that artists have always used their bodies as fluid signifying systems to dismantle parameters of norms and disrupt accepted signifiers of identity. Roberts (2008) supports this statement by citing O’Neill and Harindranath (2006) as claiming that artworks are “important psycho-socially ... as narratives of self making,

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<sup>10</sup> Alix (2008), Eliade (1959 in Gablik 1993:49), Gablik (1993), Irish (2010), Jung (1979), Lacy (1996), Lippard (1983), and Oakes (1995) are among the many contemporary authors that present these ideals.

<sup>11</sup> Depression is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> Known as in ‘it exists’ but the general public’s conception of this disorder is extremely vague and little understood. See Glossary of Terms, page xxxv: depression.

fostering ethical communication, producing counter hegemonic discourses and critical texts that may mobilize change ... [and thereby] challenge stereotypes” (in Roberts 2008:16).

Contemporary concepts of *who we are*, are based on notions of multiple *selves* that contradict modernist beliefs of an essential fixed identity. Jung (1979) and Professor of Religion and Metaphysics, Mercea Eliade (1959 in Gablik 1993) speak about the personal unconscious that is directly related to the experiences of a person and the of collective unconscious that is a universal consciousness predating the individual. These shape our understanding of life. Psychiatrist, Michael White’s (2004, 2007 in Loth 2011) and philosopher, Michel Foucault’s (1989 in Loth 2011) concepts of constructed truths are investigated in relation to truths as complex, multi-faceted, constructed narratives. These mind games explore dialogues between the *self* and the *inner-critic* thereby creating new narratives for the *self*.

An autobiographical framework is essential to this study with its intention of working from the *inside*, from personal embodied experiences<sup>13</sup> for an understanding of how transformation takes place. This then is a phenomenological exploration of the *self*. I position myself as the pivot for the theoretical, conceptual and practical research, draw on my realities and become a witness to my existence. Thus, I confront my sense of dislocation, trauma and my materiality – body, mind and soul. However, the dissertation is written in such a way as to afford global interpretations and open readings of situations<sup>14</sup>.

[M]ost people define them[selves] by their physical shape, not their personality, intellect, skills or other qualities which comprise their unique true self. This disenfranchising relationship between body/object and body/subject is their lived norm. ... they live in a dualistic tension between separateness and intimacy. ... A true self is multidimensional, encompassing mind, soul, spirit, will, creativity and self determination [sic], and is something apart from the body (George, 2011:14).

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<sup>13</sup> Embodied experiences are discussed as experiential knowledge in practice-led research: George (2011), González Leah (2003), Lapum (2008), Loth (2011), Roberts (2008), Sullivan (2010) and Taylor (2008).

<sup>14</sup> To ensure that the content is not seen as subjective and overtly personal, statements and explanations are supported by authoritative writings and references.

Although I recognise that feminist politics underscore this research, I do not adopt a feminist framework as the issues are holistic and are not restricted to gender.

The theoretical overview falls within a framework of New Genre Public Art, where public refers to social context and content rather than physical space. Author, artist and cultural activist, Suzanne Lacy (1996:19) defines this form of artist expression as resembling political and social activity but distinguished by aesthetic sensibilities. The issues raised are interdisciplinary, described by cultural theorist, Suzi Gablik as being “not just the intellectual but the emotional, psychological, ethical and spiritual parts of us” (1993:2). In this context, spirituality is secular and understood as the ultimate/immaterial understanding enabling a person to discover the essence of their being and the values by which they live.

The concept of narrative therapy is explored as a framework of self-recovery. White’s theory of narrative therapy (in Loth 2011) deals with the re-authoring of one’s stories through which the perception of *who you are* can be addressed. Creative processes become mind games that challenge how a person is perceived.

Disengaging from the everyday, allows one to re-engage in alternative thoughts. Linked to narrative therapy is the framework of altered realities, particularly through the trance dance of traditional societies<sup>15</sup> as spiritual journeys. This study interrogates a visual art practice of enactments of ritualised behaviour as modes of accessing another mind-set or, on rare occasions, an altered state of consciousness.

Roberts (2008:2-15) explains research as, by, of, or in performance/the performative, as using the skills, purposes, traditions and contexts from the arts, humanities and social sciences. He maintains that there is a need for innovation in the dissemination of research.

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<sup>15</sup> Traditional or primitive societies, early and present-day cultures such as the South African San culture, hold beliefs in a spiritual world of ancestors and demons, still retain their relationship with the earth through modes of living, and rely on the shamanistic ritualistic events to conduct daily life.

This self-study, practice-led research process claims performativity<sup>16</sup> as both a framework and a methodology.

While a study about *difference* and *states of being* or depressive psychoses is traditionally located in the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, I employ visual arts' theoretical, conceptual and practical methodologies to explore these concerns. Roberts (2008) quotes Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (2003) as believing that “what was important about art was what it awakened or evoked in the spectator, how it created meanings, how it could heal, and what it could teach, incite, inspire or provoke” and that “art as a narrative of inquiry [becomes] a transgressive activity” (in Roberts 2008:15).

The work of Ana Mendieta, Magdalena Abakaonwicz and Suzanne Lacy will be examined as autobiographical expressions linked to their social contexts of *difference*. The re-telling of their personal stories will be investigated within frameworks of narrative therapy and constructed truths.

The practical research incorporates not only traditional art-making processes of drawing, mixed-media, photography and digitally generated images but also complex interdisciplinary modes of performativity and projections as layered moments of *locating* oneself. Ritualised enactments employ depressive devices to create conditions of altered realities that equate lived experiences and moments of renewal. Personal *writings* and *reflections* are also considered as creative practice. Alternative modes of presentation will accompany conventional modes of display. Roberts (2008) quotes Bochner and Ellis (2003) as claiming that the aim of art-based research is to give the “first-person voice ... or performative voice” and thereby challenge traditional values of accessing knowledge, that is, through experiential practice (in Roberts 2008:15).

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<sup>16</sup> Researcher and theorist, Barbara Bolt (2008) explains the term “performativity” coined by speech theorist, John Langshaw Austin (1955), as being a performative spoken utterance that does not just describe but “has real effects in the world”. She presents theorist, Judith Butler (1993) as having expanded this theory to include bodily acts that contest the notion of the subject – “performativity must be understood as the iterative and citational practice that brings into being that which it names. ... it is always a reiteration” (2008:3-4).

Chapter 1 presents emerging contemporary philosophical thinking as a context for this research. Connectedness and spirituality are posited as necessary for the survival of both people and the planet and that the psychoses of individuals run parallel with the present psychological state of global society, that of turmoil and conflict. Cultural theorist and environmentalist, James Hillman maintains that to “understand the ills of the soul today we turn to the ills of the world, its sufferings” (1995:xxiii). A contextual overview of developments within performativity are also presented.

Chapter 2 locates depression as a complex condition affecting contemporary global society. Depressive devices such as *[dis]-[engagement]*<sup>17</sup>, together with theoretical conceptualisation, are contextualised within White’s re-constructions of the *self* while Foucault’s notions of mind games and constructed truths are explored within concepts of self-denial. Art critic, Christine Ross’s (2006) exploration of the disruption of conscious thinking patterns within an aesthetic of depression, is discussed as a thematic concern for contemporary art.

Chapter 3 examines the work of selected artists Ana Mendieta, Magdalena Abakaonwicz and Suzanne Lacy within autobiographical frameworks and the body as a site of trauma and *difference*. White’s concept of re-construction of the *self* is tested in analyses of artworks within socio-political contexts.

Chapter 4 presents the practical component as transformative self-discovery. Autobiographical creative processes explore the body as a site of trauma and healing within a framework of *belonging*. Performativity is one of several methodologies in which alternative narrative constructions are applied physically, visually and conceptually.

The overall intention is to demonstrate that art can play a persuasive role in meaningful personal perceptions of the *self* and initiate an open discourse on the transformative function of art in depression.

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<sup>17</sup> See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: *[dis]-[engagement]*.

Figs 1a-e. Suzanne Lacy. *Auto on the Edge of Time*, 1993-1994. Installations.

*Auto on the Edge of Time* explored the effects of domestic violence as experienced by women, children and families in seven distinct collaborations and installations throughout the United States. Lacy worked for two years with a domestic violence shelter in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a family violence program at Bedford Hills Prison in New York, children from shelters in Niagara Falls, New York and Cleveland, Ohio, teenage girls in Oakland, California and politicians in Staten Island, New York to create a series of site specific installations and public policy initiatives around the issue. The centerpiece of the project was a collection of wrecked cars transformed by Lacy and her collaborators into sculptural testimonials on themes of escape, abuse, control, support, healing, memorialising and more.



Figs 1a-c. *Underground*, 1993. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Fig 1d. *The Children's Car and Public Service Announcement*, 1994. Cleveland, Ohio.

Fig 1e. Snug Harbor Art Center Exhibition and Installation, 1994. Staten Island, New York.



## CHAPTER 1: Context and developments within performativity

The context for this research is personal but also political, falling within a framework of emerging philosophical thinking in the field of New Genre Public Art. Suzanne Lacy (1996) defines this genre as

visual artists ... working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility. Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time – toxic waste, race relations, homelessness, aging, gang warfare, and cultural identity – a group of artists have developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language (1996:19).

Public art in this genre relates to intellectual accessibility and socio-cultural contexts rather than physical sites and resembles political and social activism. The issues raised are interdisciplinary and concerned with people's rights such as equality, difference and marginalisation (Figs 1a-e). It is intended to engage the whole person, "not just the intellectual but the emotional, psychological, ethical and spiritual parts of us as well" (Gablik 1993:2). In this context, spirituality is secular and is understood as the immaterial knowledge enabling a person to discover the essence of her/his being within multiple identities and the values by which s/he lives. Many kinds of spiritual practice such as mindfulness and meditation can be regarded as beneficial or even necessary for human fulfilment.

The underlying issue in this research is of the *connectedness of all things*, that is, of *belonging*. This notion of connectivity, particularly to the land, is relevant in its inherent physical and psychological relationships between people and the Earth<sup>18</sup>. The opposite is

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<sup>18</sup> Environmentalist, Leister R. Brown (in Roszak et al 1995:xv & xvi) in the Environmental Forward to *Ecopsychology*, 1995, explains that the underlying philosophical issue in the environmental revolution is the understanding of human nature or the nature of the soul. Ecopsychology believes that there is an emotional bond between human beings and the natural environment out of which we evolve. He also contends that seeking to heal the soul without reference to the ecological system of which we are an integral part, is a form of self-destructive blindness.

exclusiveness and its debilitating partners – power, progress, alienation, degradation of the planet and the negation of the individual.

It is important therefore to present the philosophical, psychological and emotive thinking within which this research has been conducted.

Gablik states that

we have become incredibly addicted to certain kinds of experience at the expense of others, such as community, for example, or ritual. Not only does the particular way of life for which we have been programmed lack any cosmic or transpersonal dimension, but its underlying principles of manic production and consumption, maximum energy flow, mindless waste and greed, are now threatening the entire ecosystem in which we live<sup>19</sup> (1993:2).

Today's self-centred capitalist society focuses on success. It could be said that power, greed and progress underlie the dominant paradigm leading to self-centredness and individual behaviour<sup>20</sup>. Gablik (1993) comments on contemporary society's insistence on economic development calling it progress and claims that society has narrowed its sensitivity to moral and spiritual issues. Gablik further maintains that while a new philosophical framework and paradigm shift towards an alternative environmental consciousness is apparent, the dominant world-view is still largely conditioned by Modernist values that established notions of individualism (ego-centric and exclusive), separatism and autonomy. This thinking has led to the present world crisis with its rivalries, excesses and deprivation. Peter Halley explains: "It is the essence of modern consciousness to be irrevocably structured by the technological aspects of industrial production" (in Gablik 1993:45).

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<sup>19</sup> Many authors support this criticism of society's wanton need for *more* at the expense of people and the planet: Brown (1995), Burham & Durland (1998), Eliade (1959 in Gablik 1993), Lacy (1996), Lippard (1983), Oakes (1995) and Roszak, et al (1995), among others.

<sup>20</sup> Brown (1995) endorses this view claiming that from "a global vantage point, we see a world economy that is unsustainable, one that is slowly destroying its underpinnings. We live on a planet that is deteriorating ecologically and inhabited by people who are psychologically troubled" (in Roszak, et al, 1995:xiv).

Gablik underpins this need for a more positive framework, referencing Scott Peck (1988) who asserts that “we cannot save our skins without saving our souls. We cannot heal the mess we have made of the world without undergoing some kind of spiritual healing” (in Gablik 1993:12). In addressing this need for spiritual healing<sup>21</sup>, Jung (1979) equates the soul with the psyche which, together with spirituality, are linked to our inner-being while psychologist and neo-shaman, Wilbert Alix (2008) equates the soul to certain kinds of empathic experiences that move us. Alix comments that the soul, although an elusive concept, is the innate mechanism of consciousness and the mystery of life. Soul is the “animating and vital principle in humans, credited with the facilities of thought, action, and emotion and often conceived as an immaterial entity” (*TheFreeDictionary* n.d.). Alix (2008) refers to the result of soul loss as affecting not only personal living or creating a dispirited condition in humans but also as affecting society and the world condition as well as conflict among nations.

Gablik supports these ideas of soul loss, arguing that “the sickness of our time is not the absence of mythic vision, which is ever present in the unconscious, but our culture’s denial that it exists, or has any significance for modern life” (1993:56). Aligned with Gablik’s statement, is Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious which he claims, is a universal consciousness predating the individual. M. Alan Kazlev (2004) explains that the collective unconscious is not a universal mind or metaphysical reality but an ultimately biological reality. It is

the repository [sic] of all the religions, spiritual, and the mythological symbols and experiences. Its primary structures [are] the deep structures of the psyche, in other words – what Jung called ‘Archetypes’. ... Interpreting this idea psychologically, Jung stated that these archetypes were the conceptual matrixes or patterns behind all our religious and mythological concepts, and indeed, our thinking processes in general (Kazlev, 2004).

Complementing Jung’s archetypes, are soul hunts that Alix explains as spiritual “journeys into the depths of ourselves ... with the ultimate purpose of returning whole and complete (integrity)” (2008).

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<sup>21</sup> Many authors concur with this need for spiritual healing as essential if we are to heal the world and re-establish its sustainability – Dossey (1989 in Gablik 1993), Eliade (1959 in Gablik 1993), Lacy (1996), Lippard (1983), Oakes (1995), Roszak, et al (1995), among others.

Figs 2a-f. Fern Shaffer & Othello Anderson. *Nine year ritual*, 1995-2003. Nine performances.

Shaffer explains: My interest is in the interconnectedness of life, the environment and our waters. It makes no sense to poison the water when we will ultimately be the ones to consume it. The pattern is repeated over and over again revealing the crisis potential of our culture's desire for immediate gratification. Living in an increasingly dangerous, toxic, and stagnant environment, for both animal and plant life, led me to investigate the dilemma through my art. The purpose of these rituals was to reflect our concern for clean water, preservation of earth's minerals, disappearing old forests, wetlands and endangered habitats and preserve the diversity of ecosystems and transmit our concern for the living conditions of planet life through the mountains, forests, deserts, rivers and oceans. This *Nine year ritual* has been performed at sites across the United States and Canada from the desert of Death Valley to Green Point, Newfoundland. These rituals addressed everything from global warming to the disappearance of species.



Fig 2a January, 1995. A wooded site, Lockport, Illinois.

Fig 2b. February, 1996. At the ocean's edge, Big Sur, Pacific Ocean, California.

Fig 2c. April, 1998. Summit of Blue Ridge Mountain, Virginia.

Fig 2d. May, 1999. The lowest elevation of the Northern Hemisphere in Death Valley, California.

Fig 2e. June, 2000. On Temagami Island, Ontario, Canada.

Fig 2f. September, 2003. In the wetlands at Cashe River Basin, Illinois.

Aligned to these ideas of healing or wholeness, performance artist, Fern Shaffer (in Gablik, 1993:42) affirms the significance of ritual performances (Figs 2a-f) as re-enacting or remembering old ways of healing the earth; an ancient rhythm takes over where time does not exist. Performing rituals keeps the idea alive. Shaffer's work references the inherent understanding of the mystical by cultures who believe in a spirit world, relying on shamanistic ritualistic events to conduct daily life<sup>22</sup>. The mystical is interrelated with the spirit, psyche or soul of the person, essential in a relationship between body and land, between people and the planet, and knowing where we belong. This reference to ancient ways is also related to this research in terms of performative and transformative acts<sup>23</sup>, the interconnectedness of daily life and the spiritual world through ritual events as reminders of living in harmony with each other and the planet.

Eliade (1959, 1970 in Inglot 2004:104) developed an existential theory that attracted many post-war artists. Studying cultures widely separated by time and place, he observed extraordinary similarities and argued that these commonalities derived from a universal human need to uncover the origins of our existence<sup>24</sup>. According to Eliade, the desire to return to the beginning stimulates diverse societies to create their own myths, all of which relate to the original myth of Creation. Therefore at a fundamental level, all people share a common understanding of the world and operate with similar patterns, structures, and symbols, despite different historical, cultural, and personal circumstances. Eliade explains that in addition to their culture-dependent and time-specific meanings, all religious ceremonies and cultural rites carry a universal essence that transcends any particular religion or historical context. He contends that by consistently re-enacting these rituals<sup>25</sup> people can free themselves from their temporal, historical existence and create

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<sup>22</sup> Many traditional cultures still exist today in various parts of the world, who believe in the ancient ways of a spirit-filled earth. Jung (1979), Eliade (1959 in Gablik 1993) and Gablik (1993), among others, believe that the spiritual world of ancestors is still relevant today. Gretel Taylor (2008) reports the Aboriginal cosmology incorporates a notion of 'country' as being all time, all place, spirits and all living things, the earth beneath the surface and the air above it, existing spiritually together at once. "The country is not apart from life ... because life emerges from it and goes back into it" (2008:10). Sharon Irish (2010:169) states that Lacy's philosophy, influenced by Zen Buddhism's notion that we see ourselves as co-participating in the existence of all things and believed in the interconnectedness and the need for a spiritual basis for living in this world.

<sup>23</sup> Discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>24</sup> This resembles Jung's collective unconscious and Joseph Campbell's (1988) notion that myths and rituals are still necessary in contemporary life.

<sup>25</sup> This correlates with White's (2004 in Loth) theory of narrative therapy of re-authoring the *self*.

special sacred spaces where they can reconnect with the cosmic sacrum and recover organic wholeness and a primal harmony with the universe. These rituals form a continuous link with nature which can regenerate and purify the participants, saving them from nothingness and death.

Throughout the world, many primitive societies still believe in a cosmology in which ancestral beings are an integral part<sup>26</sup>. As a South African, I am interested in a holistic connection to the essence of earth/land/body/spirit through performative and transformative cultural rituals. I am emotionally connected to these rituals, particularly in relation to a closeness or intimacy with the land, its *rawness*, *wildness*, *palpability*, *feistiness* and *directness*. Traditional societies believe in the equality of all things, including the human race. Inherent to this, is the concept of interdependence. This close connection with the land, essential to their livelihood, is part of their everyday existence.

Shamanism is an ancient belief structure of animism, deities and demons in which the medicine wo/man intercedes in the spiritual world for the well-being of the community through rituals and particularly, the trance dance. It is believed that the shaman has special powers through which he communicates with the ancestors/deities. Eliade posits that “life is still ‘mythical’ and that [it] survives in us as part of the human condition” (in Gablik, 1993:49). The trance dance, a social and sacred function, is central as a way of transcending the living world into that of the spirit realm. In this altered state of consciousness, the shaman is able to heal the sick, foretell the future, control the weather, ensure good hunting and maintain the social balance of the community. The whole community participates in these ritualistic performative events in which the transformative experience of body/mind/soul, heals and cleanses the community, re-enacts belief systems and maintains the indigenous knowledge of the ancient spiritual world<sup>27</sup> (*The skeptic’s dictionary* n.d.).

It is this performative and transformative experience, the trance dance that is being

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<sup>26</sup> The South African San culture is one such traditional society in their understanding of ritual practices and the trance dance to which, in some way, I feel a personal spiritual connection.

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Lacy employs similar modes of community participation in contemporary ritualised performances that are concerned with people’s rights, self-healing and well-being. See Chapter 3.

reintroduced into today's society as a means of reconnecting and finding one's place in the world (Alix 2008). Physician, Larry Dossey (1989) claims that we desperately need to recover the soul of the shaman as "a way of seeing that rescues all of life from the sterile vacuity that has become synonymous with modernity" (in Gablik, 1993:51).

Gablik concurs:

One of the attractions of shamanism for modern individuals is that it appears to provide a possible basis for reharmonizing [sic] our out-of-balance relationship with nature. The shaman can hear the voice of the stones and the trees that are speaking – the voices of things unheard to us all. The shaman does not live in a mechanical, disenchanted world, but in an enchanted one, comprised of multiple, complex, living, interacting systems (1993:45).

These concepts of reconnection through the soul and trance dance<sup>28</sup> are central to this study as means of understanding the *self*. Ritualistic modes of performativity will be interrogated in discussions of works of selected artists and as enactments within the practical component of this study. Within the concepts of *difference* and *belonging*, these enactments will be explored as processes of transformative recovery of the *self*, connectedness to the land and rites of passage.

While the philosophical context lies within the framework of alternative emerging ideas, the psycho-social and personal contexts of this study lie within the notion of *difference* within the defined area of *states of being*. The latter is seen as mood afflictions that create feelings of worthlessness, abjection and separation of both the *self* and the person. These psychoses greatly influence the manner in which people respond to mental afflictions or interact, both psychologically and physically, within society<sup>29</sup>. This study therefore, hopes

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<sup>28</sup> My performative enactments relate to this concept of the trance dance.

<sup>29</sup> Statements and claims that I make about depressive behaviour and the resulting stigmatisation are personal knowledge that I have gained over a long period and through my own depression in consultations with psychiatrists, psychologists, councillors and others with similar conditions. I also have gained much understanding through my readings and research both previously and for this study. This knowledge is supported by WHO reports (2012), NGO organisations' web-based depression resources Beyond Blue (2014), dNet (2014.) and Black Dog Institute (2014) and publications such as Malchiodi (1998) and Sue et al (2003).



Figs 3a-h. Ahmad Nadalian. *Untitled (the human and the environment)*, 2009. Contemporary community ritual.

Covered in local red earth, Nadalian's ritual practices draw on ancient mythologies. Nadalian explains: "For me symbolism of snake and its contradictory interpretations in different cultures is very interesting. In the one hand snake is a symbol for eternity and treasure and on the other hand related to the story of Adam and Eve in heaven."



"Red earth surrounded the whole of my soul; I depicted snakes on the face of a girl named Mithra; Archetypal story, seduce of Mother god; The process of a ritual wash; The impudence of evil polluted earth."



This performative work speaks to Dossey's quest for contemporary rituals that can re-harmonise our sense of connectedness to the planet and to the question of magic and ritual in today's society. A simple enactment resembles an ancient ritual of cleansing, a need to remember ancient times from the past, in the present and into the future. This is also in keeping with the philosophies of Jung, Eliade, Moyers, Campbell, Gablik and Alix, among others.



to create awareness of the importance of creativity in dealing with *states of being*, that is, to open debates about ways of coping with depressive conditions.

Jung (1979) argues that these psychoses are disruptions, disconnections between the conscious and personal unconscious mind or a loss of the soul. He expands on disruption as a dissociation that is seen as a splitting in the psyche causing a neurosis or state in which a person “can be possessed and altered by moods, or become unreasonable and unable to recall important facts about [him/herself] or others” (1979:24-25). Alix explains the loss of soul as the “deterioration of our integrity” and a “traumatic separation from ... normal reality” (2008) that occurs when we experience great mental, physical and emotional trauma. He further asserts that when we encounter such profound pain, we either physically perish or emotionally fragment. Alix equates a soul part separated from the body with what psychologists call depression. He compares soul hunting to a “contemporary shamanic healing ritual” in which one can retrieve the “sacrificed pieces of the soul that can bring us back to a *state of aliveness* [my emphasis], integrity and well-being” (2008).

I understand these conditions as being aligned with my *states of being*. I would also posit that my performative acts could be likened to Alix’s retrieval of sacrificed pieces and that the results of my performative transformative acts may resonate with a *state of aliveness* or be seen as processes of healing/recovery of my soul. We can create our own myths/stories that become significant rituals of transformation (Figs 3a-h). Journalist, Bill Moyers (1988) presents the assertion of Joseph Campbell, scholar of Religion: “Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. ... We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are” (in Campbell, 1988:5). Campbell claims: “What we’re seeking is an experience of being alive” (1988:5).

It would also seem that the psychoses of individuals today run parallel with the present psychological state of society worldwide, that of turmoil and conflict. Hillman asserts:

The “bad” place I am “in” may refer not only to a depressed mood or an anxious state of mind; it may refer to a sealed-up office

tower where I work, ... where I sleep, or the jammed freeway... [T]he ecological psyche, the soul of the world by which the human soul is afflicted, to which the human soul is commencing to turn with fresh interest, because in this world soul the human soul has always had its home. ... to understand the ills of the soul today we turn to the ills of the world, its suffering (1995:xx-xxiii).

Referring to Hippocrates' treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, Hillman summarises:

To grasp the disorders in any subject we must study carefully the environment of the disorder: the kind of water; the wind, humidity, temperatures; the food and plants; the times of day; the seasons. Treatment of the inner requires attention to the outer; or, as another healer wrote, 'The greater part of the soul lies outside the body.' As there are happy places beneficial to well-being, so there are others that seem to harbour [sic] demons, miasmas, and melancholy (1995:xxi).

This study thus posits that processes toward regaining one's sense of balance or alleviating these psychoses, are contemporary healing rituals as spiritual journeys to retrieve the sacrificed pieces of the soul. The performative enactments of my art practice become these spiritual journeys<sup>30</sup>. This study is thus concerned with performativity as a process of *locating*. It is therefore important to examine the development of performance and performativity that also supports the socio-political developments in New Genre Public Art.

Art historian and critic, Lucy Lippard claims that

art has social significance and a social function ... . [E]ffective art [is] that which offers a vehicle for perceiving and understanding any aspect of life, from direct social change, to metaphors for emotion and interaction, to the most abstract conceptions of individual form (1983:5).

It has been stated that the context for this research is situated within the socio-cultural framework of New Genre Public Art or art as social function. Lacy describes this as socially aware activist art that used "both traditional and nontraditional [sic] media to

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<sup>30</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.



Figs 4a-d. Suzanne Lacy, Judy Chicago, Sandra Orgel & Aviva Rahmani, *Ablutions*, 1972.

This performance, one of the first pieces to treat the subject of rape and break the silence around the taboo subject\*, gave voice to women survivors. It began with Lacy's exploration of rape and a book entitled "Rape Is." A soundtrack, recording women's most intimate and explicit details of their experiences of rape, played continuously throughout the performance (information not accessible in the public domain at that time). Broken eggshells, piles of rope and chain, and animal kidneys were strewn across the floor. A nude woman was slowly bound from feet to scalp with gauze bandages while two others bathed first in tubs filled with eggs, then blood, then clay; as each emerged from the final tub, she was wrapped like a corpse in a sheet.

Lacy nailed 50 beef kidneys to the wall, encasing the room like a spinal column surrounded by its organs. The performance ended when rope filled stage like a spider web of entrapment. Violent victimisation was manifest through a sequence of sounds and images of bondage, abuse and cleansing. The voices on the tape droned on as if there was no escape from the brutalisation, ending with the audio tape stuck on a chilling note, repeating like a broken record: "I felt so helpless, all I could do was just lie there."

Artist, Cheri Gaulke (in Burnham & Durland, 1998:14), claims it is essential to make the private, public: from a personal experience of several women, a collective, thus political, reality was portrayed. *Ablutions* explored both internal and external constrictions on women through rape ... how we are prisoners of our fear as well as the social system that supports rape.

\* It must be noted that a self-help book for rape victims had yet been published at this point; *Ablutions* predated by seventeen years texts that encouraged victims to speak out.

communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives [and was] based on engagement” (1996:19). Lacy situates the historical background of this genre in radical socio-political attitudes of the late 1950s towards identity politics, political injustices and environmental issues. The boundaries between the arts themselves and many other disciplines began to merge with the emphasis on accessibility, engagement and inclusiveness.

Socially responsible artists felt that art needed to reference and communicate the prevalent socio-cultural concerns, including crime, corruption, greed, power structures, abuse of any kind and the environmental crisis<sup>31</sup>. Many artists questioned the function of art, and activists, drawing on the past, used obsession, excess, madness and absurdity to get back to meaningfulness (Figs 4a-d). Artists were encouraged to make their voices heard on the streets and in the public domain. Inherently, it was an art of social intervention, in particular, identity politics that questioned the personal.

Cultural theorist and critic, Donald Kuspit (1988)<sup>32</sup> supports these issues but is concerned with the human aspect of humanity, of seeing people *from the inside*, of the *individual* person<sup>33</sup> in a socially oppressive world. Kuspit (1993:255-266) feels that many of these socially concerned artists only touched the periphery of people’s psychoses and did not deal with social ills in any depth, for example, alienation. Kuspit observes that

much activist art has not grappled with the complex contemporary American social situation – the isolation of the individual within the crowd. ... *[C]ontemporary loneliness can be healed only by an engagement with individual experience* [my emphasis], encouragement to risk autonomy and transformation, and the recreation of an authentic community. Nonpropagandistic [sic] art shows *human catastrophe* [my emphasis] from the inside and creates the sociopolitical [sic] reality as a vehicle for an unfolding of what human beings are capable of<sup>34</sup> (1993:255).

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<sup>31</sup> This is supported by Burnham & Durland (1998), Gablik (1993), Lacy (1996), Lippard (1983), Oakes (1995) and Raven (1993), amongst others.

<sup>32</sup> This article was first published in *Artforum*, May, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> For this research, the “individual human” could be said to be the *different* human, one who seems to be outside social norms but is isolated from the crowd.

<sup>34</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.



Figs 5a-b. Suzanne Lacy, Nancy Dennis, Phyllis J Rose, Miriam Shapiro & Susan Stone. *The Crystal Quilt*, 1987. Performance.

*Crystal quilt* was a result of a two-year collaborative community project, *Whisper Minnesota*, about women growing old. Lacy also created a soundtrack of women's recollections, lecture series, film screening and media campaign. The performance featured 430 women over the age of 60. Presented in a shopping mall, the work questions community-based art itself and highlights the dichotomy between aesthetics and politics as well as the experience of art. Lacy considers this community event to be contemporary rite of passage into old-age and the passing of time. Few people, even one's family, give much time to the elderly; life is too busy and stressful to deal with the additional troubles of older family members.



Figs 6a-b. Dominic Mazeaud. *The Great Cleansing of the Rio Grande: a pilgrimage*, 1987- 1994. Performative ritual.

Ceremonialist and earth artist, Mazeaud explains that once a month she walked the river's bed and banks doing a literal and symbolic cleansing ... "the deep-listening portion" being as important as the collection of found objects. A journal, *Riveries* (sic), chronicled her ritualised behaviour, responses and became a meditation of her connection to the river itself. Her art is her life. For Mazeaud, performances are pilgrimages that reflect the spiritual in art; they come from a constant dialogue between my experiences and my conscious understanding of these experiences.

In one of the earliest performances dealing with violence and rape, Lacy and her co-collaborators explored the essence of the individual in the work, *Ablutions*, 1972 (Figs 4a-d). Giving individual voice to a group of women who had experienced rape, the performance dealt with anger, fear and the trauma of violent sexual abuse.

It is this notion of *the individual from the inside* that forms the gap in contemporary visual art publications. This is central to this research, particularly, to my performative modes of art-making which embody my personal processes of reflexivity.

The isolated, individual artist, the unique, irreplaceable object, have been part of the human consciousness for about 2000 years: how much longer has art as magic, as ritual, as disposable object, as body-adornment, been part of our heritage? (Henri, 1974:7)<sup>35</sup>.

If one considers this statement in the light of the above discussions, it is evident that there is a need for art that is still magic, that provides contemporary rites of passage and that can heal. The reason being that such works speak about humanity's need for a continual re-examination of the nature of *being* or *belonging in this world*<sup>36</sup>.

Lacy's community performance, *The Crystal Quilt*, 1987 (Figs 5a-b), could be considered one such ritualistic event. The ceremonial and magical qualities of this work were embedded in the format, the passing of time, the sharing, the sounds and the spectacle in a public arena. One also needs to take into account the contemporary context and intentions that shift this work into that of social critique, awareness and healing.

Similarly, ceremonialist and pro-active artist, Dominic Mazeaud's, *The Great Cleansing of the Rio Grande*, 1987-1994 (Figs 6a-b), is a performative ritual of cleaning the river on the seventh day of each month. Although she walked the river bed alone, her intent is

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<sup>35</sup> This statement was made in the context of the artist as magician and not within the Modernist concepts of the artist as genius or the autonomy of the art object as commodity.

<sup>36</sup> Supported by Alix (2008), Brown (1995), Campbell (1988), Gablik (1993), Lippard (1983), Moyers (in Campbell 1988) and Roszak (1995), among others.



ocial awareness: the measure of the passage of time and the consequence of human neglect for ‘the other’ – nature.

These performative works by Lacy and Mazeaud were acts of provocation and exposure; spoke about neglect; had the capacity to question society’s indifference; and had a revolutionary spirit. Lacy’s work celebrates old age and questions society’s neglect of the elderly; Mazeaud’s work celebrates the river and reflects society’s disregard for the environment. More importantly, these works question our actions and our *being in this world*. These contemporary rituals also question the status quo of society from the perspective of ‘everyman’.

Looking at early precedents for New Genre Public Art and performative events, it could be said that a chronological context goes back as far as primitive societies where ritual and creative expression were an integral part of daily life. Art has always been part of culture whether as societal beliefs, artefacts, decoration or body adornment. All forms of performance such as rituals, rites of passage, celebrations, theatre and many forms of street events were incorporated into public life. Art historian, Adrian Henri (1974:8) points out that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the re-evaluation of primitive art, it became evident that there was a possibility for visual art to again become social function<sup>37</sup>. He is referring to the ability of ritual performances to sustain a culture, to strengthen a sense of community and impart knowledge. Henri discusses the fact that medieval pageantry and earlier theatre had the same ability, through narratives, to not only transfer knowledge but also to bring people together, irrespective of class. These events had both power and intensity, as in ancient rituals, to rouse the populous. These early modes of performance as social function (both mythic and secular practices) are relevant as having contributed to not only contemporary performance and the performative act but also to the development of New Genre Public Art.

The early 1900s has generally been taken as a historical starting point for performance art. Symbolism (1890s) through to the Futurism, Constructivism, Surrealism and Dada

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<sup>37</sup> The function of art is the core concern of this study.

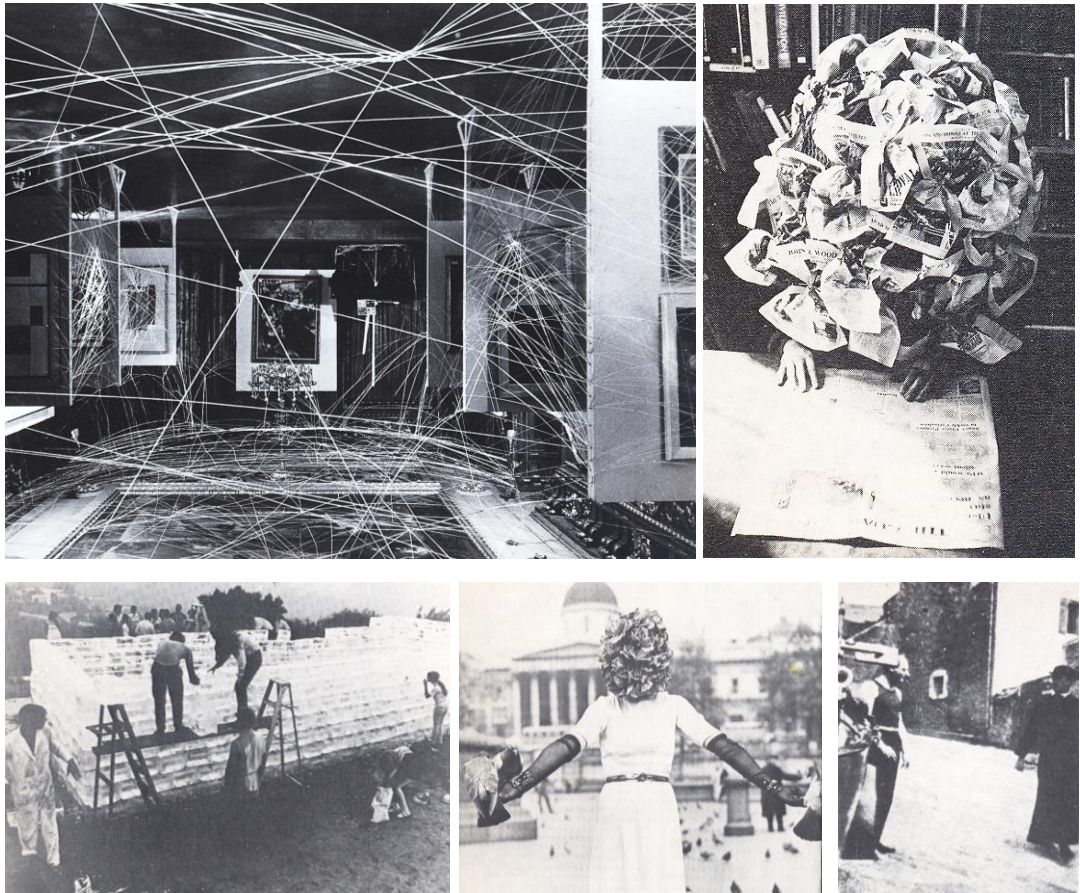


Fig 7. Marcel Duchamp. *Mile of string*, 1942. Installation.

Fig 8. Ian Breakwell. *Episode in a small town library*, 1970.

Fig 9. Allan Kaprow. *Fluids*, 1967. Time-based installation of melting ice-blocks.

Fig 10. Flower-headed woman in Trafalgar Square, London, 1936.

Fig 11. Benjamin Péret. Poet insulting a priest in the street, 1926. From *La Révolution surréaliste*.

Adrian Henri describes the above works as being unable to be “fit into a preconceived artistic framework” (1974:7). These were the beginnings of performance and the performativity of today: intentionality in non-art space and time, actions that called society into question. Henri defines these actions as the beginning of “a rediscovery of the possibilities of visual art as a social function” to question society (1974:8). Dada and Surrealism opened the way for Happenings of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century which together have led to the development of socio-political New Genre Public Art. “Dada stood for chance, for negation, to ‘destroy in order to build on the ruins’; its name was a loose catch-all word to cover almost any avant-garde or provocative activity. Surrealism, on the other hand, stood for a definite system, an aesthetic, an order of disorder, ... described in Rimbaud’s phrase ‘a systematic unhinging of all the senses’. It was a methodical exploitation of the resource of the unconscious; it involved a commitment to the imagination and to the ‘waking dream’. ... [T]he Surrealists were explicitly political in their intentions” (Henri, 1974:21).



(early 1900s) are seen as the beginnings of performance art. These movements were “more manifesto than practice, more propaganda than actual production” (Goldberg, 2011:8-11) (Figs 7-11). Henri and art critic, Roselee Goldberg (2011) both maintain that attitudes were provocative, creating works that were often outrageous, shocking, esoteric, entertaining or even shamanistic and were aimed at being a critique of social structures with the intention of breaking down barriers between art and life.

This period of outrageousness based on ideology, could be said to have influenced the emergence of the conceptual era, itself based on idea over product<sup>38</sup>. As with the Land Art movement which also incorporated the body in performative acts, Performance and Happenings were a rejection of gallery or museum contexts, of commodification, of the artist as genius and artwork as autonomous<sup>39</sup>. Goldberg (2011:7-9) offers the opinion that live gestures have constantly been used as weapons against the establishment. The presence of the artist and the focus on the body became central to the notions of *the real*, influencing performance, installation, photography and video in the late twentieth century. These activities were a precedent to the Happenings of the period and closely relate to Performance art.

German artist, Joseph Beuys’ *Coyote, I like America and America likes me*, 1974 (Figs 12a-d), could be seen as one such bizarre performative event. Caged with a coyote, Beuys forces his audience into a response with the entire context of this ‘happening’. There is something raw and primeval but also spiritual in this social sculpture – the focus is the innate relationship between two living creatures with their connection based on instinct and respect.

In a totally alternative performance, time, context, content and ritual are of essence. Fern Shaffer, at the edge of Lake Michigan in mid-winter, enacts her ritual performance, *Winter Solstice*, 1985-86 (Figs 13a-b). The ritual is a response to the environment<sup>40</sup>. Gablik

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<sup>38</sup> Both this study and New Genre Public Art, are based on outcomes through art-making with the intent of altering perceptions and demanding social change.

<sup>39</sup> This also refers to much of New Genre Public Art and pro-active artists.

<sup>40</sup> There is no audience as the artists feel this would jeopardise their intuitive responses to time and place.



Figs 12a-d. Joseph Beuys. *Coyote, I like America and America likes me*, 1974. Video stills.

The action began when the artist, wrapped in felt, landed in America and was driven in an ambulance to Rene Blocks Manhattan gallery. He spent seven days and nights in a room with a wild coyote before being driven back to the airport and flown home. Over the period, man and beast developed a mode of wordless co-existence, a two-sided performance that became rich with assumed meanings. Beuys stated that he *wanted to isolate himself, insulate himself and see nothing of America other than the coyote*.



Figs 13a-b. Fern Shaffer and Othello Anderson. *Winter solstice*, 1985-1986. Performance

The experience begins with a feeling, a sense of something that wants to materialize itself. ... If I am able to rediscover my own first experience of the basic spiritual existence with nature, it might help others rediscover and honor the same things in themselves. It does not matter that I possess no expert training or special knowledge, only the ability to open up and channel the intuition of my own self. ... What the world lacks today is not so much knowledge of [things of the spirit] as experience of them. Experiencing the spirit is all (quoted in Gablik, 1991:44-45).

explains that Shaffer “dances herself into a visionary state [and] ... transforms her[self] into the supernatural being she is impersonating” (1993:42-43).

The works by both Beuys and Shaffer demonstrate the mythical, the sacred and connectedness. Beuys purposely creates a sense of the primeval in a contemporary indoor context while Shaffer connects to ancient spiritual rituals where site is crucial to content. Nevertheless, both artists are concerned with current socio-political and environmental issues and employ ‘the unrehearsed’, spontaneity and immediacy in which the content and context coexist and create meaning.

In the context of Henri’s questioning, that of magic and ritual being part of art today and into the future, the above discussions of works by Lacy, Mazeaud, Beuys and Shaffer clearly emphasise the issue of ritual and spiritual connectedness questioning our *being in the world*. Such works will continue to exist into the future. Campbell (1988:5) supports Henri’s statement claiming that myths help us search for significance in our lives, maintains that mythological themes are rooted in human need. Ritualistic events are the experiences of our stories, of our search for the experience of being alive. They are connected to the past and will exist into the future as innate behaviour. People explore life through extra-ordinary events; these events do not exist in isolation but are integrated into the socio-cultural fabric of society.

Enactments have evolved out of the confusion of a world in turmoil; are intimate and personal but also public; and undeniably question society. Performance and performative events employ movement, space and sound to explore our philosophical, psycho-social and spiritual connections between people and the planet. The works underpin the essence of art as function or transformation; draw on ancient cosmologies; and fulfil the tenets of New Genre Public Art.

The notions of wholeness, interconnectedness, the psyche, the soul and spiritual journey have been presented as relating to the contexts for this research. They underpin the idea of *connectedness*, *belonging* and circumstances within which the concepts of *otherness*, *difference* and *states of being* occur.

Chapter 2 extends debates around *states of being*/the human condition, interrogates issues of depression and *[dis]-[engagement]*, and contextualises conditions of constructed truths, re-construction of the *self*, separateness and transformation.

## CHAPTER 2: Framing *difference*, *states of being*, *[dis]-[engagement]*, creativity and related concepts within depression

You've been a total failure  
Unworthy of love  
There's no hope for you  
No there's no hope at all  
But you can never be better than that  
Cause you're so very bad  
(Loth, personal journal 2011:108).

The whole experience [reflexive self-study research] has made me interested in examining the thought processes in our minds that hold us back. The awful *inner critic* [my emphasis], that voice inside our head that criticises us interminably and screams out our worst fears (Loth, personal journal 2011:19).

The description of 'being different' is often ascribed to a person suffering from mental or physical afflictions including personality traits or issues that make an onlooker feel uncomfortable<sup>41</sup>. The person is seen as being 'outside' socially constructed norms of acceptability. *Difference*, as an abstract concept of a particular state of mind in depression, deals specifically with *feeling inadequately different* – physically, mentally, intellectually and socially. This mind-set stems from self-denial as a result of social rejection and other alienating conditions that result in stigmatisation. *Difference* refers to an elusive, fragile and destructive perception of yourself – you have been conditioned to accept *who people think you are* as a result of depression<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> 'Uncomfortable' for the onlooker or person who perceives the difference or affliction as 'not normal'.

<sup>42</sup> This applies to not only someone with depression but to anyone who is seen as 'unacceptably' different for whatever reason.

Anyone who is ‘unacceptably different’ is generally set apart, bullied, made a spectacle of or singled out. Such issues include, amongst others, eccentricities, aloneness<sup>43</sup>, eating disorders, physical disabilities including features such as ugliness, disfigurement or extreme tallness/shortness<sup>44</sup>, to name a few<sup>45</sup>. Mental disorders such as depression/bipolar disorder, severe anxiety, obsessiveness, paranoia and other psychosis, may include a greater negative response from people. These disorders *cannot be seen* and sufferers tend to hide their condition because of the stigma attached. When the *secret* is exposed, people may become intimidated by, fearful of or apprehensive about ‘what they do not know’ or ‘cannot see’. This seems to create an alternative more subtle, less evident but more pervasive reaction against the sufferer. While obvious uncomfortable afflictions often generate blatant ridicule such as verbal and physical abuse, mental conditions provoke an undercurrent of rejection or invasive discrimination<sup>46</sup>.

Chapter 2 contextualises depression, *difference* and stigma, and explores the theoretical concepts related to the sense of *self* (body, mind and soul) investigated from *within the artist*, myself – I become a witness<sup>47</sup> to my own life experiences. Jung (1979) believed that by knowing one’s *self*, “by self-knowledge and thoughtful self-use [people] could lead full, rich, and happy lives” (1979:15). Cultural theorist, Heinz Klein (1993) claims that practice-led research can be an inquiry of self-discovery, of the experiential essence of the person that records significant dimensions of emotive realities. In such processes, “intellect, emotion and spirit are integrated [as] ... components of unified experience” (in González Leah 2003:29). These statements highlight this study’s supposition that the process of self-reflexion can become a positive transformative process of self-recovery through creative art-making involving the whole person.

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<sup>43</sup> Aloneness can be either a choice of limited contact with people or a result of alienation.

<sup>44</sup> I am extremely short and this has always played a factor in how people respond to me, Besides being short, I have always felt *different*.

<sup>45</sup> These can become causes of depression.

<sup>46</sup> As this study progressed, it became apparent that *difference*, self-denial/inner-critic and [dis]-[engagement] were core concerns within this autobiographical study of the *self*.

<sup>47</sup> González Leah (2003) and Loth (2011) both discuss the concept of witnessing through their artworks. Witnessing oneself supports the concepts of narrative therapy and self-acceptance discussed later in this chapter. Self-knowledge leads to understanding and acceptance.

This chapter positions depression globally as a major contemporary health issue. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that cultural attitudes toward and limited understanding of the condition contribute to the many misconceptions surrounding the illness<sup>48</sup>. This further results in reluctance to seek help for fear “of being outside” socially constructed norms<sup>49</sup> (WHO 2012).

Depression, mental disorders, identity confusion, and loneliness in contemporary society seem to me to be connected to the way we distance ourselves from others and from ourselves ... (Loth, personal journal 18/02/2008).

What is depression?

Psychiatric disorders, suffered by more than 350 million people globally, are now established as the third most common illness and, with the stresses of today’s world, are: the leading causes of disability worldwide; the major contributors to the global burden of health issues; add to the loss of quality of life; prevent people from functioning well; and have both economic and social costs. Health organisations and professionals maintain that clinical depression although *a common ailment in our society* [my emphasis], is regarded as a difficult and complex illness<sup>50</sup> resulting from a combination of social, psychological and biological factors (WHO 2012). Besides the close relationship between depression and physical health, circumstances such as rejection and abuse, loss, stress, economic pressures, unemployment, poverty, rape, violence, disasters and national/racial conflicts,

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<sup>48</sup> Espresso, SABC TV3 lifestyle morning programme, 03/10/2014: World Mental Health Day. The guest speaker reported on the escalating numbers of people suffering from depression and mental disorders. She emphasised the lack of information, secrecy and the taboo that surrounds the issue, particularly the damaging effects of stigma. She maintained that the majority of people still think that someone can “just snap out of it” and do not realise the ramifications of this statement. People still think that depression is not real or they think it cannot be treated and that the sufferer is just stupid, seeking attention or abnormal.

<sup>49</sup> Socially constructed norms or generally-held attitudes place depression in various categories as being: self-indulgent; lack of responsibility; something to be avoided; ‘bad’ or wrong; one’s own fault; a result of one’s own actions; looking for attention. It is not seen as an illness but as behaviour that can be avoided. People are intolerant of this affliction and judge rather than empathise with the person (WHO; additionally, I have acquired substantial knowledge about depression/bipolar depression over many years from personal encounters, numerous discussions and personal experiences). See Glossary of Terms, page xv: cultural conditioning.

<sup>50</sup> See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: depression.

increase the risk of the disorder. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide (WHO 2012; United Nations General Assembly, 2012).

It is claimed that mental illness is on the rise and, with figures stating a lifetime prevalence of 50%, half the population will experience depression at some point in life. It is predicted that by 2020, depression will be the second highest cause of death and disability in the world (WHO 2012).

Each society or group develops its own set of belief structures including behaviour. Unfortunately, mental conditions are considered ‘abnormal’ because they do not conform to dominant social constructs<sup>51</sup>. In addition, with the many misconceptions about depression in the public domain, stigma and alienation have become the resultant underlying hidden consequences<sup>52</sup>. Self-stigma plays an additional and critical role in a person accepting guilt, shame and abnormality/*difference* thus accelerating conditions of alienation. Psychiatrist, Liz Sayce (1999) explains: “Discrimination on mental health grounds affects [sic] millions because so many people fear being ‘on the wrong side of the line’ and go to such pains to make it clear – not least to themselves – that, even when distressed, they are not ‘mad’ [mentally ill]” (in Loth 2011:1).

The fight against the stigma has been taken up by many organisations, concerned groups and artists<sup>53</sup>. Their aims are twofold: to create awareness by correcting misconceptions; and to address the guilt and shame that are more destructive than the afflictions themselves. Unfortunately, social stigma is amplified by a person’s own victimisation (the

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<sup>51</sup> I argue that dominant social constructs are not accepted truths or ideals but rather the opinion of the dominant or politically powerful group within a particular society. This is predicated on Foucault’s theory of constructed truths (in Loth 2011) discussed later in this chapter. Unfortunately these norms hold weight in societies that have become conditioned to what is perceived to be good, normal or acceptable behaviour such as: codes of conduct including dress, language, drinking habits, drugs and addictions; financial stability as opposed to poverty; ownership versus homelessness; et cetera.

<sup>52</sup> These consequences are observed in either open nastiness or some kind of subtle abuse against the person. Mental afflictions unfortunately carry a deep-seated stigma that has permeated uninformed knowledge of this complicated health issue.

<sup>53</sup> WHO (2012) & United Nations General Assembly (2012) also record their concerns for the stigmatisation attached to persons, noting that mental disorders are often associated with non-communicable diseases and a range of other priority health issues that coexist with other social factors such as poverty, substance abuse and exposure to domestic violence. In their post-graduated self-studies, both Loth (2011) and George (2011) investigate art as pro-active processes of dealing with stigmatisation and marginalisation as a result of depression.



*inner-critic*). Scott Henderson<sup>54</sup> is quoted by the dNet organisation as explaining: “People describe depression in many ways such as: ‘Being in a black hole’, ‘My life has stopped’ and ‘To outsiders, I look quiet and detached – but inside I have this boiling rage like I want to scream because I can’t see any way out of this mess’” (in dNet 2014). These statements closely reflect my own *states of being*. It becomes a hopeless cycle of despair. In her doctoral thesis, Jo Loth<sup>55</sup> (2011) cites Julian Leff and Richard Warner (2006) as supporting the presence of stigmatisation and inferiority:

Faced with stigma and prejudice from both the public and mental health professionals, it is no surprise that people with psychiatric illnesses *begin to view themselves as inferior to others* [my emphasis]. They [their *inner-critic*] may accept the image that others hold of them as being dangerous and unpredictable. The impact on their self-image is then disastrous, leading to social withdrawal and lack of motivation to achieve their goals [*otherness*] (in Loth 2011:25).

With depression now recognised as a pandemic, one common misconception asserts that people suffering from this condition are able to manage or control their lives but lack the responsibility and willingness to do so. This is a fallacy (WHO 2012). Robyn George<sup>56</sup> (2011) in her autobiographical research, maintains that this lack of understanding invokes moral judgement resulting in further stigmatisation. George explains that people are branded as “culpable for their own situations. They are shamed. Shame piggybacks on guilt ... [and] shame is a powerful means by which societal norms are internalised” (2011:18). In explaining this statement, she claims that both guilt and shame not only degrade but also shape a person’s social behaviour through self-denial and self-blame. George (2011:18), in supporting Leff and Warner, asserts that either consciously or otherwise, the person internalises blame, hopelessness and fear of stigmatisation and thus accepts diminished expectations both for and by themselves. Loth (2011:6) supports this admitting to her own self-denial while George confesses to accepting fatness as “a metaphor for feeling powerless” (2011:19).

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<sup>54</sup> Scott Henderson, Director of the Centre for Mental Health Research, Australia.

<sup>55</sup> Jo Loth. 2011. Mind games: applying White’s principles of narrative therapy to the creation of a cabaret about depression and bipolar disorder. PhD thesis.

<sup>56</sup> Robin George. 2011. On being formed: a self-reflexive view of the subjected body. MFA dissertation.

The above statements closely reflect my own *states of being* – self-victimisation is a major consequence of social discrimination - *if everyone is of the same opinion then it must be true!* This insufficiency of self<sup>57</sup> or *inner-critic* is a serious obstruction in the transformative process for anyone suffering from mental disorders<sup>58</sup>.

So how can we address issues of stigma, guilt and self-alienation?

This study posits creative processes<sup>59</sup> as having the potential to redress negative self-images. Stigmatisation is concerned with *who people think you are* and, as a result, *how you see yourself*. Altering your personal self-image can adjust negative perceptions and consequently, challenge social norms. This study proposes that constructing alternative realities can counter an adverse self-image. This process of *re-locating* is the result of the symbiosis between theory and praxis – creative mind games of re-telling one's story<sup>60</sup>. This chapter therefore, also elaborates on notions of: the *self* and the construction of multiple *selves*; ritualised behaviour as enactments of positionality/*belonging*; *[dis]-engagement*; and body/land relationships within an autobiographical framework.

It is difficult to create awareness of social ills that cause discomfort when spoken about or are considered by many to be taboo. However, art is able to overcome this because the issue is removed from the personal and placed in an inanimate object and thus does not blame or accuse. Even if the artwork is confrontational, the viewer has a choice to look or walk away; personal issues reside 'safely' in the third person passive voice.

In her research, Loth (2011) examines the use of cabaret as a means of addressing depression<sup>61</sup>. Her intention is to provoke discussion about and create awareness within

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<sup>57</sup> Jo Loth (2011:25) equates the notion of inferiority to an effect of stigma or the inner critic.

<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, social stigma is amplified by one's own victimisation and shame hinders one from seeking help or admitting that they suffer a mental disorder (Loth 2011; Ross 2006; Sayce 1999 and Sartorius & Schulze 2005, both quoted in Loth 2011; and personal experience).

<sup>59</sup> Art therapy accepts that art-making can assist in generating positive emotions by expelling traumatic memories when dealing with negativity and sadness (Malchiodo 1998).

<sup>60</sup> This re-telling is based on White's narrative therapy and Foucault's games of truth both explained by Loth (2011) and discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>61</sup> Both Loth and George suffered depression and speak from an autobiographical stance.

the public realm of new knowledge related to mental illness. Loth examines three specific theories in combination with each other: White's narrative therapy; Foucault's games of truth; and contemporary post-modern concepts of shifting identities.

Loth (2011) selects three aspects of White's (2004) narrative therapy: "externalisation" as the unpacking of a problem from the person; "autonomous ethic of living" dealing with a person's core values; and "rich descriptions" through which multiple *selves* are re-constructed<sup>62</sup> (in Loth 2011:31). Together, these three elements constitute the mental re-authoring of one's story. According to White (2004), by unravelling thought processes one is able to reveal the origin of a problem:

It is quite common for this unravelling process to reveal the history of the "politics" of the problem that bring people to therapy. This is a history of the power relations that people have been subjected to and that have shaped their negative conclusions about their life and their identity. This unravelling deprives these conclusions of a "truth" status and calls them into question. As an outcome, people find that their lives are no longer tied to these negative conclusions and this puts them in a position to explore other territories of their lives (in Loth 2011:136).

In applying these methodologies, Loth (2011) probes the role of the arts through entertainment, as being able to "draw attention to our thought processes and the games that occur within our own minds" (2011:1)<sup>63</sup> and thus create new perceptions of *self*. Finding that contemporary concepts of the *self* contradict modernist beliefs of an essential fixed identity, Loth uses cabaret to present/re-author multiple identities of a single person. Thus in dealing with stigma and subsequent exclusion as results of depression, Loth investigates "different kinds of truths and [how] to view an individual's life as a complex, multi-faceted, constructed narrative" (2011:2) which creates alternative realities through a dialogue between the *self* and the *inner-critic*. Loth (2011:6) relates these practices to her own experience and knowledge of self-stigma.

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<sup>62</sup> Loth felt that these three aspects were the most appropriate for application in cabaret, as well as the fact that she has no experience in psychology or as a therapist. I employ these aspects of narrative re-construction of the *self* from a creative meaning-making stance.

<sup>63</sup> Loth is referring to a person's ability to conceptually reconstruct oneself through mind-games and also to one's *inner-critic* in self-victimisation that dictates conditions of *being in this world*.

Loth (2011) claims that such activities are underpinned by “Foucault’s [1980, 1991] perspective that truth about mental illness is a constructed notion, and that the construction of truth can serve different dynamics of power ... [he terms] games of truth”<sup>64</sup> (2011:20). These ideas, together with the notion that culture is itself a social construct determining the accepted norms by which that society should live, are therefore not truths. The conception of mind games, together with Loth’s investigations, encourages the possibility of the re-construction of one’s own understanding of one’s *true self* with multiple identities – this becomes the transformative healing process. Recovery is a mind game played out to contest the negative self-image.

Through her interrogation of White’s concepts of re-authoring one’s story in relation to both Foucault’s games of truth and the concept of multiple selves, Loth (2011:1) is able to establish a transformative role for the arts. This re-construction process is particularly suited to performativity in which new narratives or mind games dispute normality, thus enabling re-authoring and recovery of the *self*.

Loth’s discussions are of direct relevance to this study especially in relation to her investigations around social stigma associated with depression, her accounts of self-stigma (*otherness*) and Foucault’s (1991) concept of the pathologisation of mental illness<sup>65</sup> and observations of changing attitudes toward madness. Loth (2011:20-23) states that Foucault’s (1989) concept of games of truth that are played out in the dominant normative discourses within Western societal belief systems, is particularly relevant to the way that mental illness is now viewed. She claims the general assumption that there is something wrong with you if you are depressed – you are then quietly shunned or ostracised.

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<sup>64</sup> For Foucault, truths are constructs that society use to categorise and control social interactions between individuals and institutions, and thus truth is not a universal pre-ordained quality but is instead a notion constructed by discourse (in Loth 2011:20).

<sup>65</sup> In Foucault’s publication, *Madness and civilisation*, 1991 – from the original PhD thesis, 1961 (retitled, *The History of Madness*, 2006) much of the content is concerned with the birth of medical psychiatry which he associates with extraordinary changes in the treatment of the mad (mentally ill) in modernity. It refers first to the systematic exclusion of the mad from society in early modernity, followed by their pathologisation in late modernity (Mark Kelly 2010). This pathologisation has resulted in the separation and marginalisation of the mentally afflicted and disabled, whether severely affected or not.

In earlier times, madness or unreason<sup>66</sup> was considered a special attribute and celebrated<sup>67</sup>. Loth (2011:23) cites that Foucault<sup>68</sup> observes that in Europe in the fifteenth century, madness was celebrated but that, with the new emphasis on economics and the utility of people in the eighteenth century, a system of categorisation arose that changed attitudes. Foucault (1991) questions: “How is it, for example that beginning at a certain point in time madness was considered a problem ...?” (in Loth 2011:23). Loth’s summation is: “Madness has changed from being a quality potentially within all of us to being a ‘sickness’, a quality to be objectified, confined, and examined” (2011:24).

Since the 1700s, people suffering from psychiatric disorders have been ‘lost’ in institutions, forgotten and left to the helplessness of their existence and abuses they suffer<sup>69</sup>. Negative attitudes and resulting stigmatisation have never really been eradicated<sup>70</sup>.

Art critic, Christine Ross (2006) explores depression as a thematic concern for contemporary art. As with Loth and George, she is of the opinion that the function of art is to bring to light the socio-cultural and political issues of the time and believes that

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<sup>66</sup> I understand this to include melancholia/extreme sadness and symptoms now classified as mental illness and labelled depression. Ross (2006:xxvii) states that melancholia associated with genius was the main notional ancestor of depression. Furthermore, she claims that depression, criticality and creativity are not necessarily incompatible.

<sup>67</sup> Madness is equated to a discord or disruption in the mind (Jung 1979); in ancient Greek philosophy, divine madness was linked to genius – Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. “Of madness there were two kinds, one produced by human infirmity [frailty and not necessarily a negative notion], the other . . . *a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention* [my emphasis]. . . . The divine madness was subdivided into four kinds —prophetic, initiatory, poetic, and erotic—having four divine beings presiding over them” (Lysy 2008:63-67); David Cooper, in the Preface to Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation*, 1991, comments that Foucault awakens us to “a tragic sense of loss involved in the relegation of the *wildly charismatic or inspirational area of our experience (madness)* [my emphasis] to the desperate region of pseudo-medical categorization from which clinical psychiatry has sprung” (in Loth 2011:24).

<sup>68</sup> M Foucault. 1991. *Madness and civilisation*. Kazlev (2004) references Foucault’s opinion that the exclusion of unreason itself, concomitant with the physical exclusion of the mad, is effectively the dark side of the valorisation of reason in modernity. According to this view, madness is something natural, and alienation is responsible not so much for creating mental illness as such, but for making madness into mental illness.

<sup>69</sup> Loth quotes Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jenn Webb (2000 in Loth 2011:23) as commenting that within the new culture of industrialisation and economic growth, madness [or mental illnesses] became a condition that was in opposition to reason or social development. This led to the establishment of the “great houses of confinement” for the mad, the poor and the sick. The grouping of the mad, poor and sick is still apparent today in terms of un-acceptability.

<sup>70</sup> Even today there are reports about the abuses and humiliation suffered by those who are institutionalised.

artists can no longer dismiss depression as a subject for investigation. However, Ross does not deal with the idea that the function of art can be transformative or healing. Rather, she looks at how artists are able to transfer the experience of disruption, a symptom of depression, to their viewers<sup>71</sup>.

Ross's claims of the pervasiveness of depressive disorders and its relationship to contemporary subjects and the necessity for art to deal with current socio-cultural political issues, confirms the need to explore the relationship between art and mental disorders, particularly in the light of a fuller understanding. This is also supported by post-graduate studies such as Loth, George, Elizabeth González-Leah and Jennifer Eisenhauer including various articles concerning the global rise of depression<sup>72</sup>.

Ross<sup>73</sup> is concerned with two main issues, withdrawal and confusion that she brings together in her examination of disengagement<sup>74</sup> describing it as an aesthetic in which conscious thinking patterns are ruptured as in a depressed state of confusion. Ross (2006:xv) explains that depressive indicators become creative concepts and metaphorical making processes<sup>75</sup>. Artworks become depressive enactments: an acting out of states of depression using related symptoms such as boredom, stillness, communicational rupture, withdrawal, loss of capacity to remember, projection, dreams and desires. She presents these symptoms not only as art-making devices but also modes of creating awareness and

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<sup>71</sup> This presumes a superficial understanding of disruption' if it can so easily be experienced. Ross also claims that people today and depressive disorders are becoming increasingly convoluted. These assumptions escalates the misconception that depression is what the person is, rather than a person suffering from the *illness*. This implies that the person rather than the illness, is the problem – this inaccuracy is one of the typical underlying causes of stigmatisation and shows how easily misconceptions are formed. Even though Ross's assumptions about depression are based on extensive research, they are nevertheless, an outsider's perspective (she does not claim personal or authentic understanding of depression).

<sup>72</sup> The concern for the rising numbers of people suffering from depression has resulted in a great deal of reliable information posted online to provide sound medical knowledge, understanding and support. See depression online resources, Beyond Blue, dNet and The Black Dog websites.

<sup>73</sup> Ross (2006) researched scientific and medical information, historical facts and latest social implications concerning depression. She finds a lack of agreement between specialists, researchers and health professionals with dissimilar, conflicting or irreconcilable approaches being applied to the diagnostic methods and treatment of depression. This lack of agreement adds to negative attitudes linked to depression.

<sup>74</sup> Ross's understanding of disengagement in depression is seen as the person purposely separating from 'another'. It is not that simple however, being alone is a consequence of stigmatisation and one's *inner-critic* – wanting to escape. It is not just simply wanting to be without others.

<sup>75</sup> These creative devices are the slowing down of motion to near immobility and ceaseless repetition that becomes monotonous, breaks concentration, creates disruption, results in frustration and thwarts the viewer. These result in a loss of sense of time, confusion, disorientation, dislocation and disengagement.

experiencing dissociations or disruptions. The rupture between viewer and artwork is intentional disengagement. Additionally, Ross claims that due to these dissociations, memory, perception and relational referencing are devitalized leaving the viewer alienated or confounded.

In this practice-led research, similar depressive indicators are used in my art-making processes. However, the intention is to enable focus and engage rather than disrupt attentions. Concepts and depressive devices are explored as multifaceted in meaning rather than definitive or conclusive<sup>76</sup>. Concepts are also understood as binary components: *[dis]-[engage]*<sup>77</sup> in order to physically separate from a public context and engage with a personal private intimate space; *self* as an abstract philosophical concept in which the outer public self endeavours to shift between the inner deeper collective unconscious *self* to encompass its past/present/future existence<sup>78</sup>; *[dis]-[connect]*<sup>79</sup> so as to 'block out' random external thoughts and connect to the inner personal *self*; extremely slow repetitive movements subdue the raging and provide time to mediate one's mind in reflexivity; and endless ritualistic re-enactments afford multiple *selves*, *the same yet different*. These contradictory justifications of concepts are supported by both White's and Foucault's notion of mind games or constructed truths.

Additionally, concepts encompass notions of interrelatedness such as: body/land relationships; inter-zones between body/trace/land/sea and conscious/unconscious; alternative constructed truths; the *self* as multifaceted; presence in absence/shadow/trace/stain; and ritualised behaviour that implies endless recurrence, constant flux, cyclical time and all-time-at-once<sup>80</sup>.

Loth's research findings claims that White's theory of narrative therapy provides the opportunity to challenge both our own and other people's perceptions of *who we are*

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<sup>76</sup> See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: concepts.

<sup>77</sup> See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: *[dis]-[engagement]*.

<sup>78</sup> This shift from the physical known body to the deeper inner subconscious has occurred during some of my enactments when sun, light, sound and waves have been intense and pervasive.

<sup>79</sup> See Glossary of Terms, page xviii: *[dis]-[connectedness]*.

<sup>80</sup> This concept is inherent in Jung's collective unconscious and in traditional societies' cosmologies, particularly Aboriginal dreaming, in which past, present and future time, as well as place, exist all together as layered time and place (Taylor 2008:169).

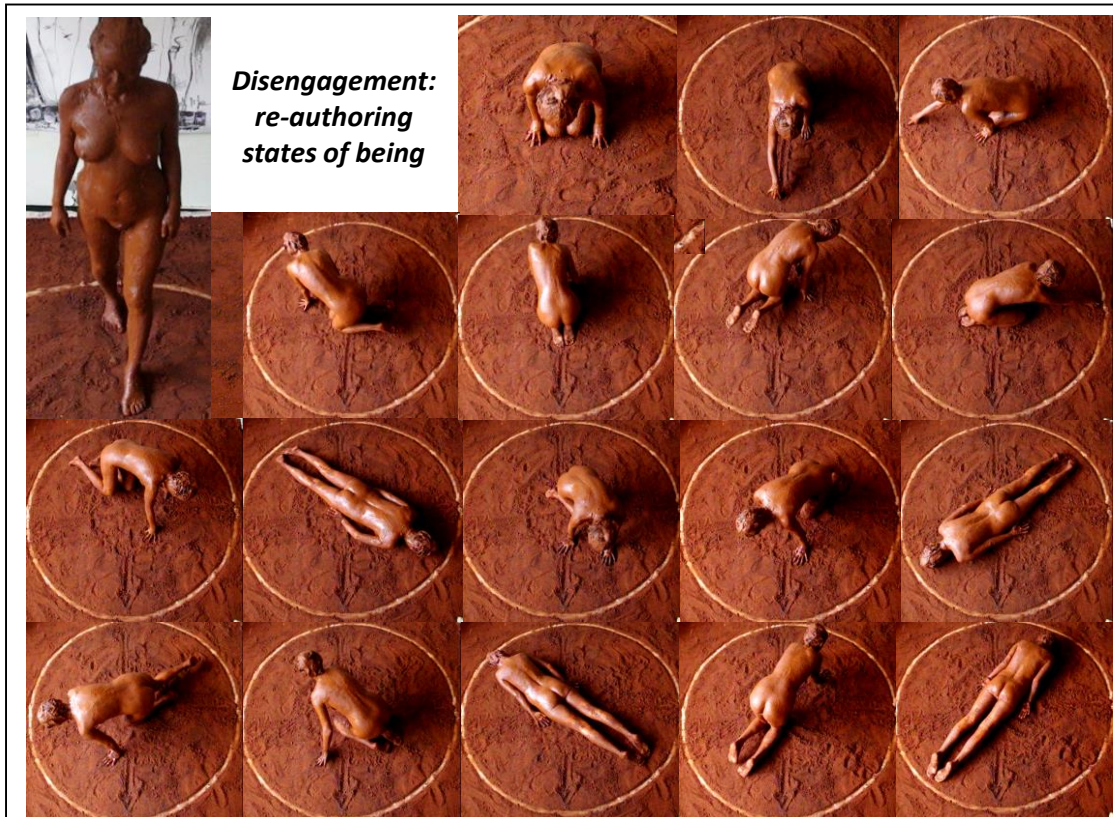


Fig 14. Vicki Ross. *Belonging*, 2012. Performative enactment.

*Claiming a space, belonging, being in this place;  
Isolated and private, it is without judgement;  
An act of re-telling my story, re-shaping my space.*

*Sand masks me; no longer my known self, I am a stranger to myself,  
another temporal self – transformed – with a different history;  
The historical baggage I claim, ties me to an ancient past:  
of the earth, of ancestors, of ritual.*

*My soul is linked to the spiritual souls of past times;  
I become connected to all things – past, present and future.  
I re-enact my memory, my instinctive mind,  
Thus I preserve 'a moment' in time – all time.*

*This is my mythical, magical being, a new understanding of my self,  
another self.*



through re-authoring of the *self*. Performativity enables ritualised behaviour<sup>81</sup> that ties me to the land, allows me to claim my space, to *belong*<sup>82</sup> (Fig 14). These enactments are cathartic transformative events, multifaceted, temporal, personal and constantly in flux. They are re-telling, re-living, re-witnessing, re-construction of and testament to my experiences, metaphorical spaces in my mind of chaos/insanity/trauma but are also breathing spaces, safe zones, sanctuaries for renewal. They become modes of self-recovery. Claiming a space within a body/land relationship is an act of declaring a sense of *belonging*, of connectedness and is an affirmation of my existence. It is a positive act of *[dis]-[engagement]* and *being in this world*.

These performative acts of the unravelling of my mind are explained in my reflections of my artwork, *Belonging*, 2013 (Fig 14). It incorporates my sense of *self* as being entrenched in the rawness of the African earth, informed by the trance dance, ritual and my innate intuitive connectedness to the land. The claiming of *my magical, mythical experience of being within a new understanding of the self, myself* is borne out by the following statements. Jung (1979), in keeping with Scott Peck and Alix<sup>83</sup>, believed that

most of the neurosis and the vacuum of meaning from which we suffer [today] result from an isolation of the ego-mind from the archetypal unconscious. ... It is this merging, or dissolution, into a larger, more encompassing identity than the rationalised ego-self that is now felt to be necessary by many people, in order for social transformation to take place in our time. The modern challenge is to again find sacredness ... to recover our lost souls (in Gablik 1993:52-53).

Psychologist, Robert Johnson (1989 in Gablik 1993:47) declares that if we want to shift from logical linear thinking into the collective dreambody, we must separate from the everyday world of ordinary activities in order to find that inner centre of archetypal energy contained in myth. He contends that ritual, drumming, chanting and repetitive movements direct us to the ‘dreaming’ of the psyche.

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<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth González Leah. 2011. The Transformative power of art: a self-study. PhD. Leah’s study is an autobiographical qualitative case study about creative processes and the nature of art, emphasising the power of art for inner transformation. Her findings indicate that art is ritualised behaviour that accounts for lost communal rituals providing a sense of belonging and identity and that art is an analogous vehicle for transformation and an awareness of cosmic fusion.

<sup>82</sup> These will be discussed in Chapter 4 related to the practical component of this study.

<sup>83</sup> Discussed in Chapter 1.

Campbell claims that

myth is the *experience* of meaning, the experience of life. Consciousness is not merely in the head but in the whole body; the whole living world is informed by consciousness; all of life is a meditation and myths bring us to a level of consciousness that is spiritual. Myths are the “world’s dreams”, archetypal dreams and deal with great human problems (1988: 5, 14-15).

This inquiry into art, as transformative, addresses the conflicts of *difference* and associated embodied experiences. *[Dis]-[engagement]*/separateness, *belonging*/connectedness and body/land relationality within an autobiographical framework are presented as devices in creative re-constructions of multiple *selves* thus enabling transformation/recovery. Acts of personal *locating* require alternative philosophical processes of appraisal and reflexion such as explained in my artwork, *Belonging* (Fig 14). The process of *[dis]-[engagement]* provides a different narrative, is cathartic and explores Foucault’s notion of a truth in flux in which mind games counter negative self-images.

It is my position that the lack of insightful information about and the taboos that surrounds depression have maintained many misconceptions. Scrutinising notions of truth, social constructs of control, multiple *selves* and re-authoring one’s life, profiles extra-ordinary unique modes for the construction of alternative truths, of acceptability, of what normality can be and how people can *belong* within flexible systems in society. By unpacking the ritualised behaviour of enactments, notions of both truth and *self* are opened to debate and change. The idea of re-storying one’s understanding of a *true self* with multiple identities becomes the transformative healing process.

Chapter 3 will apply the concepts discussed in this chapter to the work of selected artists while Chapter 4 will examine these transformative processes in the creative component of this research.

### CHAPTER 3: Narratives of being and belonging within a metaphorical framework of the body

Artworks tell a non-verbal story about something that is fluent in time and in material consistency; ... many existences side by side, together with experiences etched in the skin.

Magdalena Abakanowicz

This chapter explores the body as a site of trauma and *difference* by examining the work of Ana Mendieta<sup>84</sup>, Magdalena Abakanowicz<sup>85</sup> and Suzanne Lacy<sup>86</sup>. These artists use the body as metaphors of *being in the world*, each within their own socio-political context through which notions of *belonging* or discrimination are scrutinised. Of importance is the fact that these artists work within autobiographical frameworks drawing on their particular life experiences, that is, from within themselves<sup>87</sup> - their personal encounters dictate the essence of their artworks. Mendieta, separated from her family and Latin-American Cuban culture at the age of 12, always felt alienated and displaced within American culture. Similarly, Abakanowicz considered herself an outsider – not only by birth but also by her lesser female position. Lacy, on the other hand, while not herself experiencing personal alienation, was nevertheless affected by typical modernist attitudes of gender and racism toward women and minority groups. Thus as a woman on the periphery of a patriarchal society, Lacy works within the framework of disenfranchised communities. This chapter therefore examines content of selected artworks by these artists in relation to socio-political cultural contexts or the public domain.

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<sup>84</sup> The study examines the earth-body works *Siluetta* series of Ana Mendieta from 1973 to 1980.

<sup>85</sup> Magdalena Abakanowicz's figurative body cast sculptures will be examined.

<sup>86</sup> The collaborative performance events by Suzanne Lacy from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present are of relevance to this study as pro-active performative engagements that speak out against social constructs that define discrimination and abuse.

<sup>87</sup> Autobiographical knowledge rather than second-hand accounts of trauma, separateness and *difference* is essential in this research. The artists' intimate experiences of anguish and estrangement are the catalyst for their creative investigations and processes of transformation, of establishing their right of *being*.



Figs 15-18, 20-21, 23. Ana Mendieta, *Siluetta series*, 1973-1980. Earth-body works.

Fig 19. Ana Mendieta, *Imagen de Yugal* (Image from Yagul), 1973. Earth-body work.

Fig 22. Ana Mendieta, *Tree of Life*, 1976. Earth-body work.

Mendieta created an extensive number of earth-body works as part of the *Siluetta series* from 1973 to 1980. (Earth-body works in which Mendieta uses her body have the same intentions, selection of sites, media and modes of making as the *Siluettas*.) These silhouettes were embedded in the land, altered, dispersed, transformed and eroded away. They are personal metaphorical interpretations of *belonging*, the land as the feminine principle, the universe as spiritual and the earth as the original beginning. They are re-tellings of the *self* that capture the minds of people through images of body/land relationships to which anyone can relate. Many people feel isolated in today's world and these works speak of the rawness of the earth, touching the earth and an understanding of *being in a place*.

Discussion of artworks centre on the issue of *difference* and *belonging* by examining the metaphorical implications of the body within autobiographical, social and philosophical frameworks. White's (in Loth 2011) theory of re-authoring oneself is investigated in ritualised enactments where artists become witnesses to their place within the world. These are measured against Foucault's mind games and Loth's claims of self-stigma. Creative processes are illustrated as cathartic experiences. As the artworks are intimate emotive expressions of trauma, it is imperative the artists' *voice*<sup>88</sup> be heard. Their individual *voices* not only convey their intentions but are the quintessential tools of their emotive lived experiences - the content of their art.

Within the global sense of disruption of post-World War II, many artists became strongly politicised using art as actions against social injustices, war and the environmental crisis. The human condition was central to these actions. Philosopher, Richard Shusterman (2000) posits that "our world cannot make sense without a body, our bodies make no sense without a world. ... [W]e can never feel our body purely in itself; we always feel the world with it" (in Irish, 2010:169). In addition, both Lacy (2010) and art critic, Amelia Jones (2010) claim that the performing body became not only a primary site for art but also an important source of information. Lacy further maintains that today's notion of art as a healing force began with this emphasis on the human being, on human rights. Chapter 1 presented notions of wholeness, mind, body and soul as related to the psycho-social emotive context for this research. Within this context, this chapter examines how artists' embodied experiences influence the content and function of their artworks rendering them as cathartic transformations of the *self*.

Ana Mendieta suffered a deep sense of exile and displacement<sup>89</sup> that influenced her whole life and art-making<sup>90</sup>. As a non-American female refugee, she was never able to set aside her sense of personal, political and territorial alienation. Many authors claim that Mendieta addresses a wide range of identity issues, including feminism, sexuality, gender,

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<sup>88</sup> Although the artworks are the *visual voice* of the artist, how they write (the use of words and style of writing) becomes an alternative complementary *voice* giving the reader an insight into the artists' understanding of their own processes.

<sup>89</sup> Mendieta was sent to America because of her father's refusal to accept Castro's political regime and control of Cuba.

<sup>90</sup> Best (2007), Blocker (1999), Brett (in Viso 2004), González (2010), Viso (2004).





Figs 24-25, 27-31. Ana Mendieta. *Siluetta series*, 1973-1980. Earth-body works.  
 Fig 26. Ana Mendieta. *Untitled (Burial Pyramid)* (detail), 1974. Earth-body work.

For the past twelve years I have been working out in nature, exploring the relationship between myself, the earth, and art. I have thrown myself into the very elements that produced me, using the earth as my canvas and my soul as my tools (Mendieta in González, 2010:7).

[She] dug her hands into the sands of La Ventosa, Mexico shoreline, carving out the form of a woman's body with her arms upraised. The ocean tides slithered up to the cavity, dulling the edges of the body ever so slightly every time the water ebbed away. The powdered red pigment lining the silhouette dissipated with each wave, until the form was no longer recognizable, leaving only a blood-soaked memory of the original image (Gonzalez, 2010:1).

These remote dislocated sites were mostly along river banks, in marshlands or grasslands, at the beach or other out-of-the-way places. Her photographs are taken so as to enhance the remoteness of the site and negate any indication of geographical location. The images only reference the immediate site and the body/land relationship that is created.

spirituality, ethnicity, territorialism and cultural displacement. In this study however, I focus on her ‘earth-body works’<sup>91</sup> within the frameworks of displacement and the feminine notion of mother earth as Mendieta’s desire to regain her soul, to claim a space<sup>92</sup> for herself, to connect to the universe. Finding her place in the world was central to her creative intentions. Professor of Art History, Jane Blocker (1999:22) claims that by re-enforcing her myth of exile, Mendieta’s work was a means of establishing her sense of *belonging*, of healing her troubled sense of *self* and the wound of separation. This need to connect is emphatically echoed in the earth-body *Siluetas*<sup>93</sup> (Figs 15-23), in which her body or silhouette was repeatedly placed in selected remote natural sites. These obsessive time-based performative enactments determined her place in the world and continually created new perceptions of a connected *self*. They also elucidate White’s theory of narrative therapy as re-constructions of the *self*.

Influenced by the 1960’s and 1970’s rejection of art as commodity, the resultant turn to nature and the positioning of earth as essentially feminine, Mendieta employed dematerialisation and displacement in sites that were themselves dis-located<sup>94</sup>. Sites were neutral, without boundaries or cultural implications and without any fixed location (Figs 24-31). These contexts gave Mendieta complete freedom to merge with the materiality of the site itself. It can be said that her work was in the land, of the land and through the land: land was as an entity, body was as an entity and relationship was as an entity and together, these became a whole. The function of these artworks was re-invention; transformation realised *belonging* and healing.

Mendieta understood the earth as being the primitive primeval matter characterised by its perpetual return to its origin, that is, ‘the beginnings’ or the creation myth. Mendieta’s philosophy incorporates this understanding of the universe – she wanted “to express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature”, a way to regain her sense of spirit (Blocker 1999:55-56). She was concerned with the female body and the maternal that are tied to

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<sup>91</sup> This is the term that Mendieta used for her artworks in the land.

<sup>92</sup> My own sense of claiming a space for myself through my artworks has given me an understanding of Mendieta’s re-enactments in the land that is central to both our processes of finding our place in the world.

<sup>93</sup> Mendieta created these self-representations in a variety of media from 1973 until her death in 1983.

<sup>94</sup> The sites were mostly along river banks, in marshlands or grasslands, at the beach or other out-of-the-way places. Her photographs enhance the remoteness of the site and negate any indication of geographical location.





Figs 32a-c. Ana Mendieta. *Siluetta series - Volcano*, 1978. Earth-body works.  
 Figs 33, 35-39. Ana Mendieta. *Siluetta series*, 1973-1980. Earth-body works.  
 Fig 34. Ana Mendieta. *Untitled (Black Venus)*, 1980. Earth-body work.

They were unmistakably human: breathed fire and smoke, dripped blood, grew, disintegrated, and were reborn (Blocker, 1999:18).

My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the Universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through the making of earth-body works I become one with the earth (in Blocker, 1999:57).

[For the work] to have power, to be magic ... for images to have magic qualities, I [Mendieta] had to work directly with nature. I had to go to the source of life, to mother earth (quoted by Roulet in Viso, 2004:230).

These works determine both Mendieta's exile and *belonging*. The physicality of tracing her own body and then watching it burn implies loss, pain and aloneness. The land carries these traces, remnants that disintegrate and disappear, that are burnt into the earth, that seep into the mud and that stain the earth. Repetition of enactments become the tools for interpretation together with temporality and impermanence. There are strong influences of primitive cultures and catholic ties in Mendieta's fire earth-body works as well as the universal concept of rebirth. Positionality is a key element.



the land as mother earth. Blocker (1999) maintains that Mendieta's belief "in a life force or 'universal energy' that reverberates through all organisms, and in the ritual invocation of *ashé* or divine power, magically animated her works with anger, pleasure, hunger, and longing" (1999:18). Working with the physicality of the site – earth, mud, rocks, grass and leaves was a way of connecting emotionally; working with the elements of fire, water and space (Figs 32-39) provided the spiritual link to the universe. The physical contact itself was essential<sup>95</sup> while the site was central as the feminine principle. Covered in mud, immersed in marshlands, buried under rocks, dug into the river bank, Mendieta was able to find an alternative truth in the reality of the act; it became her existence, past, present and future. These earth-body enactments were therapeutic responses to her traumatic expatriation, to her constructed truth of continual exile<sup>96</sup>; they were cathartic transformations of the mind and healing processes. This is borne out by the multitude of her creations and the obsessive record of each work in multiple photographs and slides, often including a filmic format as well. Blocker (1999) references several authors<sup>97</sup> that suggest that Mendieta's works were "'a personal investigation on the nature of being,' or a reflection of her 'innermost feelings on life,' or a 'personal dialogue with nature, which represents the land she didn't have'" (1999:12).

Mendieta's earth-body works can be seen as following a particular pattern. Her profound sense of displacement was emphasised by her need to travel alone<sup>98</sup> into nature, to find alternate remote spaces 'somewhere'. These became *ritualised journeys* or metaphorical migrations to the spiritual. They can be equated with disruptions<sup>99</sup> or interruptions from exile. This removal from an uncomfortable/distressing yet known context to a remote unknown yet safe space<sup>100</sup> allowed her to merge with nature, to quiet her soul, to be in communion with the universe. This was an authentic cathartic enactment of the *self* with

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<sup>95</sup> Mendieta embedded her body or the silhouette form into grass, mud, water, rocks or burning the silhouette.

<sup>96</sup> Mendieta always maintained her exile.

<sup>97</sup> Gura (1979), Heit (1980), Poggi (1980).

<sup>98</sup> Mendieta was complicit in her own separation. She chose to be alone on most of these journeys. Separation is often necessary in actions of self-actualisation or reinvention.

<sup>99</sup> In Chapter 2, Ross (2006) defines disengagement as feelings of dissociation. In contrast, this study employs *[dis]-[engagement]* in order to separate one's mind from a public/depressed context (Mendieta's exile) to enable engagement with the intimate and subconscious *self* as a positive action of renewal.

<sup>100</sup> This refers to her living spaces in America where she never felt at home but rather, displaced. She travelled from 'home' (where she lived or place she was visiting) to a remote neutral site (in America, Mexico & Cuba) that in itself had no external references but to which she felt emotionally connected.

with place, of *belonging*. Metaphorically and spiritually, she journeyed to a place, embedded her *self* in the site and the site became her *being*. She was the only witness to her new existence. These journeys became a template for transformation: new narratives, new beginnings of life, the creation myth repeated as cyclical time. Repetition provided authority; time and timelessness equated renewal; re-enactment became rebirth and re-established the spiritual.

It has been recorded that both Ana Mendieta and Magdalena Abakanowicz<sup>101</sup> created and maintained personal myths built around their histories and embodied experiences. While Mendieta's myth is built around exile, Abakanowicz created a more romantic myth of an 'outsider'<sup>102</sup> that blends childhood memories, deeply rooted cultural traditions, belief in humanity, the tragedy of war and the socio-cultural conditions during Poland's occupation and oppressive socialist regime. It is important to understand each artist within her own constructed truth or myth. It was central to their art-making and gives meaning to the function of art as modes of self-actualisation. How would one explain 'myth' in the context of these two artists? Art critic, Rosiland Krauss (1986) gives us a contemporary explanation that correlates with these personally constructed myths:

Myth is depoliticised speech. Myth is ideology. Myth is the act of draining history out of signs and reconstructing these signs instead as "instances"; in particular, instances of universal truths or of natural law, of things that have no history, no specific embeddedness [sic], no territory of contestation. Myth steals into the heart of the sign to convert the historical into the "natural" – something that is uncontested, that is simply "the way things are" (in Inglot, 2004:1).

Abakanowicz was consumed by her sense of being an outsider and the conviction of her

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<sup>101</sup> Most publications (Rose 1994, Inglot 2004, Abakanowicz 2008) recount Abakanowicz's construction of her personalised 'myth' incorporating her feelings of being an outsider. This myth should also be seen in the context of Polish culture and the Romanticism of the times

<sup>102</sup> Mendieta always sustained her myth of exile and displacement; Abakanowicz created her myth as an outsider around several factors: childhood memories of magical forests; her mother's emphatic rejection because she wanted a son; her lack of the required finer female qualities and inability to conform to the accepted social image of a proper upper-class lady; her female gender as inferior to men; and finally, the need for silence surrounding her aristocratic family history (Rose 1994; Inglot 2004).

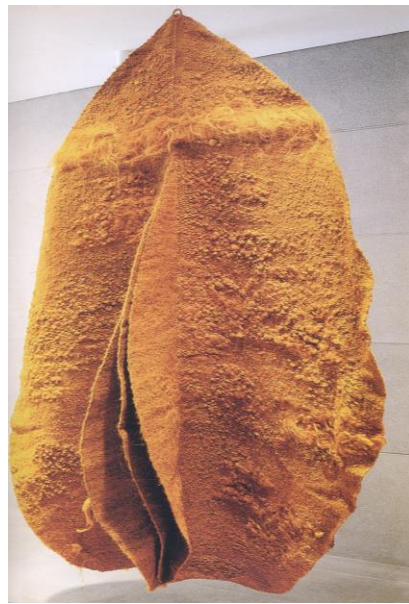
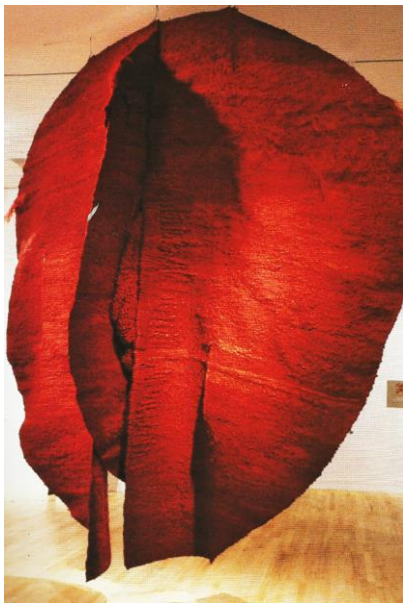


Fig 40. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Black environment*, 1970-78. Installation.  
 Fig 41. Magdalena Abakanowicz *Red Abakan*, 1969. Woven sculpture.  
 Fig 42. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Yellow Abakan*, 1970-75. Woven sculpture.  
 Fig 43a-d. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Faces which are not portraits* series, 1983.  
 Drawings.

Abakanowicz uses simplified distortion to express the human condition. Her working processes and woven forms speak about containment in their psychologically charged theatrical spaces. *Abakans* confront the viewer with both the tactility of medium and largeness of scale. Memories of childhood games in the forest fed her subconscious need to work with natural tactile fibrous materials and influenced her decision to take up weaving. Her obsessive intentions began as abstractions, as material and metaphorical expressions of her ideas. "I transmit my experience of existential problems embodied in my forms built into space" (Abakanowicz in Rose, 1994:102).

“lesser female position” and having always “stood alone” (Inglot 2004:21)<sup>103</sup>. She belonged nowhere; art became her refuge – it became a way of dealing with trauma and her sense of separation; art provided a safe psychological space. In this sense, both Mendieta and Abakanowicz employed art as their salvation, as a way to connect to a spiritual *self*, as a way to heal or compensate the alienation they felt.

Art will remain the most astonishing activity of mankind deriving from constant struggle between wisdom and madness, between dream and reality in our mind. ... Art does not solve problems but makes us aware of their existence. It opens our eyes to see and our brain to imagine (Abakanowicz, 2008:153).

War was declared in 1939: Europe was in tatters, life was turned up-side-down.

Poland suffered tremendous human loss, ... and it witnessed the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust, with mass exterminations in concentration camps set up across Poland by the Nazis casting a deep shadow on the consciousness of the entire nation. Ruined cities, wounded and displaced people, and poverty of everyday life dominated the Polish landscape for years to come. Permanently imprinted on the psyche of the Poles, the image of war suffering became part of cultural expression, as writers, filmmakers, theatre directors, and visual artists tried to come to terms with this experience on both an individual and a collective level (Inglot, 2004:74).

World War II impacted enormously on Abakanowicz but her romantic essentialist ideology<sup>104</sup> in some measure, substituted the visions of war, the turmoil and trauma that filled everyday life. The artist chose to remain outside reality, to remain separate and hide in her obsession within art-making. Large fibrous weavings (Figs 40-43) gave Abakanowicz the opportunity to experiment with media, scale and

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<sup>103</sup> Abakanowicz (in Inglot, 2004:21) states that it was a man's world and that “in order to become ‘a great artist’ she has to be ‘manly,’ strong and driven and so cuts herself off from stereotypical portrayals of women”. Johanna Inglot (2004:16-21) describes Abakanowicz as being victimized by war and history and stated that she suffered greatly because of her gender, social class and her personal self-image as a victim. This was nourished by her Romantic sensibility.

<sup>104</sup> Inglot (2004: 16-20) maintains that Abakanowicz's social and cultural positions within her art, philosophy & autobiographical writings were grounded in Polish Romanticism and her desire to express existential truths about the human condition.





Figs 44a-d. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Faces which are not portraits* series, 2005.

Drawings.

Fig 45. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Heads*, 1973-75. Detail of Installation.

Fig 46. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Schizoid heads* cycle (detail), 1972. Sculpture.

Fig 47. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Self-portrait* (detail), 1976. Sculpture.

The transition from the *Abakans* to *Heads* was predictable, particularly in her use of media as equations for the convolutions of veins, sinews and brain. The entanglement of her fibrous materials became the chaos and trauma within the mind, a brain out of control. While *Heads* are constructed as very basic forms, the intensity of her ideas was translated through frantic process and malleable materials. Abakanowicz's fascination with the functioning of the brain was motivated by philosophical (rather than scientific) concerns. Abakanowicz (in Rose 1994) explains:

Our brain bears the vestiges of our ancestors ... the traces of our primitive animals ... .  
[The brain] provides the material basis for our conscious experience. [They] cause continuing and permanent struggle between wisdom and madness, between dream and reality in our nature. Art is the product of this struggle. ... Each *Head* presents something organic metastasizing out of control. The bursting brain is a metaphor for insanity (1994: 43-44).

I see fiber (sic) as the basic element constructing the organic world ...

It is from fiber that all living organisms are built –

the tissues of plants, and ourselves, our nerves, our genetic code, the canals of our veins, our muscles.

We are fibrous structures ...

Fabric is our covering and our attire.

Made with my hands, it is a record of my thoughts (Abakanowicz 2008:40-41).

Abakanowicz felt the need to speak out about what she observed, about “what I knew, what I experienced looking at humans, their limits and their power. I wanted to show my reality, the reality of my time, of my country” (2008:68).

The drawings were also an expression of humanity and her self-alienation – their pain was her pain.

abstraction<sup>105</sup>. However, she felt that although her *Abakan* weavings began to evoke a sense of the human form, they were unable to reflect the tragedy of the times. She turned to the body itself, first as abstracted forms that represented heads (Figs 44-47) and then as headless, handless, featureless, monumental torsos without gender – alternative expressions of trauma<sup>106</sup> (Figs 48-50). Art historian and critic, Barbara Rose (1994) and Professor of Art History, Johanna Inglot (2004) both speak about the artist's obsession with myths about the human condition. This obsession replaced any direct political critique but was nevertheless explicit of the times as seen in the artworks' representation of collective brokenness, silence, of soulless beings, the suffering of a nation – words that could be seen to equate her own sense of silent anguish. Strong evocative poignant works pronounce their own critique.

Besides connecting psychologically with each sculpture, Abakanowicz's bold aggressive tactile processes ensured her complete instinctual involvement. The physicality of doing transferred her anger, obsession and trauma into a twisted mass of sacking, burlap, ropes and fibres that formed the fragile remnants of the body. Collecting, sorting and cleaning her materials were essential – the idea of discarded media brought back to life, is inherent in concepts of rebirth and renewal, and are implicit in her artworks. Total involvement was liberating, necessary and cathartic. Rose contends that for Abakanowicz “the struggle to achieve a mental and physical equilibrium through the cathartic and transformative capacities of art was a moral imperative” (1994:44). Rose further maintains that much of the power and intensity of Abakanowicz's work derived from

her daring to disgorge material from her deepest unconscious ... .  
The process [was] painful and difficult. ... [She saw] the role of  
the artist as that of a shaman who absorbs the collective sickness  
of the tribe or society in order to effect a cure through spiritual  
exorcism or purgation of the psychically or physically toxic  
material (1994:94).

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<sup>105</sup> Inglot (2004:27&30) provides the 1950s context of Socialist Realism in which Abakanowicz's work had to reside: national in form, socialist in content and anti-modernism. Modernism was rejected as bourgeois, cosmopolitan and harmful and a realist mode of depiction was advocated. She states however that the Academy had an open attitude encouraging intuition and media experimentation. Abakanowicz's weavings were abstract in nature and thus did not require her to work within the social realist mode of representation.

<sup>106</sup> As abstractions, these torsos could not be seen as a deliberate critique of the government.



Fig 48. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Backs*, 1982. Installation.

Fig 49. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Herma*, 1994-1995. Installation.

Fig 50. Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Crowd I* (detail), 1986-87.

When I investigate the human, I investigate myself. When I yield to my curiosity I do not expect rational explanation. I have not really disturbed the original image I carry in myself. The man I deal with, in my work, is man in general. I wanted to show my reality, the reality of my time, of my country... what I knew, what I experience looking at humans, their limits and their power (Abakanowicz 2008:68-69).

Minimalism of form allows the metaphorical implications of media and process to dictate. The tactility of the raw savage entanglement and disarray of media, the compelling numbers, the rhythm in repetition of the motionless hollow forms and the power of their silence, arouse strong emotions of despair and emptiness. The greater the number, the greater the evocation of these psychologically charged dramas. The installations suggest subjugation, violation and victims; however, ceremony is also apparent.

In a mutual intimate exchange of each other, Abakanowicz becomes the sculpture, the sculpture becomes her. They become reflections of each other, each individual and unique, each unrepeatably, all part of the universal crowd. These surrogates are imbued with her spirit, her essence, her myths. These fibrous bodies equate the chaos of her mind, their trauma was her trauma, their existence – her experience. In this process, each body became a re-invention of herself released from the confined, restricted, controlled conditions in which she felt trapped. Naturalistic figurative representations would have been too literal and politically threatening. Bodies without heads, hands or gender represented her silence, her horror and her sense of being an outsider.



In any research of Magdalena Abakanowicz, it becomes obvious that her myth, her understanding of the world and her position within it, are all tied up in her philosophy of a living nature and a humane world<sup>107</sup>. This included her predilection for nature and natural material, her assertive hands-on approach to making, her intimacy and connection with herself, her angst and her compassion for humanness. She was obsessed by the psychological and philosophical conditions of both humanity and herself. The human condition became the content within which Abakanowicz could conceal her sense of horror and emptiness<sup>108</sup>.

“My face hides the entanglements of my thoughts and feeling from the person who looks at me” (Abakanowicz in Inglot 2004:2010).

Body casts (Figs 48-50) were declared “untamed strangers, intruders” (Abakanowicz, 2008:68) that she befriended, thus no longer strangers<sup>109</sup>. These artworks were her repeated enactments, *re-tellings* of her story, her silent truths, her multiple *selves*. “When I investigate the human, I investigate myself” (Abakanowicz 2008:69). These bodies provide an opportunity for re-authoring the *self* – each became a re-construction of her truth. Endless compulsive re-creations equated rebirth and cyclical time. Abakanowicz was totally immersed in these forms, mentally and physically – they became expressions of her own hollow, broken, chaotic *self*, they were her surrogates; timeless signs that will continue beyond the artist’s existence.

Modern catharsis as a ritual of renewal, underlies the cure of torment through the

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<sup>107</sup> Abakanowicz’s understanding of the world was strongly influenced by the deeply spiritual dimension of Polish culture and 19<sup>th</sup> c Romanticism embedded in Polish ethos: the veneration of nature as part of a Romantic heritage – idealised Polish landscape of primeval forests, marches, country manors, peasant cottages, scarecrows, haystacks roadside shrines and crosses (Inglot, 2004:16-17). Like Mendieta, she was strongly influenced by ancient mythology and the concept of a universal origin of life, rebirth and cyclical time.

<sup>108</sup> Inglot (2004:105) claims that Eliade’s (1959) writings left a profound mark on Abakanowicz’s thinking, serving to ratify her intuitive understanding of the world in which spirit and matter, people and nature, and diverse cultures are all interdependent. She further maintains that Abakanowicz found a perfect escape in this kind of universalising thinking and that she joined a broad spectrum of cultural references through a common theme of humanistic concern.

<sup>109</sup> “Each other” refers to both the individual sculptural bodies as well as to the artist – they are all individual members of a universal crowd.



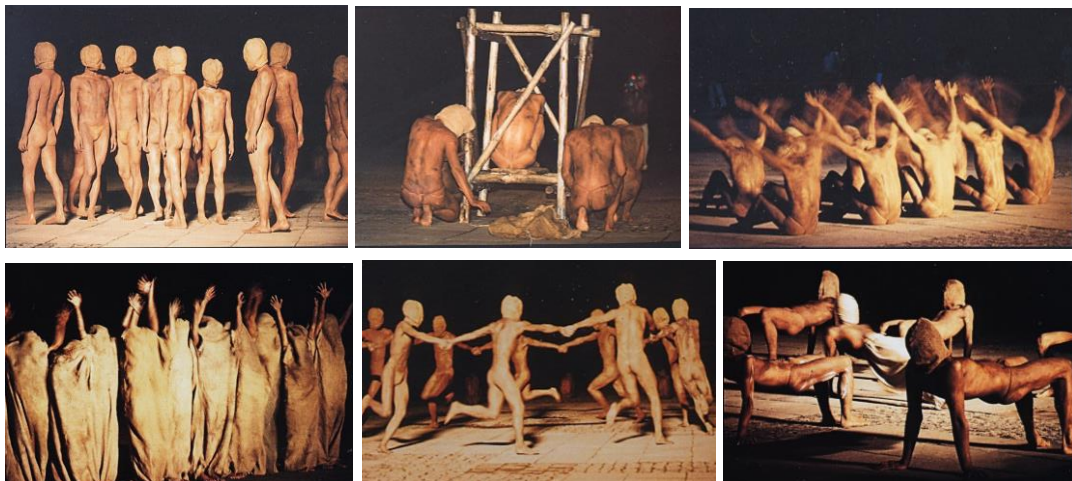


Fig 51. Magdalena Abakanowicz with Akiko Motofuji and dances, 1995.  
Figs 52a-f. Performance under the direction and choreography of M. Abakanowicz, 1995.

[I wanted] a ceremony celebrated by myself for myself and my sculptures. ... In my dance, the idea was to reduce all evolutions of the body, hands, feet, fingers, and toes, to the most fundamental. The human body should keep its quiet and strong monumentality; a rhythm had to be found. ... to sit, stand, lie, and run – these were the available basic sequences. Only within them, with the expression of my ‘dances’ be born ... like sculptures being alive (Abakanowicz 2008: 176-177).

In the unconscious of contemporary man, mythology is still buoyant. It belongs to a higher spiritual plane than his conscious life. The most superficial being is crowded with symbols and the most logical person lives through images. Symbols never disappear from the files of reality; they can change guise, but their role remains unchanged. ... they are a real undeniable part of human nature – they constitute the imagination (Abakanowicz’s statement, 1973 [closely worded to Eliade and strongly linked to Jung’s collective unconscious] in Inglot 2004:105).

Linked to ideas of primitive and contemporary rituals, the performance is similar to Mendieta’s work of *locating*, of find a place for the souls of humanity and to Lacy’s performances of re-constructing *selves*.

psychotherapeutic process of digging up and confronting repressed buried memories and traumatic experiences<sup>110</sup>. Abakanowicz's intensity and obsessive processes constantly challenged the immediate past, present and future of her situation. Confronting one's *self* requires separation or *[dis]-[engagement]* – a quiet safe zone.

Abakanowicz's words best describe her creative rituals:

To create, I needed total solitude.  
No people, no music, no books, [no sound].  
My body was a cage for my spirit.  
In this cage, I could discover my shapes, their texture, the necessity for the organic, for the huge scale.  
Finally everything I needed was like hunger for water in the desert  
(Abakanowicz, 2008:40-41).

Abakanowicz made more than 2000 bodies, exhibited sometimes as single figures but mostly as groups or crowds. Within the crowd, each figure plays a role, is unique and although individually fragile and broken, together portray a sense of power or solidarity. Abakanowicz constructed her own idea of reality – not what one sees but rather what one experiences. Walking between the members of the *Hurma* (Fig 49), brings one into close contact with fragility, brokenness and a strong silence – it is not simply about the physical – it is about the psyche or spiritual experience<sup>111</sup> of human existence. Inglot (2004) along with Rose (1994), contend that the burlap crowds of the 1970s and 1980s were permeated with a 'primitivising' spirit and imitated archetypal forms connecting them to a distant epoch in order to universalise the meaning of her work<sup>112</sup>. Inglot further maintains that Abakanowicz deliberately created installations that conjure up images of "dried-up mummies, unknown solemn offerings, or tribal rituals" (2004:102) (Figs 52a-f) that speak

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<sup>110</sup> White (2004 in Loth 2011), Alix (2008), Dossey (1989 in Gablik 1993), Malchiodo (1998).

<sup>111</sup> Inglot (2004:105) explains Eliade's popularity as being his universalizing perspective stressing the transcultural ahistorical unity of humanity and the importance of spiritual life across civilizations. It referenced Christian (Catholic) character of Polish culture with its various popular myths, traditional ceremonies, and symbolic rituals. Abakanowicz was familiar with both Eliade and Jung.

<sup>112</sup> Myth and ritual are closely bound to Abakanowicz's internal world expressed as silent symbols of humanity. As with many artists of this era, fascinated with popular theories about ancient mythologies and anthropological studies from around the world, Abakanowicz was also strongly influenced by Eliade and Jung and their writings about early cultures, rituals, cyclical time and the collective unconscious. Witnessing the horrors of war would have compounded her philosophies about the human condition, supported by thinkers such as Jung, Eliade and Campbell as well as her Romantic Polish cultural heritage.

about celebratory events of some kind and refer to ancient mythologies, rebirth and cyclical time, past, present and future. She claims that the pursuit for a spiritual meaning in Abakanowicz's work "fulfilled her romantic longing for a return to a primordial time – a time of 'the beginning' – and her wish to restore the vital link between people, nature and the earth" (2004:102).

The global context of the 1960s was one of contradiction: the aftermath of war left people struggling to regain a balanced life economically, psychologically and philosophically. While destruction abounded, renewal was also in the air. The USA in particular, was a politically charged public domain where social justice, activism and community engagement were being redefined (Lacy, 2010:xxxvii). While Mendieta and Abakanowicz were directly affected by their personal political contexts, Lacy<sup>113</sup> is concerned with the *individual*<sup>114</sup> in society, challenging social attitudes by presenting pro-active collaborative community performances. Social realities such as violence, equality and difference became the content of Lacy's pro-active art events. Lacy claims that it is art's place to bring visibility to all social injustices and advocates making the private public. Lacy maintains that

the political of *women's particular and specific bodies* were hard to ignore in a climate of growing feminist activism<sup>115</sup>. The threat of physical violence expressed in many women's performances as vulnerability, inspired instead activist ... body based 'private' performances and large-scale public performances on violence against women (2010:2-3).

Author and academic, Sharon Irish (2010) presents Lacy's life and her art as being both profoundly personal and political, grounded in everyday individual experiences and power structures linked to oppression. Irish explains that these concerns deal with the 'spaces between' *self* and other, art and life, the body and urban physical structures. Lacy (in Irish, 2010:4) defines feminist as meaning a political version of a woman's sensibility,

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<sup>113</sup> Irish (2010) presents Lacy as coming from a strong Feminist background in the time of civil rights movements, student riots and social activism.

<sup>114</sup> Kuspit (Chapter 2) challenged New Genre Public Art as too superficial in that the individual was not central to these artwork. However, in Lacy's work, it is the individual that constructs and presents the issues inherent in each work.

<sup>115</sup> Feminism created an awareness of many injustices that were thought to be taboo or unacceptable subjects that were previously ignored. However, this study is not dealing with feminism per se but has similar intention of creating awareness of marginalisation and difference.

and politics as the evaluation of power and the attempt to distribute power equally, reassessing the nature of power by questioning dominant constructs of a patriarchal society. Lacy works within a contemporary socio-cultural political framework of New Genre Public Art on the edges of theatre/performance, collaboration, community participation and activism. Documentation through all media plays a pivotal role as information, distribution and the potential for change. Women are central to her collaborative performances, particularly issues of: abuse, violence and rape; aging, racism, minority groups and marginalisation; and issues related to youth/teens including gang warfare.

While Mendieta and Abakanowicz created their own personal myths, Lacy develops community performances as collaborative contemporary myths of self-actualisation or rites of passage<sup>116</sup>. All Lacy's work is about relationality – experiences, *difference* and acceptability between cultures/people, that is, *who we are and how we exist* within our communities. Story-telling, mind games and the re-construction of truths are central to these processes. Lacy summarises the nature and context of her work which quite clearly parallels White's theory of narrative therapy:

The concreteness of experience was communicated through one's narratives of self; personal stories were the foundation ... . Memory was wrapped up with [narratives], collective and individual memory, and alternate histories were constructed. The urgency to address very real injuries led to a desire to go public. ... [We] made significant contribution[s] to cultural critique and media intervention (2010:2&3).

Irish explains Zen Buddhism's influence on Lacy in the philosophy that we see ourselves as co-participating in the existence of all things and claims that Lacy explored intangible experiences that might be called spiritual. Because of her belief in interconnectedness, Lacy's spirituality is the basis for her "feeling the world" (2010:169). This interconnectedness was presented as underlying the context and content of this study. Lacy claims: "The drive for social justice is the desire for connection, and the desire to share and make equal – to experience a oneness" (in Irish, 2010:169).

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<sup>116</sup> While major rituals such as weddings or funerals still exist, ceremonies such as the 'naming of a child', 'coming of age' or initiation practices have become less significant.





Figs 53a-e. Suzanne Lacy with Cecilia Barrique. *Tattooed Skeleton*, 2010.  
Community Performance

Artists worked with local collaborators to explore gaps between the experience of abused women and society's collusion. A series of performances and strategic civic interventions explored alternative venues and publics to 'publish' domestic violence and offer new diverse possibilities: shelters; award ceremonies; dialogue between activists, media and officials; an art exhibition; a live-streamed performance; and a massive protest on November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, where the names of women who were killed during the past year were read.

*Tattooed Skeleton* was a year-long collaborative project examining socio-political discourses toward domestic and gender violence by officials, media and publics in Madrid. The simple emblem of a mask covered in personal narratives of helplessness, abjection and entrapment symbolise all the complexities experienced by these abused women and girls. Victims remain silent and hidden behind white masks for fear of retribution.



In her discussion on physical, psychological and social injustices, Lacy comments that few modes of communication or language exist that speak of violence against women and children beyond photographic documentation. These images show the horror of any event and are therefore generally complicit in the further violation and degradation of the victims (2010:94). Media concern is for *news* rather than compassion for victims. The violence is often turned inward by the victim who becomes depressed; hides from society and oneself, thus compounding the situation (self-victimisation).

Within the context of this study, one could ask what languages exist for any form of *difference* where fear, abhorrence, secrecy and shame are common and in which people are marginalised and stigmatised<sup>117</sup>.

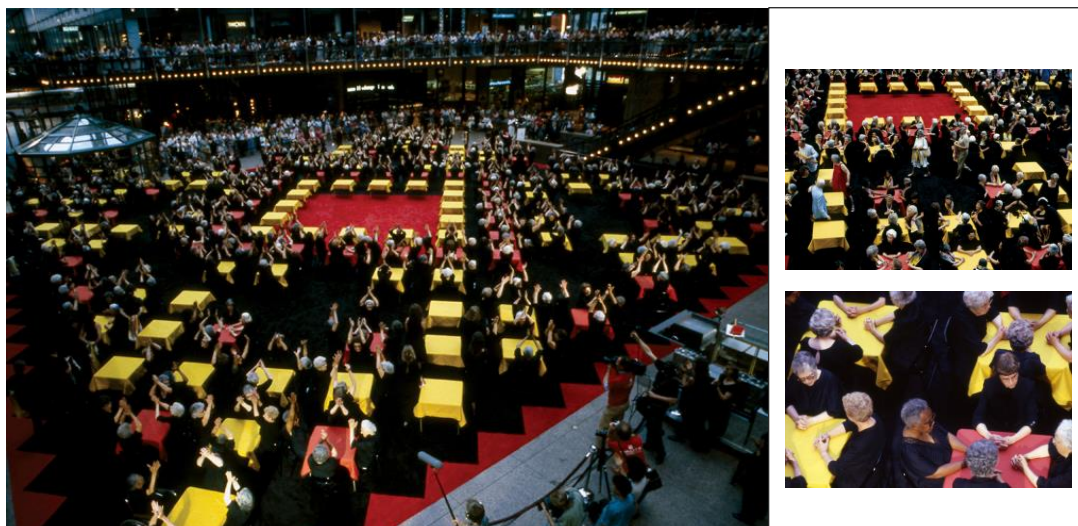
Lacy's year-long collaboration, *Tattooed Skeleton*, 2010 (Figs 53a-e), explores numerous avenues for creative visual language and modes of expression that open debates surrounding difficult issues. This study posits that art-making and performative events can provide alternative modes of addressing such issues.

Lacy (2010), in clarifying ideas about pro-active art within socio-political contexts, believes that it is obsession and idiosyncratic activities over a period of time that makes something art – ritualised behaviour<sup>118</sup> (Figs 4a-d). Lacy asserts that within a public event in a non-art site, the artist becomes a witness, reporter and analyst for a particular socio-culturally biased concern; the performance gives public articulation and permission to speak out loud, gives voice to internal dialogues. She further maintains that these activist events do not provide answers but reveal information that requires questioning. Feminist reasoning is that “individual experience has profound social implications” (2010:176-177); the social is inherently political. Lacy believes that it is an innate human need to reflect on the meaning of one's life and one's work.

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<sup>117</sup> Lacy claims that it is no longer possible to plead ignorance about sexual violence. I agree but feel that it is an issue that people choose to ignore because of the horror it induces. It is easier to ignore.

<sup>118</sup> Ritualised behaviour is seen in presentations of contemporary rituals or collaborative community performances and private performative enactments.



Figs 54a-c. Suzanne Lacy with Nancy Dennis, Phyllis Jane Rose, Miriam Shapiro & Susan Stone. *The Crystal Quilt*, 1985-87. Community performance.

*Whisper Minnesota* Project, 1984-1987 was a collaborative “celebratory mythic” programme dealing with the process of aging. *The Crystal Quilt* and *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* explored the experience of aging and specifically, how aging women are represented in media and public opinion. The project was developed over a two year period during which Lacy created a lecture series, film screening, and media campaign in collaboration with Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD), The Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs and the Minnesota Board of Aging, Walker Art Center and At the Foot of the Mountain Theater. Her research process culminated in two large-scale performance installations: with a group of Southern California women over the age of 65 on a beach in La Jolla; and the other on Mother’s Day in the middle of a shopping center.

Under a large crystalline roof, *The Crystal Quilt* featured 430 Minnesota women over the age of 60 seated at tables on an 82-square-foot rug designed by painter Miriam Shapiro to resemble a quilt. Speakers mixed personal observations and reminiscences with social analysis about the unutilized potential of the elderly. An accompanying soundtrack by composer Susan Stone mixed the voices of 75 women talking about aging. A loon cry or thunderclap rang through the space in ten minute intervals, signaling the women to change the position of their hands on the table, thus changing the design of the quilt.

At the end of the performance, the audience flooded the stage bearing hand-painted scarves. As they greeted the triumphant performers, they transformed the austere order of the quilt design into a crazy quilt of color. *The Crystal Quilt* performance was broadcast live by KCET public television.

In *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind*, Lacy was intent on producing a series of policy and media actions that culminated in an ocean front performance for an audience of over 1,000. During the performance, 154 participants sat at white-cloth covered tables discussing their lives, their relationships, their hopes and their fears. Audiences watched first from afar, as a sound score created by Susan Stone reiterated their conversations. Later, the audience was invited to stand around the tables for a closer listen and to experience a space of active contemplation that Lacy and the women had created. The structure of this tableau vivant was based on the populist theatre movement, which Lacy began incorporating into her practice as inspiration for a contemporary public performance.



Figs 55a-c. Suzanne Lacy & Susan Shapiro. *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind*, 1983-84. Community performance.

Lacy's mode of communication is personal lived experiences presented through storytelling in public contexts as in White's theory of narrative therapy: issues are given public appearance and challenged in open debate. Her performances follow a definite pattern although each one takes a different format. Lacy explains that the artwork becomes "a primary philosophical inquiry ... about the space of collective thought. [The work] is an attempt to understand what we do in art, and, through art as a metaphor, to understand what we are doing in life, with each other" (2010:202). Irish (2010:61) clarifies this pattern as a dialogue in action that enables visibility of conversations. This inherently incorporates the sharing of ideas, anguish, realities, dreams and desires. Real people become protagonists, real life becomes content, real stories become vehicles while real social sites become the canvas and galleries for theatrical events. Public exposure is given to hidden injustices through shared experiences. The realities within the event become the re-construction of the *self* for each participant – *telling it out loud* makes it tangible (real) thus making confrontation possible.

Lacy's format or template is a combination of performance, parade, conversation, soundtrack, colour, media campaigns, TV broadcast, posters/billboards/maps and in some instances, conferences and articles. Lacy appropriates whatever means available to create public awareness. Irish refers to this mode of creating as a "strategy of convergences" (2010:85). Philosopher, Homi Bhabha (1998) calls this creative practice "contextual contingency ... multilayered [sic] dialogues" of conversational art (in Irish, 2010:89). Lacy's ability to bring together different modes of communication in creative processes conveys her conviction that there is power in many, that the overlay of voices, the multiplicity of a *greater voice* is able to speak in unison for change and for a proactive approach to social injustices.

Lacy's multi-layered dialogues are clearly demonstrated in the two performances from the *Whisper Minnesota* Project, 1984-1987. *The Crystal Quilt*, 1987 (Figs 54a-c) and *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind*, 1984 (Figs 55a-c) were collaborative celebratory mythic events around the process of aging. Lacy explains that we no longer "have those rituals to distinguish our passage into old age ... . I am interested in aging because I feel in a certain sense we've been robbed [as women] of dignified, competent and beautiful models or images of aging" (in Irish, 2010: 97).





Figs 56a-c. Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz. *In Mourning and In Rage*, 1977. Community performance.

In December 1977, ten women were strangled and dumped on the sides of roads by the “Hillside Strangler” in Los Angeles. The media sensationalised the victims’ lives, creating a climate of fear and superstition. Much of Lacy’s work is in relation to the ignorance and lack of a suitable language with which to raise awareness in the public domain. *In Mourning and In Rage* was a media performance offering an alternative interpretation of women abuse and rape. Participants from the Woman’s Building, the Rape Hotline Alliance and City Council joined with the feminist community and families of the victims in creating a public ritual of rage as well as grief.

A motorcade of sixty women followed a hearse to City Hall, where news media reporters waited. Ten very tall mourning women robed in black climbed from the hearse. At the front steps of City Hall, the performers each spoke of a different form of violence against women, connecting these as part of *a fabric of social consent for such crimes* [my emphasis]. After each of the ten performers spoke, the motorcade of women, now surrounding City Hall steps, yelled, “In memory of our sisters, we fight back!” The tenth woman, clothed in red, stepped forward to represent fighting back against all forms of violence.

City Council members voiced support to the press and the Rape Hotline Alliance pledged to start self-defense classes. Singer-songwriter Holly Near created "Fight Back" the night before for the event, and sang it as a cappella in the City Plaza. The performance reached its target with extensive coverage on local and state-wide news.



*Whispers, the Waves, the Wind* and the *The Crystal Quilt* are contemporary rites of passage. They were developed in such a way as to take on personal, social and political ramifications – the cultural invisibility, and the potential loss of dignity and respect faced as we age. In each event, a large gathering of women, all over 60 years of age, clad in white or black and seated around tables in groups of 4, *whispered* about issues of growing old. The ritual and magic of these works were embedded in the format, the passing of time, the sounds and the spectacle of the event in a public arena. One needs to take into account the context and the intention that also locates such works as critique, engagement, awareness and re-evaluation. Lacy felt that the power of these performances was the evocation of a universal experience of aging.

Lacy (2010:92) relates that at the end of the 1960s, she found herself in the midst of personal stories – dark undercurrent experiences of physical abuse, sexual assault, rape, shame and betrayal – abuses that do not have a face. The themes for these naive but compelling performances were taking control: anger, fear and violence (Figs 56a-c). In order to tell their stories, these performers needed to unlock their memories. However, they first had to “undo their shame” (Lacy 2010:94). Lacy claims that in an era shrouded with secrecy<sup>119</sup> about violence and other inequities, early performances – outrages against abuse – were curiously healing. Rape and fear of rape were a daily part of every woman’s consciousness but the subject was taboo<sup>120</sup>. Author and social activist, Susan Griffin wrote in 1971, “I have never been free from the fear of rape. ... I never asked why men raped ... the subject is so rarely discussed ... one begins to suspect a conspiracy of silence” (in Lacy, 2010:94).

Lacy contends that raped women are virtually silenced in their personal and public lives. She presents a new world view in performances to audiences whose ideas about women and violence were often previously only formed by the entertainment media

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<sup>119</sup> This secrecy still exists world-wide.

<sup>120</sup> These subjects are still taboo today and are often the cause of depression. Lacy (2010:98) presents Susan Brownmiller’s publication, *Against our wills: men, women and rape*, 1975 as being an important moment in exposing and opening the debate around women abuse and rape. Thus “naming” and “narratives of violence” became a way of addressing these issues. In 1976, at International Tribunal of Crimes against Women, Simone De Beauvoir (in Lacy, 2010:98) brings to light the shameful truths that half of humanity is trying to cover up. She stresses that women need to “talk to one another, talk to the world”.



Figs 57a-d. Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz. *Three Weeks in May*, 1977.  
Community performance.

*Three Weeks in May* exposed the extent of reported rapes in Los Angeles during a three week-long performance in 1977. This was the first of a series of large-scale events in the public domain on violence and rape against women and is considered a signature piece [along with the earlier staged performance, *Ablutions*, 1972], defining strategies and processes, for a series of works subsequently created by Lacy and Leslie Labowitz.

The gallery context gave way to a need, politically, for a public context. Why talk about rape in an art gallery when one could be raped on the way home from that space? This demand for relevance led to the development of a public locale, the City Hall mall, as placement for a large map of Los Angeles. Each day Lacy went to Los Angeles Police Department's central office to received confidential reports on the rape from the previous day. She stamped these locations on the map, each surrounded by fainter markings symbolic of 'additional nine estimated rapes for every one reported'.

As the map rapidly turned red, a second map, installed next to it and showing sites of resistance – organizations and self-help activities for violated women – revealed places and schedules for three weeks of activities. This collaboration was taken to the streets, to the place of the crime where red drawings and dates recorded the rape.

The event became a media hype of daily reportage, factual evidence, maps, side-walk drawings and sites of resistance. They were extremely visual, in your space, in your face, impolite realities of rape.



(2010:95&97). *Ablutions*, 1972 (Figs 4a-d), *In Mourning and In Rage*, 1977 (Figs 56a-c), *Three weeks in May*, 1977 (Figs 57a-d) *Auto on the edge of time*, 1993-94 (Figs 1a-e), and *Tattooed skeleton*, 2010 (Figs 53a-e), became processes of public telling and personal healing. Artists negotiated their role within the public arena – “as framers of an unexplored reality, activists giving voice to the unspoken” (Lacy, 2010:97). While the *Whisper Minnesota* Project was celebratory in nature, these events were confrontational and highly activist in the intentions of naming and shaming.

This chapter explores the body as a site of creative meaning-making processes of *being in the world*. Importantly, these artists work within an autobiographical framework drawing on their particular life contexts – their personal encounters dictate the essence of their artworks. Autobiographical knowledge rather than second-hand accounts of trauma, separateness and *difference*, is essential in this research. The artists’ intimate experiences of anguish and estrangement are the catalysts for their creative investigations and processes of transformation, that of establishing their rights of *being*.

All three artists are concerned with the *individual in a social context*, the ability to speak out about personal and social injustices, and how art becomes processes of self-actualisation. While the works are very different, the underlying intentions are similar – to draw attention to and open debates about *difference* and *belonging*. These employ philosophical and psychological mind games that negate both the *inner-critic* and dominant social constructs. It is not what one sees but rather what one experiences; *who you are* rather than *how people see you*. Individual *voices* not only convey the intentions but are the quintessential tools of emotive lived experiences - the content of the art.

Chapter 4 weighs up the practical component of this research against notions of re-authoring, constructed truths and multiple *selves*. It deals specifically with the *self*, the *inner-critic*, transformation and the construction of *my truth*.





Figs 58-59. Vicki Ross. *My story: dismal days*, 2011-12. Memory drawings.

Figs 60-62. Vicki Ross. *Untitled*, 2011. Memory drawings.

Fig 63. Vicki Ross. *Falling*, 2011. Memory drawings.

*Images sink into the depths of darkness,  
floating in the shallow murky spaces of the mind.  
Fluidity parallels uncertainty;  
memory contests the ebb-and-flow of time and space;  
here but not quite, there – now gone but still felt;  
continuously echoing the cacophony of my mind.*

Abstractions representations of my mind offers a scope into moments of confusion - fragmented elements, like memories, float within a spatial context. The fluidity of the ink medium parallels recollection, fluctuating, never still, always dissipating, sometimes remembered, sometimes forgotten. Together with the metaphorical use of media and making processes, abstraction can be seen as an equivalent of the invisibility of and inability to define or fully understand depression. Depression is not something that can be cured; it is an endless and cyclical affliction. It comes and goes for no apparent reason. Dealing with or balancing the effects requires ongoing re-structurings of the *self*. All the methodologies used in my artworks and performative acts are inherent in depressive symptoms: rawness, confusion, disorder, darkness, obsession, repetition, endlessness and rupture.

## CHAPTER 4: Re-locating to a new self: in between spaces of my mind in performative enactments

Art making can be many things: a compulsion, a profession, a spiritual practice. “Making” ... is innately optimistic [and personal]. Making counters despair, personally and metaphorically. ... The aspirational [sic] longings that generate art are akin to other spiritual longings. ... We act, and the effects ripple out in time and space, each act affecting all the others in Indra’s net<sup>121</sup>. We make the art and art makes us (Lacy, 2010:298-299).

Art making was a function of a reflective life, not a skill set. ... Artwork becomes less a ‘work’ than a process of meaning-making interaction. ... breaking the boundaries between art & life (Lacy, 2010:321, 325).

Chapter 4 explores art-making as a performative self-recovery mechanism in addressing *difference, states of being* and *belonging*. It also provides an explanation of performativity within the context of my art practice that is concerned with outcomes rather than finished products. Memory drawings, fragmented moments (Figs 58-63) are presented as testaments to intense detaching processes while reflexive italicised *writings*, derived from *within the performative*, offer my experiential perspectives that attempt to give voice to corporeal awareness. These *reflections* accompany the documentation of ritualised behaviour and aim to evoke the complexity – the turmoil or quiet orderliness – of experience in relation to time and space. These *writings* offer alternative modes of formal analysis. This is in keeping with the overall intention of this research – that of demonstrating art’s potential for personal transformation. Analysis of my artworks therefore deals with conceptual relationships (rather than formal analysis) between art-making processes and content, that is, between media, body, context and content. These elements are: the purposeful choice of media and selected sites; the physical interaction

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<sup>121</sup> Lacy’s (2010:xxxvii-xxxviii) reference of Indra’s net refers to the Buddhist allegory of interdependency – Indra’s net spreads over the universe with a brilliant jewel at each node, the movement of any point affecting all the others .



Figs 64a-j. Vicki Ross. *Blue self* series, 2014. Memory drawings.

I maintain that my drawings are performative in the sense that through my aggressive, obsessive, intense or fragile making processes, I am able to expel my anger or vulnerability. These works are remnants of my emotions, nuances of my *self*, utterances, questionings, narrations – sometimes raging, sometimes submissive. They are psychological games of truth, the untanglings of my mind through which I express my private ramblings, mental echoes of the returning past. They explicate *who I am*. Of importance is the concept that *self* is not a fixed conclusive notion but one that continues to unfold, shift and become a multi-layered construct. The endless repetition becomes the meaning-making process through which I balance my life – they *locate* my sense of *self*.

between myself and selected sites/media/drawing formats; the emotive responses to these choices; conceptual interpretations of formal elements such as process, movement, repetition, time, fluidity, tactility, layering, burning, ritual; and the resultant associative social-political content. This chapter thus addresses notions of multiple *selves*, the body as a site of trauma, ritualised behaviour and *[dis]-[engagement]* in creative processes of meaning-making as modes of *locating my self in the world*. Artworks are presented as the *visualisation of recovery*.

I have positioned myself as the pivot for this research, theoretically, conceptually and practically, and therefore, draw on my own realities in becoming a witness to my existence. An autobiographical framework provides authentic interrogation from the *inside*, from my personal embodied experiences and from my understanding of how positionality<sup>122</sup> takes place. This is a phenomenological exploration of the *self*, myself, in which my body becomes a vehicle for creative processes in relation to the states of my mind during depression. Thus, I confront my sense of dislocation, trauma and my own interiority in a search for *belonging*.

Jennifer Lapum<sup>123</sup>, in looking at “the idiosyncratic nature of human experiences” (2008) while investigating her own research identity, references academic theorist, Chaim Noy’s (2003) assertion that the “performative nature of a journey ... is narrated in a way that it: ‘enacts, performs, and evokes, rather than conveys’” (in Lapum 2008). Lapum maintains that the dialogical<sup>124</sup> nature of her writing in the first person present tense allows the reader to engage more personally in the work while enhancing aesthetic and moral sensibilities. She applies a “conversational quality ... in an attempt to engage speed and tone and the natural involvement of an audience” (2008). Gretel Taylor<sup>125</sup> (2008:3) claims that in using a diversity of writing styles, she hopes to effect in the reader an experience

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<sup>122</sup> Positionality in this study is the locating of myself within my understanding of who I am becoming through the transformative processes of re-enactments. This also involves myself in relation to others.

<sup>123</sup> Jennifer Lapum. 2008. The performative manifestation of a research identity: storying the journey through poetry. The article is based on her doctoral research investigating patients’ experiences of technology in heart surgery.

<sup>124</sup> Over the last few decades, alternative modes of writing such as reflexive, dialogic and conversational, have been supported by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984 in Lapum 2008), Norman Denzin (2000 in Lapum 2008), Arthur Frank (2005 in Lapum 2008), Loth (2011), Roberts (2008), and Taylor (2008). These styles have been evident in many of the research documents that I have read.

<sup>125</sup> Gretel Taylor. 2008. Locating: place and the moving body. DPhil thesis.





Figs 65a-i. Vicki Ross. *Unseen and silenced* series, 2012. Memory drawings.

of multiplicity similar to the lived moment between body and place of her *locating* dances. My own *reflections* are influenced by moments of trauma and fragments of renewal, and are constructed by my experiences. I posit that, due to the cyclical, temporal and repetitive nature of my work that is always in flux and has no end, it is necessary that these personal writings are presented in similar dialogical, conversational and direct modes in the present tense.

My art practice is explored as philosophical psycho-social experiences and metaphorical implications and thus, the emotive content and context of the work is imperative. My personal written *reflections* that accompany both my artworks and my theory, are presented in italics, indented when felt necessary, in an attempt to equate the extreme conflicts and burning intensity of my *inner-critic* and convey the incessant turmoil of engulfing/consuming experiences. This *personal tone* aims to allow the reader a scope into my mind<sup>126</sup>.

This practical-led research investigates *how* creativity enables or creates a sense of *belonging* or positioning of my states of mind. My body/mind/head spaces become vehicles for conveying trauma/healing, chaos/stillness of mind, absence/presence, separation/engagement and states of mindlessness or mindfulness that result from living with depression in the world today (Figs 64a-j, 65a-i). Making meaning through creative processes both explores and expresses who I am within a specific time and place. The aim is to engage my whole being, not just the intellect but also my emotional, psychological, philosophical and spiritual consciousness as modes of connectedness to place, any place, visible or invisible, and to my sense of *self*. I work with the conviction that performative art-making is my methodology for inner transformation and self-actualisation<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> Roberts (2008) claims that the turn to performativity was influenced by new forms of writing: “The use of poetry [visual arts], fiction and more reflexive writing ... challenged what has constituted ‘academic’ or ‘research’ writing. ... research that disrupts the ‘traditional’ notion of the research process as not necessarily according to traditional, linear conception of collection, interpretation and dissemination – research becomes a flexible, recursive process with its ‘end’ less definable” (2008:6).

<sup>127</sup> González Leah’s (2003) self-study doctoral research about the nature of art, emphasises the power of art for inner transformation. She references Ellen Dissenayake’s (1987, 1992) notion that art and creative processes are natural and intrinsic to each human being. González Leah claims: “Art is ritualised behaviour that accounts for lost communal rituals providing a sense of belonging and identity” (2003:vii).



Figs 66a-f. Vicki Ross. *Self but other: the hair cut*, 2006. Film stills.

These were my first two performative works during a very low period in my life. At the time, these self-reflective and self-discovery processes were intuitive. I needed to change my circumstances. A trip to de Doorns Nature Reserve in the Cape gave me an opportunity to try performativity and I found them extremely transformative.

*Apprehensive, even fearful, it took all my courage to enact this decision. Initially, I had feelings of nakedness – including mental nakedness, a totally foreign notion. Then I accepted that difference is not abnormal – just other. I became another self within myself. This was revealing and elevating.*



Fig 67. Vicki Ross. *Metamorphosis*, 2006. Film stills.

*A slight breeze passes over my skin, splatters of wet white clay trickle over my body. My mind engages with this moment. I roll in the sand – body, sand clay merge. I am part of the earth, the rocks. I head towards the ocean knowing that the turquoise blue ocean will wash me, cleans me.*



It is important to acknowledge various modes of language including visual, metaphorical, sound, movement and performativity. Roberts (2008: 2-15) posits that new creative media such as alternative audio-visual-movement-tactile-text processes, can layer and interconnect information. Cultural theorist, Norman Denzin (2003 in Roberts 2008:7) asserts that research can be presented in alternative artistic modes in which the meanings of *lived experience are inscribed and made visible through performance* [my emphasis]. Roberts (2008) claims that communication is more than mere words or images. The performative accepts the emotions of the shifting body in a spatial context as aiding interpretation. It produces ‘meaning’ intertextually. Since communication has a temporal dimension, even in speaking, the communicative resources of the visual body are central to performativity. Roberts rationalises the performative research practice as being fluid, uncertain and temporal incorporating gesture, tactility, sound and space as evocative elements of memory and sensuality of embodied understandings and exchanges. Lapum (2008) adds that performativity provides space for the dialogical construction of knowledge – “crafting [artworks] can be fashioned as a way of knowing. It can be a source of knowledge...” (2008). Embodied experiences are ways of knowing; are new knowledge.

The practical component of this study has two objectives: to open a discourse around the transformative function of art for a person suffering depression; and challenge notions of *difference* by presenting alternative realities of the performative mind (Figs 66a-f, 67).

*Difference does not make one ‘other’,  
difference is not bad,  
in fact, difference can be seen as merely ‘alternative’.*

My argument is that everyone is different in one way or another; it is a matter of opinion. Adopting this attitude challenges social norms and invalidates conformity. Audiences/readers may question this study as too personal. However, my personal modes of dealing with depressive emotions can be seen as possibilities for others. Anyone can challenge concepts of *belonging*.



*The intimate and personal become revealed and public;  
the creative process becomes the voice of the artist,  
becomes the voice of many.*

Depression results in feeling out-of-place with everyone in general. Detachment is seen as a major negative symptom of depression<sup>128</sup>. However, my intention is to create an understanding of *[dis]-[engagement]* as an important process of managing *otherness*<sup>129</sup>, a counter rather than surrender to depression (Fig 14).

Intertextuality is central to this study. Written *reflections*, drawings, media, enactments, projections, sound, space, light and time are all interconnected and become part of the overall interpretation and understanding of this research. The personal *writings* and theoretical component are completely intertwined with my art practice and are to be seen within the context of each other. *Reflections* are influenced by my art-making, my direct embodied experiences and the effects of depression – these *writings* are explanations, alternative critical and conceptual analyses and experiences of artworks, of *states of being*, of renewal (Figs 68a-j).

I am interested in the creation of a new culture of *becoming-by-acting*, one in which the model of the aesthetic process will be extended as a way of being in the world. I feel it is my responsibility as a woman-making-art to make evident the process by which I participate in the creation of my own identity, and to provide structures which will allow for others to share in this activity (Lacy, personal writings, 2010:46).

The above statement by Lacy is in the context of marginalisation of minority groups and, particularly, women abuse and rape. It correlates with White's narrative theory of re-

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<sup>128</sup> Personal knowledge: see Chapter 1, footnote 29.

<sup>129</sup> Many people have coping mechanisms for dealing with their depressive conditions that are not generally spoken about and so continue to be seen as 'unacceptable' behaviour. Being alone can be a coping mechanism, a time in which to re-adjust or calm one's emotions, to manage one's feelings. Your own safe space is an essential element in managing depression and quieting the mind (personal knowledge). Cathy A. Malchiodi also maintains that solitude and day-dreaming are states that encourage creativity" (1998:76). Art therapy and creativity are recognised as methods for managing depression. Solitude/isolation/separateness need to be understood as positive actions rather than as 'negative conditions'.





Fig 69. Vicki Ross. *The measure of myself*, 2013. Performative enactment.

My shortness has played a major role in my feelings of *difference*. Hence, my circular and oval formats are based on my height, 147 cm. The inside demarcated spaces become my private personal mental and physical space – I mark the space, fill it, own it – thus I *belong*.

*Cold wet pigment onto warm skin – ochre – stains flesh,  
I am camouflaged.  
Another narrative, a mind game,  
freeing my secret, my identity, my state of being.*

*Lightly covered in a pigment of ochre, the evocation of sand, I claim my space. The ritual begins. I [dis]-[engage]. Incessant repetitive movements – extreme slowness – I absorb the warmth of the sun. A 182cm radius – the size of my out-stretched body – my safe zone. Crouching, stretching, reaching as a radius touching the circumference. An ephemeral journey of just existing, exploring the moment, each moment as I turn to complete the circle. The quiet, each moment, each imperceptible trace of movement reaches over to the next. It is claimed, it is a part of me, I am located.*

The work presents a multiplicity of languages – body, movement, colour, space, duration, sound, texture. It resonates within itself and in relation to my other work. The body is a common element in my art practice, in itself it is the trauma, the repetition, the recovery – past, present and future. The essence of this performative enactment is its minimalism, the embodiment of quietness, stillness, weightlessness, to exist lightly, silently. Body and sand become one – they create the liminality of an inter-zone, a connectedness.

Autobiographical performative re-enactments are manifestations of narratives, confessional and personal, and allow me to create uncontested events within a selected space or safe-zone. A safe-zone is a psychological state of mind as much as it is a physical space – it may or may not be demarcated in any way. However, when a circle or oval is drawn, the outside space is a public zone, inside the shape is my measured space, a safe zone. It contains the traces/memories of my *being* long after I have passed through the site: my absence, my presence. Traces become embodied in the site.

Documentation of my work is unobtrusive and low-key – it is about the experience. An automatic Canon and a digital Pentax camera, with a video feature, are used. These enactments are personal intimate events in which [dis]-[engagement] is paramount. Only the photographer and sometimes an additional person for security, are present. It is important that I am in a safe-zone, physically and mentally, so that I am able to [dis]-[connect] from the outside world in order to connect with the site, the space, the sounds – to turn inward and listen to my own inner self.

*I listen to the space, I respond to the elements – then, only once these are understood or pass through me, am I able to enact or engage, to enter into the journey. I am attentive to the impulse of my body. The site becomes the layered universe of all time, all place – I understand such overlays as metaphorical spaces of locating. Spaces of belonging are the subliminal constructs of my mind – a change from tangible to intangible space or knowledge, a subconscious acceptance of my existence.*



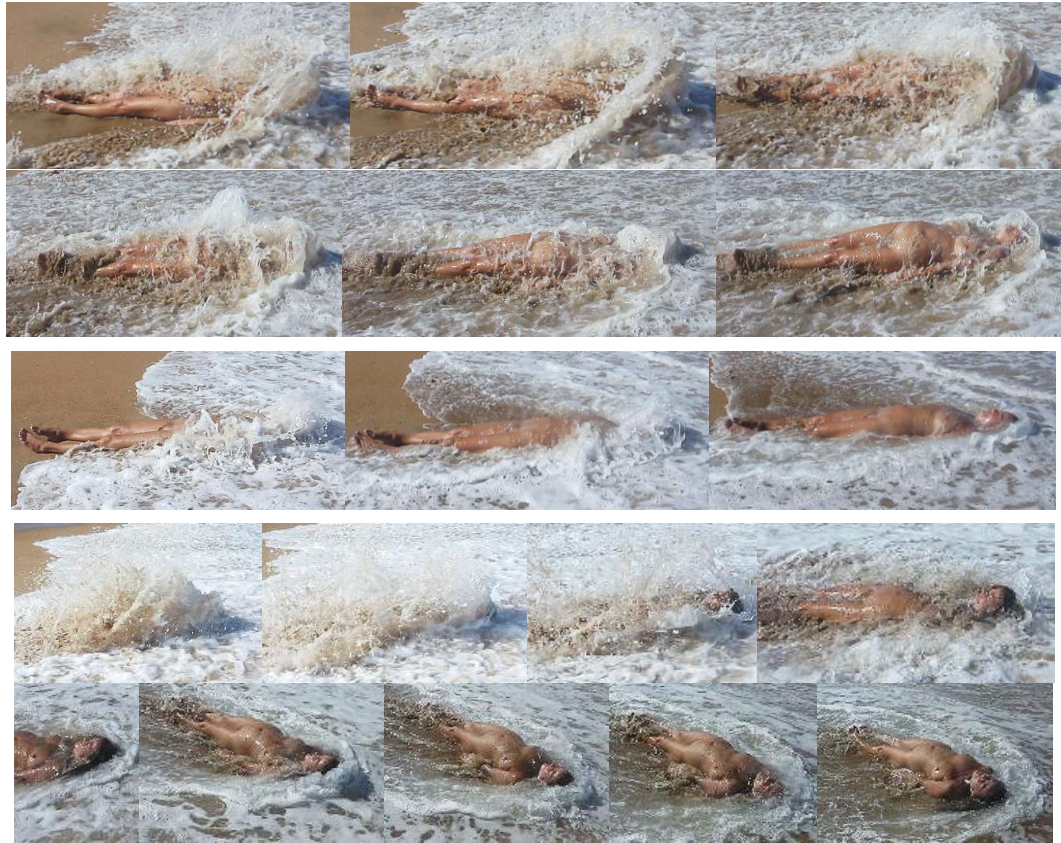
authoring the *self* and contradicts the notion of dominant constructed ideologies. Lacy's processes of 'becoming-by-acting' and the 'creation of one's own identity' compares with my own philosophy for making art and with my performative enactments and self-portrait abstractions.

Performativity provides a philosophical and practical methodology for re-authoring myself. The performative act, the *doing*, becomes a positive and powerful ritualistic connection to an intangible inherent knowledge that I *belong*. I becomes a belief in myself, another head-space, a safe-zone that nullifies the *inner-critic*. This constitutes psychological transformation and self-healing – my performative experiences in terms of site/space/place/time are forms of connectedness and communion within the specific duration of the enactment. *I turn inward; all time and all place are layered into one time and one place, then and now, there and here*. My enactments are equivalent to soul hunts or the spiritual “journeys into the depths of ourselves” (Alix, 2008). Performativity in my creative process is not acting<sup>130,131</sup>. Each performative act is a new beginning, a re-birth, a new story (Figs 69, 70a-c, 71). Norman Denzin (2001) claims: “Performativity is not a mere telling, but is an actual showing and being in the world that is moral and dialogical as a researcher” (in Lapum, 2008).

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<sup>130</sup> Chris Perkins (2009) discusses Judith Butler's notion of performativity as a social tradition in which mapping [or construction of an idea of the self] is performed by telling a story, recalling a dream, performing a dance, singing a song, or enacting a ritual. Socio-spatial meaning is communicated through movement, gesture, words, music, narrative and action. Performative mapping may make ephemeral traces, such as chalked map on a wall or a route mapped in soft mud but is often embedded in cultural practice. The performative tradition reinforces a more symbolic role for mapping – it embodies cultural values and reinforces particular practices. It becomes a powerful agent, formulating social cohesion or difference, influential in how we live in the world and forms a sense of place. Performativity is most obviously enacted in indigenous mapping, in recent Western technological interactivity and in artistic practice. Perkins further explains that Butler argued that identities are constituted through what people do, rather than who they are and that bodily practice is central in this process [in which my personal renewals of *belonging* take place]. Perkins asserts that Butler recognised that unspoken psychoanalytical factors contribute to the formation of subjects but argued social norms and historical contexts also strongly affect action, through the operation of discursive power and past performative utterances. Referring to important comparative studies, Perkins claims that we now appreciate the rich performative tradition from first peoples in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australasia, the Arctic and the Pacific. A holistic and unified worldview is often revealed in these performative indigenous mappings which avoids the dualisms of modern material maps. Art and science merge in practice; myth and ritual make the mapping; landscape and the event are not separated; time and space are relative and culturally enacted; and religious and secular beliefs combine.

<sup>131</sup> See Roberts (2008) in Introduction: he cites O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) as speaking about “safe spaces for dialogue” and claiming that these “biological narratives can heal, empower, challenge and transform our relationships to the past and the future” (in Roberts 2008:16).



Figs 70a-c. Vicki Ross. *Consumed I, II, III*, 2013. Performative enactments (three wave actions).

*Swirling, twisting, tumbling in the pounding of the waves, anger empties its pain into the ocean. Madness merges with sanity; confusion becomes clarity. It is a psychologically charged drama, cathartic and obsessive. The sun beats down on my body suspended on the cool wet shoreline. I wait. Uncertainty fills my mind. My attention centers on the crashing of the waves. Is it going to be a tiny ripple that licks the surface of my skin, coaxing thoughts of absorption, sand, water, sound, sun? Or will it be a thundering tossing sea of foam thrashing my body, pulling and pushing as it encircles me? I wait – it ripples around me, my body sinks into the sand, it receives me, it comforts me – it's a connection – a physical tangible essence of belonging. Finally, that wave lurking in my mind, opens up, consuming me, my mind. I feel alive and simultaneously, lost. Tossed, turned, churned – past memories expelled. I engage in the swirling pounding exfoliation of sand, water, salt, stinging my skin – drowning. A sense of aliveness flows through me.*

Each wave carries renewal, an alternative *self*, as sea becomes a fluid covering, a second-skin that encapsulates both body and mind. Taylor speaks about finding herself “in a trance-like inter-relation with the place. ... I felt again as I have on rare occasions before that I was not dancing at all but relating to the place, sensing it on all levels, sinking into the air around me, my entire body, not just parts of it aware of sensation outwardly and inwardly at once; the complexity yet unity of experiencing ... my face melting into the water ... my mind observing all of the experience” (2008:34&29). This captures exactly how I understand my performative experiences.



Fig 71. Vicki Ross, *Another self* series, 2014. Performative re-enactment.

By confronting and re-constituting my memories and emotions, the performative re-enactments evoke *[dis]-[order]*, *[dis]-[engagement]* and *[dis]-[connectedness]*. In their assumed pointlessness – extremely slow endless repetitive actions – together with the contradictions embedded in the work, the re-enactments exude a sense of *madness in sanity*<sup>132</sup>. The artworks are simple, direct and intuitive. They can be comprehended visually and emotionally. However, psycho-social interpretation is dependent on the unpacking of depressive devices<sup>133</sup> used. Alone-ness/separateness provides the necessary *[dis]-[engagement]* to unite with the *self*. These disruptive making-processes are based on the continual *[dis]-[ease]* associated with managing depression: madness of the mind; the continual cyclical nature of the condition; and the reality of multiple *selves* and renewal. Performative re-enactments provide the process of on-going re-assessment of the *self* (Figs 70a-c, 71).

What we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we can actually feel the rapture of being alive. ... We 'come out' of the earth, we 'are' the earth, we are the 'consciousness of the earth' (Campbell 1988:5, 32).

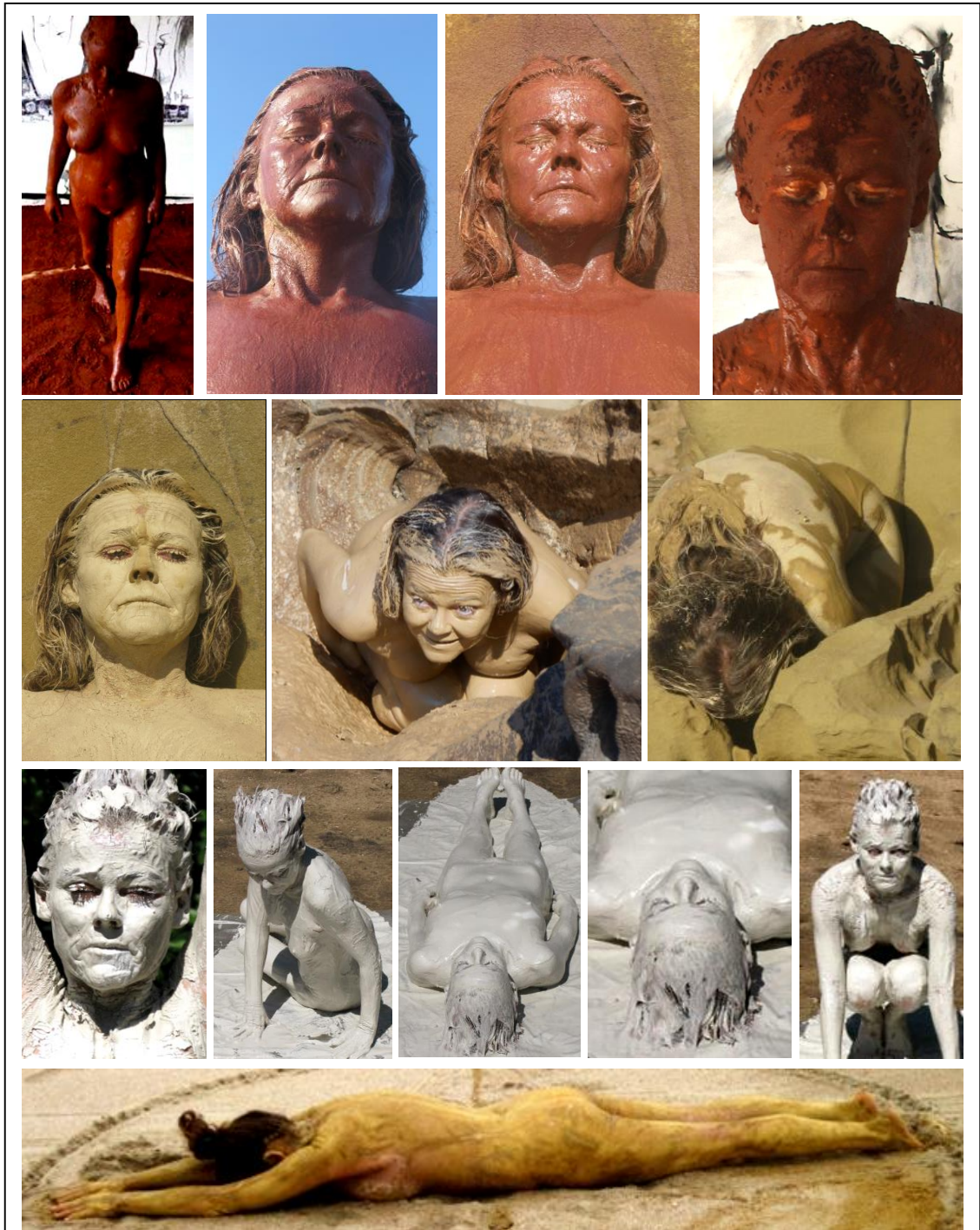
These enactments are based on my immediate and subconscious engagement between body, land, space and time. *The continual repetition, endless slow duration, the heat of the day, together with my body covering, metaphorically enacts my original birth as renewal, allowing me to connect with a new self.* “Ritual disrupts chronological time: it is the eternal return, for it can transform any given moment into a new beginning. By repeating itself, yet always remaining the same, ritual provides a world in perpetual motion with a recurrent, unvarying element of security” (Virel, 1980:129).

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<sup>132</sup> Madness is in all of us - see Chapter 2. *Madness in sanity* is a term I use to explain the intense obsession and seemingly pointlessness inherent in my work referring to what appears to be excessive, repetitive and endless. *Madness* in this instance, is the unacceptable inexplicable or manic behaviour such as 'being covered in clay' or 'obsessively slow repetition'. This may seem incomprehensible to others but is behaviour that is effective in allowing me to focus on myself by creating a mental barrier to the outside world.

<sup>133</sup> The use of these depressive devices was discussed in Chapter 2.





Figs 72a-m. Vicki Ross. Details of performative enactments with *masked body/second skin*.

Man was born when he began to question. Masks were born when man became the object of his own questioning. Thus, the mask is the primordial reminder of our role as symbols (Virel, 1980:15).

Day by day, everything I experience is refracted not only by my human, social and geographical environments, but also by the mental image of what I dream while awake or asleep. On the edge of this process, I amass the data of the experience in physic 'centers', that store, so to speak, units of emotional energy (Virel 1980:132).

Ritualised behaviour and a *masked*<sup>134,135</sup> body/second skin are seen as methodologies that extend the impact of performativity. In this study, ritualised behaviour is equated with rites of passage, initiation, birth or new beginnings. Thus, as in birth, the performative event requires my original attire of nakedness<sup>136</sup> in order to pass from an old *state of being* to a new *self*. The masked body in motion is therefore fundamental to the transformative process. Nakedness gives authenticity; it returns me to the ‘original’; it abolishes social consciousness; and most importantly, it denies accepted norms of being covered (clothed). Skin/second-skin/nakedness can be seen as a philosophical dimension that allows me to “climb out of [my] skin, to look under [my] skin, for deep truths” (Irish, 2010:1) (Figs 72a-m), to experience these notions when I am covered in a second-skin. Cultural theorist, Andre Virel (1980) corroborates the idea of nakedness/skin as being one’s true self. Virel (1980) states:

When man dreams of being naked and free, he recaptures his childhood and innocence. To take off one’s clothes is to strip oneself not only of personal history, but of History. It means going back to the very beginning and reliving one’s birth outside of chronological time. ... The body is naked, too, when it is involved in initiation rites. The etymology of the word reminds us that “initiation” is actually a return to the beginning, a new birth. ... Thus, there is an intimate relationship between nudity and the three great acts of life, be they considered events or symbols: birth, love and death (1980:11, 21).

*Covering my body in the rawness of sand, clay or ash evokes strong emotions – a deeply spiritual act of intimacy.*

*I turn inward.*

*Tactility and strangeness of wet cold matter slowly become acceptable; a new skin, a second skin.*

*I disengage;*

*I am an alternative telling of myself;*

*I am different yet I am the same.*

*Becoming-by-doing becomes my voice.*

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<sup>134</sup> The naked body is covered in raw materials such as clay, sand, mud, pigment, ash, et cetera.

<sup>135</sup> Virel states that the mask is nothing more than a mediator between the profane that is always ‘self’ and the sacred is always everything else (1980:14).

<sup>136</sup> The naked body in my practical work, although gendered, is not intended to be provocative/seductive or about sexuality. The body is the vehicle, the site of trauma and transformation. It is nevertheless, subtly confrontational in that it challenges social norms.





Figs 73, 75. Vicki Ross. The *inter-zones* within performative enactments.  
Figs 74a-c. Vicki Ross. *Touching rock*, 2014. Performative enactment.

These images represent what I call *inter-zones*: *in-between spaces of my mind* – that space between myself and sand, rock or water – the memory of my presence/absence.

*I hide my rage in the physical process of making –  
in the selection of media,  
in experimentation,  
in the evocation of the site,  
in the slow mediation of space and time.*

Both land and body are universal concepts, common to all, shared by all and therefore something that is known to the viewer. This human knowledge evokes an immediate response and a link between viewer, site and artist or self/land/body – interpretation comes from the viewer's own autobiographical framework of the own embodied experiences.

Performative re-enactments incorporate concepts of body/site relationships in which the land, site and space become the matrix for connectedness. The site is selected not for where it is but for what it offers in terms of intimacy, connection, isolation, media, weather, space and context. Thus geographical coordinates or actual locations are irrelevant<sup>137</sup>. Sites are fluid, always in a state of flux. Within each site/re-enactment there is an inter-zone, a liminal or in-between space: the merging between two elements (Figs 73-75). These in-between spaces incorporate interdependence, dispersal, traces, transitions, indeterminate boundaries and temporality.

Body/site positionality establish a specific dialogue within the immediate surroundings between body/covering, material and immaterial elements that identify the particularity of the context. These relationships become convoluted contested zones or spatial entities between body/space/land/stain, body/water/sand or past/presence/immediate future – they carry the traces from *then* and *now*. Sites are uncontrolled, sometimes remote environments of which I become a part - the quality of the sand/rocks or strength of the wind or tides, govern my actions. Each specific environment dictates my approach. *I respond to the elements – then, only once these are understood or pass through me, am I able to enact or engage, to enter into the journey. I am attentive to the impulse of my body. The site becomes the layered universe of all time, all place – I understand such overlays*

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<sup>137</sup> Geographical information or location are not listed in the empirical data related to my artworks. Sites are to be understood as whole elements – sand or rocks or water or beach or shoreline.





Fig 76. Vicki Ross. *Scarring the earth*, 2012. 1<sup>st</sup> burning enactment.

*Layers of paper, tissue paper, evolve into fragile translucent impressions, cast from my body, they are the surrogates of my soul.  
Exact replicas, they absorb the memories I carry, they equate my mind, they are my secrets, my fears, my loneliness;  
Hidden inside these hollow tenuous forms are the horrors and trauma of my life – filled with tears, anger, hurt and shame.*

Creative devices used in these burning enactments closely equate depressive symptoms – raging, manic/lethargic, self-destruction, searing heat, smoking veils, embers, ashes, traces, stains. Evocative aesthetic qualities establish a dichotomy between demise and renewal, the *inner-critic* and *belonging*. They encompass the embodied experiences of my states of mind but are also modes of empowerment. *They give me authority; they interrupt the outside world; I turn inward, I reflect on my being, my existence, my renewal.*



Fig 77. Vicki Ross. *My body, my soul*, 2012. 2<sup>nd</sup> burning enactment.

*as metaphorical spaces of locating. Spaces of belonging are the subliminal constructs of my mind – a change from tangible to intangible space or knowledge, a subconscious acceptance of my existence.*

The contact between body/elements articulates an intimacy, an innate response, a private act, one with the self and without judgement while the performative act constructs both traces of being and layers of transformation. These are ambiguous complex relationships, indistinct, open-ended and self-reflexive. Conscious and subconscious musings/reflections, visible and invisible traces are all embedded in that space, in my mind and in my soul.

Searching for an alternative mode for my personal enactments, the body casts<sup>138</sup> (Figs 76-79) become my surrogates. They become alternative realities in their burning, drowning and burying. The events of their demise are closely linked to White's theory of re-telling stories in order to deal with being out-of-balance, outside of social norms. Trauma is displaced, chaos is controlled, truth is re-constructed. Such *happenings* could be seen as manic endeavours or fruitless insanities – for me they are life-enriching confirmations of acceptance, of ridding myself of past traumas, of assuring renewal/*belonging*. Madness and sanity are wrapped together in compelling acts of recovery: obsessive but rational.

*Imbued with my spirit, my essence, my memories<sup>139</sup>. In a mutual intimate exchange, I become them, they become me; we are reflections of each other; each unique, inimitable, part of my deeply buried emotions. They carry my anger, my pain and my shame. These fragile forms are suspended in a cyclical process: being formed, destroyed and reformed – life, death, renewal.*

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<sup>138</sup> The paper bodies are formed with multiple layers of tissue paper in a plaster cast of my body.

<sup>139</sup> "Each other" refers to the multiple paper bodies as well as to myself – we are all individual members of my universal mind. I am totally immersed in these surrogates, mentally and physically – they represent my hollow, broken, chaotic self striving for existence. During the process of making — I am engrossed with their construction. This in itself is transformative, the careful methodical placing of multiple layers of tissue paper – 'skin' in the construction of my other *self*.





Fig 78. Vicki Ross. *Erasure*, 2013. 5<sup>th</sup> burning re-enactment.

*My outline hovers in the fine sand.*

*I dig out a hollow that now holds my surrogate filled with my thoughts, my memories.*

*A fury of flames explodes, crackling, smoking, alive – a rite of passage.*

*The intensity of the heat seeps into my being, erasing past memories.*

*Stained by the ashes, the sand receives my remains, my essence, my soul – memories defuse into oblivion.*

*Another time, another self - a coexistence between past, present and future.*

Burnings my surrogates could be seen as melancholia, dark burning memories that lurk in the mind. It is nevertheless, a self-recovery act. While preparing the site, my mind is in a frenzy. Will the body burn or will the fire just fester almost imperceptibly? Once the fire is lit, it take on its own dimensions: to burst into a furious rage of flames or slowly simmer, creeping across the burning body finally turning into embers. The fast furious flames are unexpectedly alarming but also evocatively beautiful – like the raging of my mind. The slow burning fire is disconcerting as it etches the edges of the body. This extremely slow lingering burning is like the confusion of my mind vacillating between staying and going – leaving incredibly fragile residues that disintegrate under my touch.

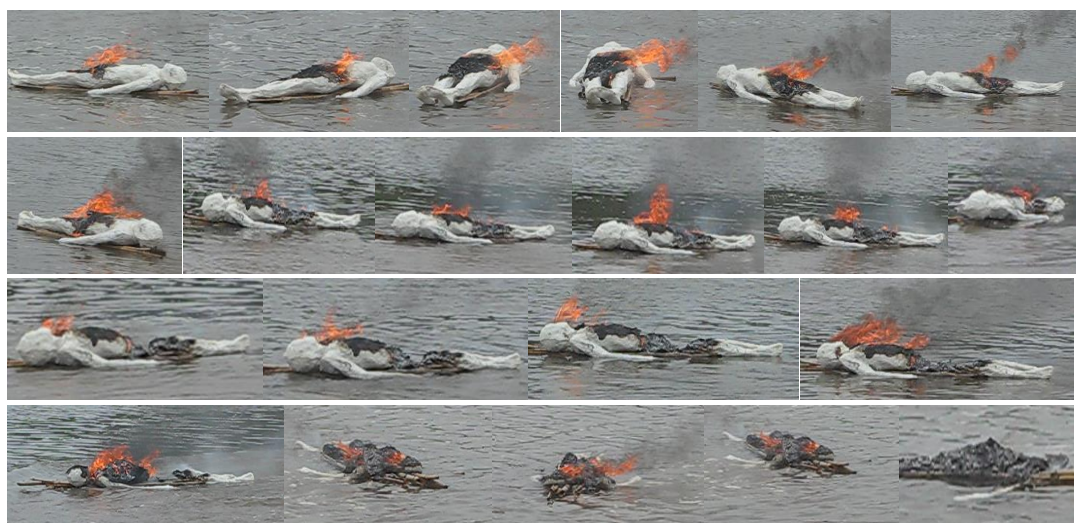


Fig 79. Vicki Ross. *Passage to the other side*, 2013. 6<sup>th</sup> burning re-enactment.

*Burnt, buried, drowned and destroyed. I feel the fire, the flames,  
the heat; it stains the earth. The remnants, the ashes, swirl in the  
air;  
I blow in the wind.*

*Burnt, buried, drowned equates the chaos of my mind, their trauma  
is my trauma, their existence – my experience.*

*Rituals re-live my life, re-tell my story.*

*Burning these paper surrogates is an extremely purgative experience. In the intensity of the fire, it seems as if all the bad memories, hurt and pain seep into the blackness of the smoke and dissipate into nowhere. Through the psychotherapeutic process of digging up and confronting repressed memories, I feel the underlying trauma in the blazing heat of the flames. The burning is regenerative, a catharsis, a ritual of renewal.*

*These re-enactments are similar in experience to the pounding of the waves. I grip the sand as the waves, with their own turmoil, flood through me, eroding away the mayhem of my inner-critic; or I release my hold as the cool ripple of a wave sweeps over the heat of my body.*

*During these re-enactments, my mind rages with anger or drifts away into a void that surrounds me, I turn inward as I sink in to an alternative state. In these altered realities, I have occasionally entered into what seems to me to be an altered state of mindfulness and belonging.*

Art critic, Richard Fuchs (1986) discusses British artist, Richard Long's walks as "traces of staying and passing" and that the choice of where he conducts his "walks", the particular place, has to do with what each site offers in terms of scale and spirit of place (1986:43). Fuchs states that "the relation between space and perception is central to Long's art – it is what makes the walks much more than formal exercises. ... Walking is ... an intensification of perception" (1986:99). This correlates with my walking



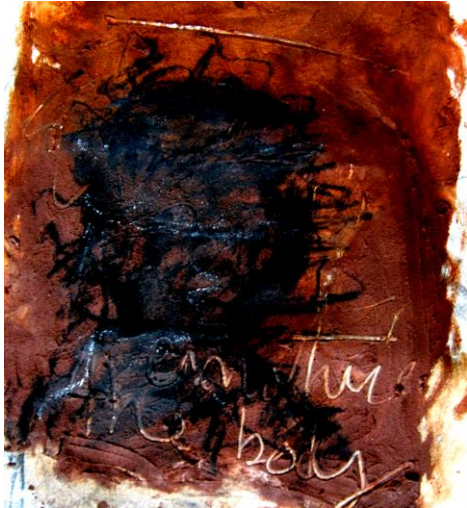


Fig 80. Vicki Ross. *Memory of my mind: the inner critic*, 2012. Memory drawing.

Fig 81. Vicki Ross. *Discord of memory: in-between spaces in my mind*, 2012. Digital image.

Tactile aggressive media becomes meaning and has authenticity; translucency suggests the intangible and spiritual but also layered confusion. Abstracted images are metaphorical representations of *states of being*. Media, technique and process become content: scarification and tactility of raw earth equate my experiences of darkness. Fluidity and translucency express tenuousness; while multiplicity confirms intensity and obsession.

Projections are always in flux, seen and not seen, maintain fluidity and elusiveness – this is the phenomenological nature of pure light. Projections offer transient readings with each viewing. Fleeting images are interlaced with memories of previous projections giving ever-changing interpretations. These are not conclusive but are embedded in constantly adjusting experiential and ephemeral explorations. Understood in relation to depressive conditions, these elements equate my experiences. *Sand is the rawness of anger; separation is being-out-of-place but also a time in which to regain order; repetition is the quiet raging in the mind but also alternative re-tellings of the self.*

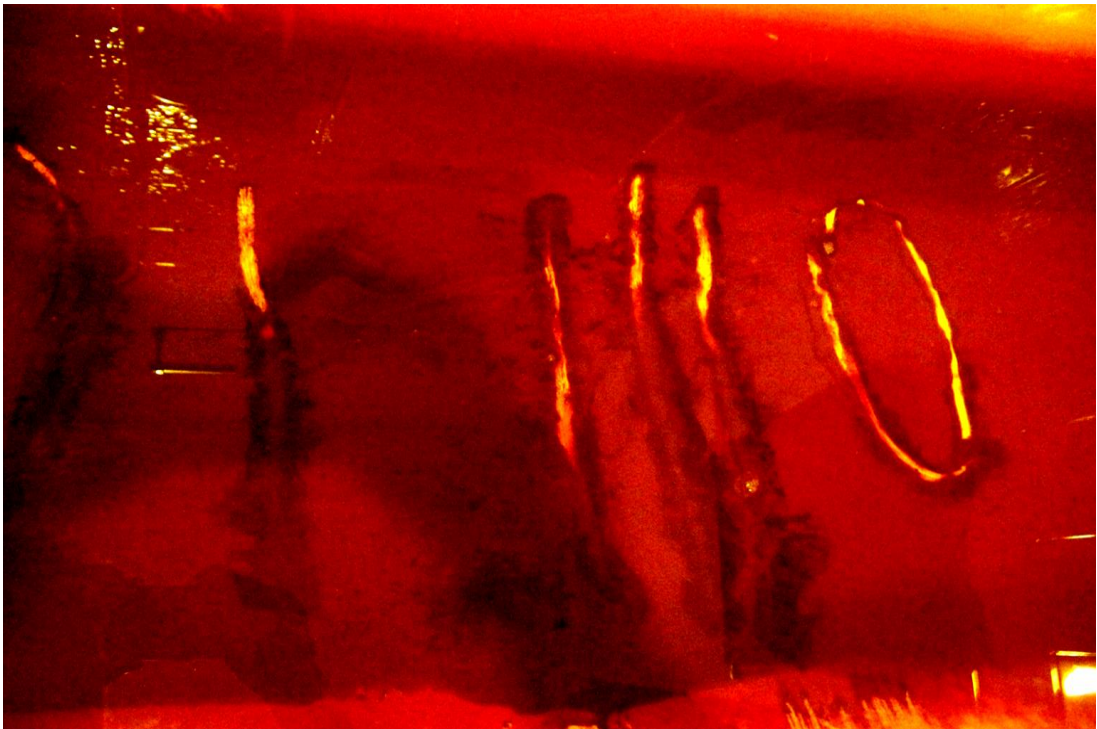


Fig 82. Vicki Ross. *Shifting secrets*, 2013. Digital image.

mediations. Walking for me is a meaningful act of centring, fine-tuning my *self*. While the *format of walking* remains the same, the place, time, distance and, importantly, my state of mind on each walk, offers alternative narratives. Subsequently, each walk *shapes* the work, constructs the *self*. It is about the embodied experience and temporality, an articulation of the site and the relationship between my *self*, my traces in the sand, the sounds of the waves and the salt in the air.

Walking is not a pastime:

*It is a mind-space, a journey, an odyssey,  
filled with purpose and meaning.  
I walk the beach.  
The sand, the sea and the sounds contribute to this union,  
in this space, in this time.  
The raging of my mind simmers and dissipates,  
in the sand, in the waves and in the air,  
new thoughts take over;  
I return whole.*

Besides the performative enactments, various other formats are used in the practical work, each with its own agenda: two-dimensional works on paper, digital projections, three-dimensional works, photographs and personal *writings*. Each forms part of the intertextual reading of my practice. While performative works present themselves, each in their particular but limited physical, psychological and philosophical scope, two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks are open-ended in their interpretations. However, I maintain that these works are also performative in the sense that through my aggressive, obsessive, intense or fragile processes of making, I am able to expel my anger or vulnerability. These works are remnants of my emotions, nuances of my *self*, utterances of my mind. They are healing processes and become recovery.

*Projections* (Figs 81-82) are realities in themselves, fleeting moments that make the invisible visible. The projection is the work – it is a transitory manifestation, an echo, a memory, then and now, present yet absent, visible yet intangible, merely light that mirrors



my *states of being* and *locating*. Using this digital mode gives me control over how my art-making is viewed: scale and duration play a role in the dynamics of their interpretation. In addition, the inherent elements of temporality, intangibility, impermanence and luminosity equate the concept of presence/absence in the fact that the image does not exist beyond itself, beyond its projection. Each repetition is a *re-invention of the self*.

The personal *reflections/writings/drawings*<sup>140</sup> are philosophical and psychological renderings, *pages of my mind*, (Figs 68a-j), the essence of my thoughts, my questionings, memories, narrations, sometimes raging, sometimes submissive, reflective or critical but always a response to *states of being* and *belonging*. These elongated *pages*<sup>141</sup> are my *textural voices* through which I express my private ramblings, mental echoes of the returning past – they are the untangling of my present, non-linear, without limits, without boundaries, what Taylor calls “all-time-at-once” (2008:169). They explicate my *self*. Quick drawings together with signs, textures and symbols equate memories, secrets, anguish and pain. These autobiographical *reflections* are relevant to the understanding and interpretation of the written paper. They represent moments in time and *states of being*, my embodied experiences. They are to be understood as a necessary part of my creative pursuits and contribute to processes of *locating* my sense of *self*.

In this chapter, the ideas of normality, *difference* and *belonging* have been questioned. The concept of transformation has been positioned within the practice of autobiographical re-enactments of re-telling my story from different perspectives and in alternative media. The intention was to manifest transformation visually by creating an understanding of *[dis]-[engagement]* and repetition as processes of managing *otherness* or the *inner-critic*. *[Dis]-[engagement]* was presented as a positive process, as a *response* rather than a surrender to depression.

Drawings, projections and personal *writings/reflections* aimed to open a discourse around

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<sup>140</sup> There are a few quotes or borrowed text in the *pages* but are always referenced informally with inverted commas, writer’s name and page numbers.

<sup>141</sup> The long horizontal formats allow ideas to flow across *pages*, to create a mindscape of thoughts.

the use of art-making as coping mechanisms in depression. Thus the art-making explored 'edginess' and revealed confusion, psychoses, obsession. It suggests activities that seem antisocial or reject sharing: separateness, intensity, mania and nakedness in which the uncomfortable awkward intimate emotions of anger, hate, rejection, loneliness and fragility were confronted. Using seductive media and techniques such as endless obsessive repetition, the rawness of sand, the translucency of inks and the impermanence of projections, an immediate connection with abstract qualities and their implied associations can be made. I posit that the viewer is thus coaxed by light, tactility, movement, sound and associations that resonate with the inner-self of the viewer.

By unpacking processes of performativity and re-authoring my understanding of a *true self* with multiple identities, it is shown that the concept of transformation and healing is possible within art practice that becomes methodologies of meaning-making in life.

Art-making has been explored as self-actualising and recovery that express *who I am* within a specific time and place.



Fig 83. Vicki Ross. *Self-portrait* series 1, 2012. Memory drawings.

Fig 84. Vicki Ross. *Self-portrait* series 2, 2013. Memory drawings.

Fig 85. Vicki Ross. *Self-portrait* series 3, 2014, Memory drawings,

*Conspiracy of Silence series*

*Abuse has no face.  
Hidden and private,  
secrets concealed,  
betrayal and shame alive.*

*All manner of injustices permitted, obscured.*

*A voice is found,  
he untold is unmasked.  
Anger, rebellion take hold.  
Many voices join,  
many voices heard.*

*We witness, we hear.  
Time to challenge, time to change.*



## CONCLUSION

*From the earliest memories of my life, I knew I did not fit in, I was not part of the crowd. I knew I was small but there was more than that, it was a yearning perhaps – perhaps it was just that I secretly did not want to be. That is how I feel now. I don't really want to be – is that a strange concept? Is it a paradoxical mind-set between good and evil? What is this necessity to survive in this world, what limits me to this place called earth? I know that my creative journey was an important part of my being able to just be in this world. I know that it kept me alive when I wanted to die. I believe that my art-making practice kept me more or less sane within my solitude of madness. It got through the next day and that next breath – and the damned next moment of existence and managing to exist one day longer, fleeting moments of existing and existence. Art became my solace and my pain. This notion fluctuated as I journey through my life of un-fulfilment – what is it like to feel full? Does this exist? What does it feel like to need to want or not want? Is there something that equals fullness versus emptiness? Can someone explain please!*

*I think that the first time I really felt a sense of fulfilment was my experience at art school. I threw my heart and soul into my art. It consumed the whole of my being – I was in a state of aliveness. Art was my life but life took over.*

This study has therefore been an autobiographical interrogation of my *states of being* and how art can become a transformative recovery process in addressing issues of separateness, *difference* and the *inner-critic* within the condition of depression. Art-making has been explored as a creative meaning-making process through which I can balance my life. By positioning myself at the centre of this practice-led investigation, I

have drawn on authentic personal experiential knowledge<sup>142</sup> to open up a discourse around *[dis]-[engagement]* as a positive mode of re-construction of the *self*. Of importance is the concept that *self* is not a fixed conclusive notion but one that continues to unfold, shift and become a multi-layered construct.

The context for this research is situated in philosophical and psychological frameworks within the socio-political context of New Genre Public Art. It was found that a new paradigm of *connectedness* or *belonging* is emerging in which an equilibrium between people and the planet is seen as essential for any meaningful future. In this alternative approach to living lightly on the planet, the notion of mindfulness that incorporates the soul, psyche or spirit, was considered fundamental. It was suggested that this *wholeness of being* could be attained by regaining our sense of spiritual value. Contemporary rites of passage were suggested as a means of reconnecting and finding one's place in the world.

The psycho-social and personal contexts of this study were said to lie within dominant socially-constructed norms and the notion of *difference*. Depression was explored from a social not clinical perspective and was summarised as *an illness*, a *disruption* of the mind, the *loss of soul* and intense dejection which are generally considered as being inconsistent with dominant social constructs of normality and thus disturbing. Processes toward regaining one's sense of balance were presented as ritualised behaviour or performative enactments as transformative processes toward a *state of aliveness*.

Central to the findings of this study, are both the transgressive<sup>143</sup> and transformative functions of performativity. Performativity has been stated as an iterative and citational practice that involves repetition in actions that effect situations (Butler in Bolt, 2008).

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<sup>142</sup> Taylor (2008:2) maintains that Performance and Dance Studies have positioned subjectivity and embodied experience as valid forms of knowledge. Loth (2011:56) claims that the concept of art itself is the knowledge of her study in that it has been enacted and embodied through her artistic practice utilising the methods of practice-led research. She supports this by quoting dance theorist Cheryl Stock (2007) who states that "embodied practice engenders ways of knowing, and therefore is a knowledge claim in its own right with a rigorous epistemology" (in Loth 2011:56).

<sup>143</sup> Bochner and Ellis (2003) consider art a new narrative mode of inquiry that takes "a turn in a conversation" and becomes "a transgressive activity" opening up the boundaries for new research practices such as the acceptance of experiential knowledge (in Roberts, 2008:15).





Figs 86a-i. Vicki Ross. *Another me: same yet different* series, 2014. Memory drawings.

The many self-portrait abstractions are the process of dealing with confusion, truth, constructed truths and the notion of “whose truth”. This series equates my *inner-critic* and is an on-going performative act of ridding myself of unwanted memories and emotions that cloud my understanding. It is a daily process of challenging my negative self-image by expelling these thoughts one by one. This is the fourth portrait series.

*Who am I?*

*I do not know you – you try to confound my mind but I am still you – you are still me.*

*You are the darkness that surrounds my space, seeping into my skin, my mind, my being.*

Performative acts are about the doing, are fluid and temporal, present alternative experiential insights and provide opportunities that are not bound by traditional linear research conventions (Roberts, 2008). In the practical component, I have combined performativity with re-authoring aspects of narrative therapy and constructed truths. The purpose has been to place the emphasis on the outcomes of my art practice. While the aesthetic quality of the resultant works are important, the overall intention of the art-making process is transformation, the actual doing. It is in the *doing* that transformation takes place (Fig 86a-i).

The frameworks of positionality, relationality, reflexivity, autobiography and narrative have allowed me to explore ideas from an open-ended phenomenological stance. I have gained seminal information<sup>144</sup> with regard to: research of depression in an art context; identity in flux and multiple *selves*; narrative therapy; alternative writings styles in academic contexts; performativity; contemporary activist rituals; and practice-led research as embodied experiential new knowledge. I have applied this information to the interpretations of work of the selected artists and my own meaning-making creative processes.

In discussion of works by Ana Mendieta, Magdalena Abakanowicz and Suzanne Lacy, intimate experiences of estrangements were seen as the catalysts for their creative investigations and performative processes of transformation – that of establishing one's right of *being*. While Mendieta's work focusses on her exile and own alienation, Abakanowicz and Lacy were concerned with the *individual in a social context*, their ability to speak out about personal and social injustices and how the 'power of a greater voice' can be heard through collaborative community art that becomes processes of self-actualisation.

White's narrative theory was presented as concepts of re-authoring thereby reconstituting new values and alternatives stories for oneself. These re-tellings of my life were

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<sup>144</sup> Loth (2011), George (2011), Lacy (2010), Irish (2010), González (2010), Ross (2008), Taylor (2008), Roberts (2008), Lapum (2008) and Roszak (1995), amongst others.

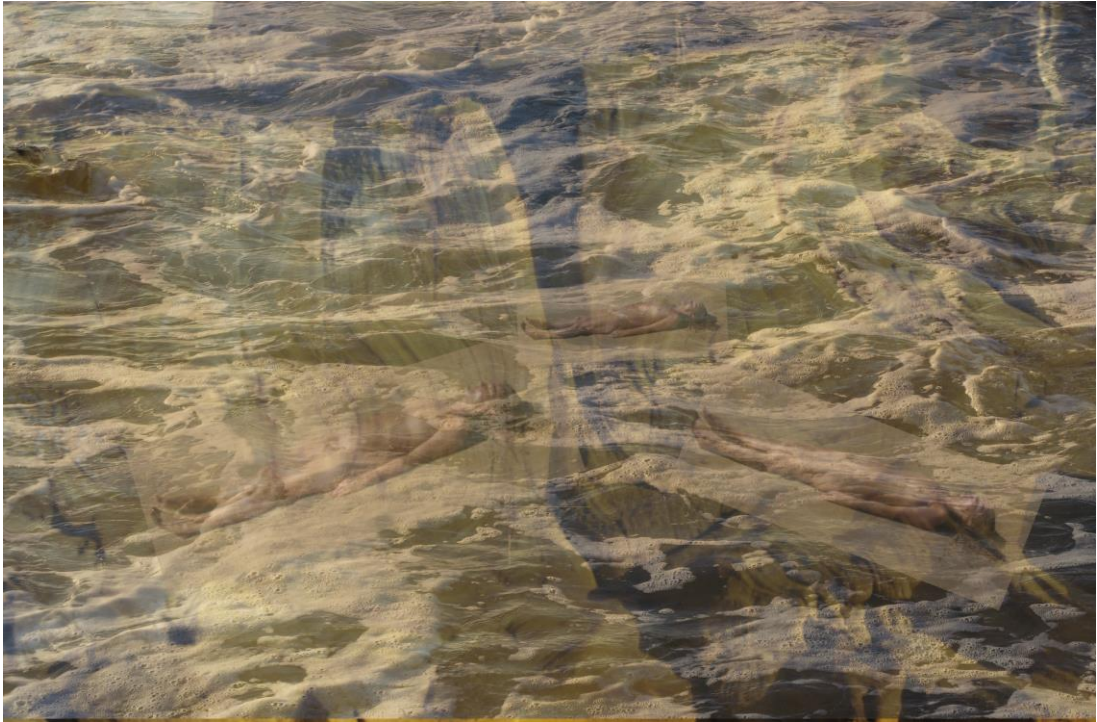


Fig 87. Vicki Ross. *All-time-at-once*. 2014. Digital image.

*Rawness of earth, clay, water tie me to the land while space and time become emptied of earthly connotations and unite me with universal limitlessness. Movement is surrounded by sounds – natural, created, spoken, memories – linked to thoughts, emotions and experiences.*

*Projections have no permanence, are timeless and intangible and give meaning to both the sacred and profane. They are fluid, have a life of their own and are transformed by repetitive viewings. They are mere light. They are the essence of my memories. They are the subliminal expressions of my experience*

Time and space as *emptied of earthly connotations* in this written *reflection*, is to be understood as having no social meaning: time of day, month, year, and space as having no specific location. Taylor (2008:169) uses the term “all-time-at-once” referring to past, present and future time, original time or cyclical time.

established as the motivation for my creative activities in which the body became a site of trauma, of untangling my mind and a vehicle of change. Meaning-making employed philosophical and psychological mind games that negated both the *inner-critic* and dominant social norms.

Performativity and the concept of re-authoring have been valuable in understanding more fully my personal creative practice. I have interlaced ideas and developed notions in my art practice of: *[dis]-[engagement]*, mind games, inter-zones as spaces of my mind in body/land relationships, safe-zones both physically and psychologically, and the layering of time/imprints as *all-time-at-once* as a philosophical construct of interconnectedness (Fig 87). These ideas were intertextually interrogated using metaphorical implications of media, techniques, processes, performativity, site, space and duration in creative visual practices.

*[Dis]-[engagement]* or separateness was shown to be a conscious mechanism in dealing with *states of being* by physically and mentally separating so as to engage with my *self*. Placing myself in a detached situation was presented as a process of self-discovery. Jung (1963) relates that his “rustic schoolmates ... alienated me [him] from [him]self” and that he had a “passion for being alone, [his] delight in solitude” (1963:35, 48). My *[dis]-[engagement]* from a context is similar - it is not antisocial but a conscious decision that creates a physical, philosophical and psychological safe zone, a space where I restructure my thoughts and re-position my *self*.

Lacy (2010) speaks about art-making as a “primary philosophical inquiry” (Fig 88) and that “the activating potential of memory ... continues to live as a question ... . Where we come from, who we are now, [who people think we are], where we are going? What are memories except ... constructs that define who we think we are?” (2010:202, 205). Blocker claims that performativity’s “emphasis on liminality over legibility and change over fixity is effective in placing interpretive emphasis on actions rather than on commodifiable objects” (1999:24) – outcomes rather than artworks.



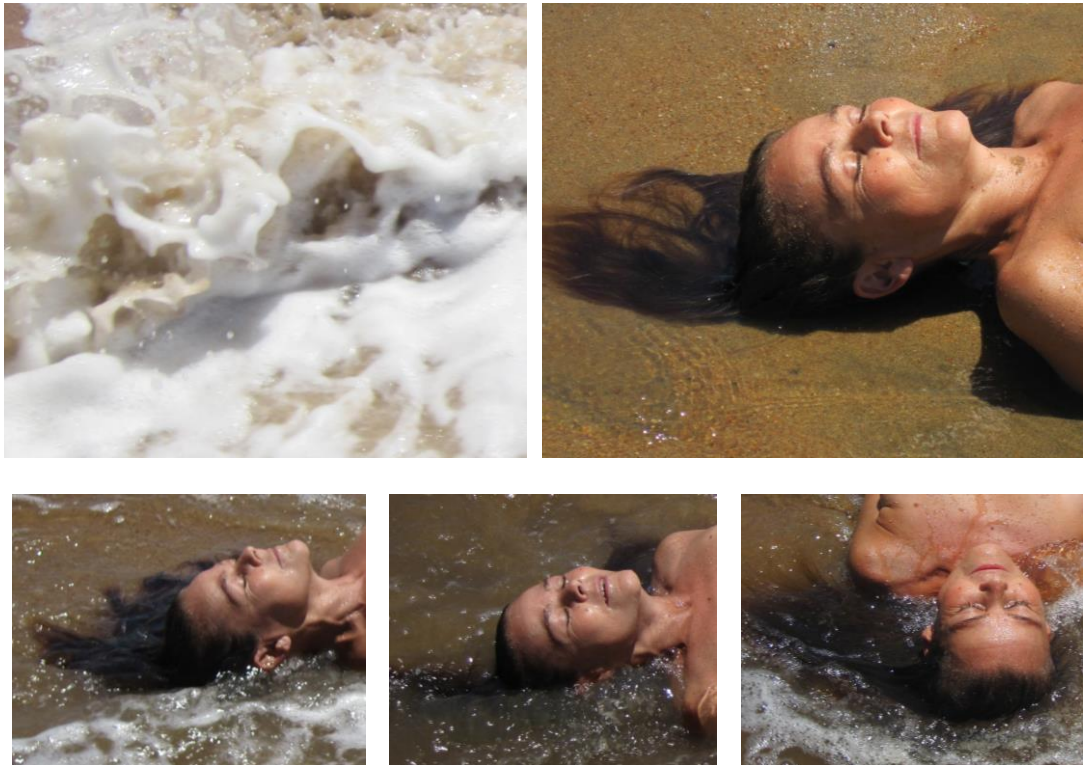


Fig 88. Vicki Ross. *Another self* series, 2013. Performative re-enactment.

Walking and *Another self* series share similar elements. Both involve repetitive events on a regular basis and allow processes of reflexivity. Lying with my eyes closed waiting for the waves to wash over me, I try to empty my mind and let go of all thoughts. After some time, the heat of the sun beating down on my body, sends me into a semi-conscious state in which I float in and out of rational thought. I am aware of the coolness of water on my skin but this is *at a distance from my physical awareness*— in some ways it is like dreaming, a psychical liminal space. At times, and depending on the wave actions of the tides, I move into what could be called an altered state of mindfulness when, on a few occasions, I have the sense of a bright blue light in an endless space (this could be argued away as the intense light of the sun even though my eyes are closed but it is more a mind space than a physical one). At other times when the waves are stronger, I feel as if I am enveloped by the sea – we share the same space, the same thoughts.

Walking along the beach offers me alternative self-recovery processes. I walk at the edge of the water paying little attention to others. I concentrate on the sea, the sand and my footsteps. These are usually what I call *power walks* – fast in pace, again trying to empty my mind of rational thought by responding to the elements – wind, waves, sounds and sun.

*Walking incessantly, clam or raging,*

*Obsessively, intensely, quickly;*

*My mind races, recalls, remembers;*

*The anger flows through my body into the land and is washed away by the waves.*



It is within this liminality that the re-tellings of my life occurs, that transformation happens.

*Covered in clay or swept by the waves, I become the space.  
I am wrapped in the moment of place,  
its hardness, its heat, its muddiness, wetness, coolness.  
Nothing else is important.  
I am embedded in this moment, this place, this time.  
I am just me – no goodness or badness, no ecstasy, no pain.  
I belong.*

At a particular moment within a re-enactment, it is as if I am nothing more than who I am, *just me right now*. I am connected to the site, I am located *in* the site. This is an inter-zone, apart from the world outside – I *[dis]-[connect]* from the exterior and merge with my inner zone. Sometimes there is a moment in which I move into another state, an altered state of mind. The experience is fulfilling and feels as if a darkness has been lifted. I am able to reflect and consciously challenge or alter previously-held beliefs which I now understand as only constructs rather than as truths. I can now separate my *self* from my *inner-critic*, I can re-construct a new truth of *who I think I am and how I belong in the world*.

Understanding performativity, ritualised behaviour and my art practice more fully, has given me a new perception or acceptance/tolerance of my sense of *belonging* in/at any site or space – nothing fixed, always in flux, the invisibility of *belonging*, and a sense of the place – past, present and future. This however, does not mean that I am better. Depression is cyclical.

It was stated that my performative art practice is never-ending, is fluid, always changing and will continue to adjust. This follows the continual recurrence of depressive states – it cannot be cured, it can only be managed. However, knowledge is power. I can manage my low periods through reflexivity in repeated creative processes. I will refuse complicity

in self-denial and reject becoming both ‘my victim’ and ‘my culprit’. I posit my performative practice as modes of *locating* my *self* within time and place, engaging all my senses.

Drawing, photographic and digital imaging, and *writings/reflections* were also presented as providing alternative opportunities for the re-positioning my *self*. I have drawn my pain, the ugliness, the hurt; I have drawn the chaos of my mind – it has been absorbed into the media of the work. In this process of inquiry, I have reconstructed my truths; and for a while I *belong*. This is not the end, however. I will continue to discard my trauma and chaos in my art practice. It is a continual process of doing, renewing and reclaiming, of positioning my *self* within the world.

It has been uncomfortable to expose my vulnerabilities but this journey has been necessary in order to justify the function of art as having the potential for personal transformation. George (2011) states that writing as honestly as she could about herself became a critical sign of self-reflexivity through which her transformations were actualised. I too have found this – these mind games have formed the basis of my work in which I expel the negative constructs of my *self*, media that reflect my darkness, and that holds my rawness, projections that are fleeting remnants of my memory.

Lapum (2008) speaks about the performativity of her poetry as being a different form of knowing and that embodied experiences become knowledge<sup>145</sup>.

It is the journey that [untangles and] explicates the temporal and performative nature of identities. ... With each new experience ... with each poem I craft, with each story I live ... I shift, I change, I vacillate ... my identity ... is still on its journey ... and always will be (Lapum, 2008).

*It is not what one sees but rather what one experiences.*

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<sup>145</sup> Lapum supports this with reference to Carper (1978), Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Richardson (1994). See Introduction, footnote 12.

In this study, shame, insufficiency of self, *difference*, *otherness* and the *inner-critic* have referred to *states of being* as negative depressive symptoms. In order to deal with issues of self-denial and self-persecution, this study interrogated art-making processes and performativity as positive modes of self-declaration and *belonging*. These became the externalisation, ethic of living and rich descriptions of White's narrative therapy for healing and transformation.

It is my contention that through *[dis]-[engaging]* from dominant normative Western discourses, you can engage with your inner *self* and re-tell your story according to your understanding of a truth. This action becomes what Foucault calls games of truth and power in which you can oppose socially-constructed notions of what is acceptable. Art-making becomes a process of mind games, games which encourage an individual to continually re-position oneself within changing contexts.

The contribution of this research to knowledge is the application of therapeutic principles to autobiographical creative meaning-making processes of self-revelation. Artworks are presented as the visualisation of recovery processes in which the function of art became a vehicle for re-positioning oneself within the world.

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