UNEARTHED:

PERSONIFICATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD AND ACTS OF MEMORY

Volume 1

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

MASTER OF FINE ART

at

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

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Date: September 2009

ABSTRACT

By researching visual traditions of representing widows in relation to a social role, I explore how these may be related to processes of mourning and memory. My study begins with an historical reading and, along with an analysis of Renaissance widow portraiture, I trace the experiences of widows in the Cape of Good Hope. For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected images of widows to investigate memory-work particularly when speaking of loss. I re-view these memory processes through recent historical and art historical discourse with reference to contemporary South African artworks in order to understand how public memory is formed by way of visual documentation. These narratives around widowhood have informed the subject matter for my Master's exhibition and shed light on my own experience as a widow. The interaction between objects and memory are of particular interest and manifest in my studio art practice.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted for any degree before.

Linda Margaret Arbi
September 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my sincere gratitude to Maureen de Jager, as Art Practice Supervisor and to Brenda Schmahmann as Theory Supervisor, both who invested their extensive time and experience in guiding me through the process of this Master's Degree. Without their invaluable assistance the work for this degree would not have been possible. I wish to thank my children for their patience and assistance as I undertook the role of artist. I will always be grateful to Gwenda Euvrard, who, in counselling me through the particularities of widowhood, provided safe passage. To friends who have encouraged me, it would have been a lonely journey without you.

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PREFACE

I first experienced death when my husband died in February 2000, casting me into widowhood. The immediate and unexpected loss of him physically, and the subsequent shifts in memory that occurred over time as I learned to negotiate my feelings of loss, prompted me to investigate these processes both materially and perceptually in my Master of Fine Art degree. The artworks I made for the exhibition component, *Unearthed* and *Anon.,* were produced in two phases. In the first, I made objects that became signifiers or stand-ins for the process of working through mourning and loss. In the second, I buried and exhumed most of these objects, which revealed to me much about my own processes of memory. Art objects are never static in the sense that meaning alters through the investment and frames of reference that individual viewers bring to them. But I also have a preference for objects that *themselves* undergo change or transformation. From September 2007 until February 2009, components of my exhibition were interred in Grahamstown's New Cemetery at Waainek. As I dug my way into the theoretical component of my Master's Degree, the sculpted objects underwent their own processes underground beyond my reach. Having allowed expression of my own particular experience through my art making, my subsequent reading of historical theory surrounding images of widows and their negotiation of changed circumstance has provided a context for understanding the particularities of widowhood.

INTRODUCTION

The physical pairing of being 'husband and wife' bodily, and the subsequent mortal absence of one of those bodies, defines widowhood. Widowhood is located in physical loss. Similarly, memory is inscribed with loss. For the purpose of this thesis, I explore recent historical and art historical discourses as well as selected images of and textual information about widows in order to trace processes of memory-work that operate particularly when speaking of loss. Throughout the text I highlight the many altered states that widowhood brings both for the women under discussion, and for memory itself.

In the first chapter I investigate how women's experiences are altered by the expectations of widowhood. My discussion of portraits of Renaissance widows reveals that women themselves became archives bearing testimony to their dead husbands; portraits of these widows were in effect memorials to the dead. A Renaissance widow becomes a bodily repository for his memory in the manner in which her physicality is presented materially (be it in the form of a medal or a painting) and by visual codes displayed in these images. As we look at the widow, we are 'seeing' her husband as he expected to be remembered. There are fascinating accounts of how these widows negotiated their altered circumstances, caught up as they were in the economic and gendered imperatives of the Renaissance. In a parallel study of widows in the Cape of Good Hope while it was a Dutch settlement,[1] many of whom were manumitted[2] slaves, we find the female body yet again operating as a repository for male memory, albeit in an entirely different way. These women found their own bodies in

[1] For the sake of brevity, I refer to women in this category as 'Early Cape widows'.
[2] Manumitted slaves are those who have been formally emancipated from slavery.

demand, an economic asset, and their femaleness a viable commodity in a colony where women were scarce. Able to inherit land and slaves from their dead husbands, some of these women were widowed several times and consequently became wealthy landowners.

In beginning this study, I focus on literature on widowhood in Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries. Alison Levy, who discusses mainly the Italian context, is currently the most published author on this subject but there has also been recent work which examines other parts of early modern Europe. This interest can be seen in light of a concern with gender in the Renaissance, which was prompted, largely, by Joan Kelly's essay in 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' first published in 1977. In this essay Kelly sets out to establish 'the quality of their historical experience' and she considers 'the regulations of *female sexuality*; …women's *economic* and *political roles*; … their *cultural roles; ... ideology* about women, in particular the sex-role system displayed or advocated in the symbolic products of the society, its art, literature, and philosophy' (Kelly 1977: 22). These criteria provide useful tools with which to revisit history.[3]

[3] Kelly was responding to an assertion by Jacob Burckhardt that Renaissance women 'stood on a footing of perfect equality with men' (Levy 2003: 1). Through rigorous research of both literature and art from the Renaissance period, Kelly establishes that the 'norm was one of female dependency and male domination…denial of women's independence'. She states that there was clear distinction drawn between the 'inferior domestic realm of women' and 'the superior public realm of men'. It was most certainly a male prerogative to inhabit public life and to fashion ideology concerning the roles of women. In the conclusion to her essay, she writes:

> Renaissance ideas on love and manner… [were] almost exclusively a male product, [and] expressed … [as]… subordination of women to the interest of husbands and male-dominated kin groups and served to justify the removal of women from an "unladylike" position of power and erotic independence. All the advances of Renaissance Italy, its protocapitalist economy, its states, and humanistic culture, worked to mold the noblewoman into aesthetic object: decorous, chaste, and… dependent (Kelly 1977: 46).

In turning to South Africa, it became my quest to search for visual images of women who were widowed in the Cape Colony, and which were thus the counterparts to those made in Europe one hundred years previously. But while I came across histories of a few individuals, images of them were almost non-existent. Despite my scouring museums, archives, and homes of descendents, I discovered no 'portraits' as such. Through Dutch East India Company records there are clues as to who they were and how they lived. I discovered many of their names, the dates placing the officiated events of their lives, how many offspring they had, who they married and when they were widowed. In *The Afrikaners,* Gilomee (2003: 38) discusses the position that a widow may have found herself in between the period 1690 to 1770:

> The property rights enjoyed by European women at the Cape…. were almost totally denied to English women. At the Cape there was even something of a 'widowarchy'. A widow with property could consider the options for a subsequent marriage as an astute modern investment manager would. Many widowed Cape women remarried several times accumulating a small fortune… European women at the Cape developed a greater degree of social self-confidence than their counterparts in most other colonies. Visitors to the Cape considered them more intelligent than the male burghers and better informed.

Who were these women and how did their lives alter when they became widows? Karel Schoeman provides a comprehensively documented account of the 'who's who' in the Cape during the first sixty years after Jan van Riebeeck set down anchor, in his book *Early slavery at the Cape of Good Hope 1652 -1717,* which I shall draw from extensively.

In the second chapter I investigate how contemporary memory is altered through documentation, be it through visual images, text or sound. 'Objects, Martin Hall writes, have a "polyvalence of meaning", and it is this quality that gives them their potency in the construction of memory' (Nuttal 1998:11). Against the backdrop of the first chapter, I take

an in-depth look at Andrew Putter's recent video installation *Secretly I will love you more* in order to explore how discourse around this particular work has set in motion inaccuracies that have altered our perception of the history of one of the Cape's first widows. A void left by lack or loss of memory is often filled with 'information' that alters and fixes what becomes set down as solid knowledge, and in recording inaccuracies as historical fact, further loss occurs. Artworks themselves are complicit in this process - alongside memorialising - and thus entropic ruin and subsequent renewal of memory is set in motion. Once fixed, the memorial or the artwork usurps the naturally fallible processes of decaying memory. Memory is not fact. Memory is Re-Presentation. However, inferences in popular culture, when presented as authoritative 'evidence', become traces that lead back to untruths, or, as we may choose, many truths. It would appear that there is a desire in South Africa today to 'stitch' together a history that would 'restore the rent of' a 'divisive history' (Samuelson 2007: 233). What Samuelson (2007: 233), after Boym,[4] refers to as 'restorative nostalgia' will be invoked in relation to Putter's award winning work. This highlights how we too readily fill the gaps caused by loss of information, thereby altering memory. The very decay of memory causes us to flesh it out, memorialise it. The corporeality of memory is soaked into the materiality of monuments and as such becomes a sticky fixing of history. I will argue that Putter's artwork evokes restorative nostalgia and creates gaps that allow for slippages in historical facts, thus altering perspectives of the past.

Until this point, I investigate images that reside in public memory. This world above the ground, whether psychological or physical, holds traces referencing subterranean residues

4 Boym, S. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

that are abject and hidden, as contaminated and as deeply buried as a rotting corpse is to a healthy society. There is a clear distinction between the role of public widow and that of private grieving. This distinction is as sealed as the grave itself, tidily memorialised with the epitaph 'in memory of'. The widow is expected to move on after a suitable period of time to resume her daily duties. In the second part of Chapter Two I will analyse a work by South African artist Cyprian Shilakoe titled *The Widow*. This work exhumes, in part, the devastating effects of widowhood and is thus in stark contrast to the more traditional images of widows in previous discussion. The woman represented by Shilakoe becomes the site of abjection and a corporeal reminder who is the counterpoint to the contained images of Renaissance widows, and who thus alters established perceptions of widowhood.

In the third chapter I shall bring into discussion the processes my artwork underwent, and the effects these had on my own memory. Annette Kuhn (1995: 158) writes about memory-work in her book *Family Secrets* as follows:

> For the practitioner of memory work, it is not merely a question of what we choose to keep in our 'memory boxes'—which particular traces of our pasts we lovingly or not so lovingly preserve—but of what we do with them, how we use these relics to make memories, and how we then make use of the stories they generate to give deeper meaning to, and if necessary to change, our lives today.

A widow is often considered a memory-bridge, charged with the storing of 'memory-boxes'. The dilemma she faces is of keeping memory alive whilst at the same time knowing it is fallible. What losses occur in processes of representing the deceased, be it via the making of an artwork or a written text? How might all the meanings that a person signified when living shift when they have entered the field of memory? Is there such a thing as *closure* for the widow or does the shift from the role of wife to widow entail a back-and-forth movement

without easy resolution? Once there is a relinquishing of memory, 'Should this be seen as a promise of parting, assurance of the letting go that promises the end of mourning? Or does the remembering never stop?' (Kuhn 1995: 121). I explore the contradiction between the relinquishing and holding onto memory in my art practice. The titles of my two-part exhibition are *Anon.* and *Unearthed.* The physicality of grief and the redefining of self within the widow's own body are explored in *Unearthed,* whilst difficulties of presenting a comprehensive biography with the 'relics we use to make memories' are explored in *Anon*. I explore how my memories were overwritten by the making of these artworks. The works were themselves altered by burial and exhumation, disallowing the setting down of stable remainders or fixed representations.

CHAPTER ONE:

PERSONIFICATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD

I observed in the introduction that, in stark contrast to the many Renaissance images, there are no traceable 17th-century portraits of widows in the early Cape Colony that I have discovered in South African collections. However, retrospective reconstructions of the appearance of individuals through contemporary inferences will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two. Both the widows of the Renaissance and of the Cape Colony have left enough of a trace through text or visual images for us to sift the layers of their historical periods and discover what the implications of being a widow entailed within the gender-based political and economic framework of their respective eras. Visual documentation, or lack thereof, strongly reflects these social practices and expectations.[5]

For the Renaissance widow, primary mourning expectations were expressed foremost in attire. Dressed in widow's clothing, a woman was to display on her person signs of immortalising her dead husband in ways that indicated virtue and chastity. It was incumbent on her that he be remembered through her outward conduct. 'Widow as Saint' is a popularly-themed image from this period. In the Cape Colony, however, we find no formal reference to any expectations of widowhood. Although some of the widows in the Cape Colony may

[5] I asked Jillian Carmen (the Johannesburg Art Gallery's former Curator of Historic Collections and an expert on Dutch 17th-century art in South Africa) if she would confirm a lack of images of widows from the Cape. She responded in e-mail correspondence on 24 March 2009: 'There is no surviving evidence of portraits of widows, or of any other people, from the second half of the 17th c at the Cape. There is very little regarding art-making at the Cape at that time, apart from early taxidermy (if that's an art) in a little "museum" and records of plants. There's a bit more evidence from the 18th century, but again art is marginalised and, it seems, any important works or works that were likely to survive (owned by governors, for example) were repatriated to the Netherlands.'

have been from Europe, the majority of women came to the Cape from elsewhere as slaves and would have brought with them cultural references and practices from a variety of backgrounds. In contrast, in Renaissance Europe there is an almost overbearing amount of prescriptive writing in the form of now well-documented and preserved guidebooks for widows - though, comparatively, not much instruction is given to widowers. Key to understanding the changed lives of these women is to look at the economic imperatives into which they were cast when taking on the role of widows. Despite crossing paths on history's timeline, widows of Renaissance Europe and the Cape Colony found themselves in vastly different socio-economic roles.

Levy (2003: 3) cites instruction for widows from Juan Luis Vives's guidebook of 1523, *A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman* as follows: '[S]he hath lost not only the one half of her life…but herself also to be taken from herself altogether and perished'. Such a woman would express her loss of not only her spouse, but of *herself* through 'honest weeping'. Women who did remarry and were subsequently widowed again were described by Alexander Niccholes in his 'directive' *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving* (1615) as being 'in a league with death and coadjutors with him', and thus were seen, in a sense, as murderesses. According to Francisco de Hollanda in *Four Dialogues of Painting,* written in 1548, a woman was expected to display in her home 'the portrait of her dead husband daily before her' so that her children and visitors to her home would be reminded of him (Levy 2003: 5 - 8). An option was for widows to enter religious orders, thus ensuring chastity. On all accounts, these expectations made a widow unavailable for re-marriage and therefore kept any inheritance safely within the male domain of the deceased.

Wealthy widows could, however, become patrons to the arts or building projects, many of which commemorated their dead husbands. Some of the finest examples of Renaissance art are to be found in the many chapels and buildings commissioned by these widows who were often actively involved in their construction.[6] Helt (2003: 39) states:

> Widows, in early modern Europe, served as sites of memory in two important ways: as custodians of property and wealth, which was passed from generation to generation; and as active participants in the ritual performance of remembering, through which they constructed, preserved and transmitted their own social identities as well as those of their husbands and families.

In her altered state from wife to widow a Renaissance woman's focus shifted entirely to the dead, within which she would be expected to literally clothe and conduct herself.

The 17th-century painting *Portrait of a Widow at her Devotions* (ca. 1590 - 1600) by Leandro Bassano,[7] provides a useful reference for analysis on Renaissance representations of widows, giving full expression of the social expectations of women's altered status (Fig.1). The work is described as depicting 'an elderly woman dressed in widow's weeds and holding a string of rosary beads, with her wedding ring clearly displayed. Above, there is a framed picture of the Birth of the Virgin in a style similar to that of the portrait'.[8]

There is more to it, however, than what may be apparent. The widow is clothed in black, her head covered with a veil. A book, presumably devotional, lies closed on the credenza next to

[6] A good example of this is the San Jerónimo Monastery commissioned by the widow of Gonzalo Fernández of Cordoba ('El Gran Capitán') for the burial of her distinguished husband who died in 1515. In accordance with Renaissance criteria, the Monastery features an entire iconographic programme alluding to the virtues, fame and immortality of the hero. http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5136/
Catherine de Medici built what is now known as the Denon wing at the Louvre. Isabella de Estes , after her husband's death in 1519, continued as patron to artists Leonardo de Vinci and Raphael, the writer Castiglioni. Isabella's music room survives in the Reggia de' Gonzaga, Mantua, decorated with wooden inlays of musical motifs by Tullio Lombardo. http://encyclopedia.farlex.com/Este,+Isabella+d%27.
[7] Otherwise known as Leandro del Ponte.
[8] www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/b/bassano/leandro/index.html

her. The prayer book and rosary beads indicate the necessity for 'prayer, penitence… and also self-education in scriptural knowledge, so as to set a good example or teach others in her charge' (King 1998: 29). The widow is pointing towards the painting of the Birth of the Virgin with both hands in a gesture that emulates benediction whilst at the same time protecting the rosary and prayer book. Widows were exhorted to devote themselves to God, this being deemed a suitable replacement for devotion to a husband. The wedding ring may thus signify more than her marriage to her husband: it emphasises her constant state of being paired with, but in deference to, a patriarchally-defined God. In committing herself to abstinence (God's virgin) 'she was considered to be living in a state in which she could be more virtuous than a wife whose chastity consisted in keeping herself for one man' (King 1998: 29). Her left hand hovers above the handkerchief that is displayed just below her waist. This handkerchief is the object both closest to the viewer and on the picture plane, and is thus an important and noticeable symbol. It signifies the importance of her perpetual attention to active mourning. Her devotion to this constant return to mourning, a reminder of the repression that melancholia brings (note the twisted corner of cloth), denies her any opportunity for renewal outside of her status as widow. The handkerchief points limply towards her pudenda and could be read as signifier of male impotence. The fears of libidinous sexuality a widow may present in her state of 'male' freedom could be in some way resolved by subtly inferring impotence. The emphasis here is on her altered state of sexuality from that of wife to one of desexualised abstinence. In 1524 Trissino published a treatise entitled *Concerning the Life that a Lady who is a Widow Should Live*. The potentially ambiguous sexual status of widowhood clearly promoted gender anxieties. King (1998: 34) quotes Trissino as follows:

> He spoke of her as a free woman 'who is not subject to a husband' and he encouraged her with the thought that she was born, like all humans, as a man in soul, and just happened to have been placed in a female body.

Whilst widows may have been seen as 'a man in soul', their femaleness was nevertheless problematic when not 'subject to a husband'. The framed picture of the Birth of the Virgin is of particular interest as it reiterates ideology that a widow devoting herself to pious living could be redeemed from 'perceptions of the female persona and body [that] were conditioned by a reading of the Bible as…. the principal party for the downfall of mankind' (Cooper 2000: 203). The portrait of the Birth of the Virgin restores Bassano's widow to the original state of 'virginity'. The birthing scene raises gendered issues surrounding fecundity - as Cooper (2000: 202) suggests: 'women themselves may have been seen as bodily allegories of *vanitas*, their cycle of procreation and degeneration mirroring that of biblical similes.' The bejewelled cross on the rosary pointing towards her now-infertile womb and her image mirrored in the Birth of the Virgin as one of the women bathing the new-born infant in a bowl - itself a metaphor for the uterus - reiterates the purification she should now seek. Her fullness should come as keeper of memory and no longer from her womb. Finally, Bassano's widow, whilst looking silently inward herself, becomes doubly instructive as she points towards the birthing scene. In *Renaissance Women Patron,* King (1998: 39) states of portraits-within-portraits: 'Where portraits were included, the widow took the role… of exhorting devoutness by example and directing the viewers how to look.' Her gaze is away from the picture on the wall, and she appears to be turned inward. Widows were instructed to be passive and silent. Her mouth is firmly closed: widows were forbidden to 'reveal their innermost thoughts' (King 1998: 35). Whilst an inner life is acknowledged, it is denied expression. Contained as Renaissance widow she becomes a guardian against loss and a

pious memorial to her husband. Transformed in the altered state from wife to widow, her quiet repose is an expression of effectively-neutralised womanhood into that of barrenness. Her 'fullness' is to be found in becoming a loaded signifier of memory - trussed in chastity and restraint.

Despite the (what we would consider today) repressive expectations observed through signifiers such as those seen in *Portrait of a Widow at her Devotions,* Renaissance widows, as Levy suggests, were quite capable of transgressing social constrictions. Catherine de' Medici, for example, 'cleverly modified her mourning dress by appropriating the costume of her deceased husband in order to gain power and authority previously unavailable to her' (Levy 2003: 9). In the absence of her husband through death, De' Medici literally re-made her female clothing to incorporate male attire, thereby conflating her presence as woman to include elements of the absent male. In so doing, she incorporated codes of mourning with a literal putting-on of maleness. Levy (2003: 9) notes that De' Medici, through costume, took on 'male attributes of her husband and the female attributes of a historical ruler; for instance, she also presented herself as Artemesia'.[9] Levy (2003: 9) quotes Ann Rosalind Jones who observed that clothes in the Renaissance 'were material mnemonics, the bearer of names. Yet

[9] In 480 B.C. Artemisia was Queen of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor and went to war at sea against Greece after her husband's death. She 'built the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus to ensure her husband's memory would live on for eternity, then drank his ashes mixed with water to preserve her own private memory of him, offering her body as his living tomb'. An exhibition of tapestries, paintings and objects called 'Caterina and Maria de' Medici: Women in Power' was held at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence from October 2008 until February 2009. It aimed to demonstrate 'the way in which two Medici queens of France used powerful images to legitimize their claims to rule over warring families and factions. To glorify Caterina, the legend of two very different Artemisias from antiquity was appropriated: the warrior queen who fought at the battle of Salamis, and the widowed Queen of Rhodes celebrated as the builder of the Mausoleum dedicated to the memory of her husband. The merging of these two myths allowed Caterina to project the image of the grieving widow and the powerful ruler at the same time. The cycle of tapestries was only manufactured under Henri IV who dedicated it to Maria, focusing on the theme of the education of the ideal prince, her son, who was to become Louis XIII, sparing no expense either in yarn or in the use of gold'.
http://www.donnealpoterefirenze.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=120

as bearers of names, clothes inscribed conflict… One function of clothes was to name, unname, rename'.[10] De' Medici, in conflating gender by altering her clothing, subtly re-dressed her state from that of neutralised woman to empowered widow.

Caterina Sforza, too, left a successful legacy of self-empowerment facilitated by the death of her husband. Medals she commissioned of herself, the first being in 1488, were constructions recording her transformations. Purportedly one of the three graces by Botticelli in *Primavera* (Fig. 2), portraits and writings of her perpetuate the role she commissioned beyond the 16th century into our present time.[11] Since she successfully breached all the strictures of her epoch despite almost impossible odds, I shall indulge in a retelling of her story before turning in greater depth to the widows of the Cape Colony.

Born illegitimate, Caterina was married as a teenager to powerful and wealthy Girolamo Riario in 1477. She bore him a child almost every year until his assassination in 1488 when she - then 26 years old - and her household were taken prisoner. Machiavelli has written an account of how she outwitted her captors. She purportedly offered her children as hostages in order to access the family fortress. Once inside, according to Machiavelli in *The Discourse* (c.1512), she 'reproached [the captors] from the wall with the death of her husband… and to show them she did not care about her children [being killed] she uncovered to them her

[10] The quotation is from A. Jones. 2000. *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory.* Cambridge and New York. Cambridge University Press, p. 32.

[11] An interpretation of the three graces is as follows: 'Venus is standing in the center of the picture, set slightly back from the other figures. Above her, Cupid is aiming one of his arrows of love at the Charities (Three Graces), who are elegantly dancing a rondel. The Grace on the right side has the face of Caterina Sforza, also painted by Botticelli in a famous portrait in the Lindenau Museum as Catherine of Alexandria'. Trapp, J. 2000. Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 8. (1945), pp. 7-60. Essay in *The Gombrich Archive. E.H.Gombrich. A bibliography.* 2000. London. Phaidon.

genitals, saying she still had means for producing more children' (De Vries in Levy 2003: 77). This account, although presumably not literally true, does nevertheless suggest Caterina's feisty spirit and insistence upon her own agency. The reclaiming of her fortress and the subsequent display of her genitals to her captors can be seen as a metaphor for a reclaiming of her own body and her confidence in using her femaleness as a weapon. In a society where widows were expected to abstain from sex, yet remain under male control, Caterina refused both expectations. Caterina's next subversive act was to appear publicly at a religious festival and incorporate the burial of her husband on the same day. Her public appearance at the festivity in which she both took husband's place and then buried him further asserted her position of strength.

Caterina went on to become regent to her son. At this time Caterina cast a medal including imagery in which she 'aligns herself with a masculine rather than a feminine model of courtly power in keeping with her special position as regent and widow, not just wife or ruler'.[12] Appearing on the one side as veiled and chaste, and very obviously Riario's widow, she legitimizes her position as regent with the 'fully elaborated' inscription 'DE RIARIO' (Fig. 3). On the other side of the medal, her choice of emblems 'demonstrates how widowhood opened up a play of sexualized political power' (De Vries 2003: 85). While the triumphal cart featured as a symbol in representations of both men and women in the Renaissance, iconographical emblems would normally invest only males with agency while

[12] Medals were, at the time, a popular way of conveying allegorically loaded information. Easy to carry, many copies could be widely distributed - unlike that of the painted portrait. By casting medal as widow-portrait, Caterina was effectively 'marketing' herself.

females would be shown in essentially passive terms.[13] Here, however, Caterina is cast as the figure of Victory driving the cart (Fig. 4). De Vries (2003: 85) points out that the representation of Caterina as Victory, a symbol of male power and fame, emphasises that her political triumph involved a masculinising of her role.[14] The medal is in 'stark contrast' to a medal cast at the time of her marriage (De Vries 2003: 85). Having established a favourable public image, she took a lover and bore him a son. Whilst conducting herself as public widow, she maintained her sexuality as woman, successfully negotiating both roles without facilitating closure to either.

It was only ten years after her husband's death that she cast a second medal, this time without a veil and showing her hair decorated with pearls (Fig. 5). Clearly her 'widowhood was no longer a necessary component of her political strategy' (De Vries 2003: 86). This coincided with her son's coming of age and allowed her to shift away from the role as widow-regent. She later became a Medici widow, and fought successfully for assets due to her sons from this union. She devoted the rest of her life to her sons' education. It was essential for the Renaissance widow to conduct her power-base within the bounds of male patriarchy, a skill Caterina achieved by conforming to, yet subverting, visual codes that

[13] Brenda Schmahmann pointed out to me that a well known example of a woman in a triumphal cart is Battista Sforza in the *Urbino Diptych* by Piero della Francesca. Schmahmann states that, rather than depicting her in an active role, it shows her reading a devotional book while riding in triumph on her chariot surrounded by the figures of Charity and Hope, who sit in front of the carriage, and Chastity and Modesty, who stand immediately behind her. The chariot is pulled by unicorns, which are associated with chastity. Battista died just a few months after giving birth to her only son, Guidobaldo, and - having been preceded by a visit to a shrine - the birth was widely regarded as miraculous and the immediate result of prayers and rites that she had undertaken. The pelican included in the work signified miraculous birth, and provides an indication that Battista is being celebrated for giving birth to an heir. (A description of the *Urbino Diptych* can be found in Fossi, G. 2001. *Uffizi Gallery: art, history, collections.* Guinti Editore: Firenze, Italy. pp. 115 -117).

[14] In her essay *The Myth of the Woman Warrior,* Linda Nochlin examines pictures of 'the woman warrior as a historical subject… the most extreme exemplar of a feminine being as independent agent of her own destiny - conceived as a problem rather than an image, a visual oxymoron in need of analysis' (Nochlin 1999: 35).

displayed acceptable formats of widowhood and thereby gaining political and economic power.

Whilst the concerns for Renaissance widows were caught up in keeping inheritance within the male family, the widows of the Early Cape Colony experienced an entirely different situation. Most women were married in community of property which meant that, upon a spouse's death, a widow would directly inherit his portion of land and slaves. Cape widows were in great demand. As Dooling (2007: 37) observes:

> …Cape settler women played a crucial role in ensuring land and wealth circulated within narrowly constructed familial boundaries. Since women were for the most part younger than their spouses, widowhood was virtually guaranteed in the life-cycle of a large number of settler women. Widows gained control over substantial amounts of property, both landed and human.

As time progressed more and more single men were drafted to the Cape. So too, were slaves brought to the Cape from as far afield as Madagascar, Batavia, Bengal and Angola.[15] Schoeman (2007: 256) notes that 'It was on the children born of slave women… that slavery at the Cape depended on its continuation'. Further:

> The inability of slaves to contract legal marriage [between slaves] or be assured of a reasonably stable union, and the fact that they had no power or control over their own children, is a reminder of the inexorable fact that whatever palliatives there may have been in given cases, the slave's lot was essentially unbearable (Schoeman 2007: 256).

[15] Clear distinction needs to be made here between slaves and the Khoisan people already inhabiting the Cape, as their rights differed greatly. The Khoisan were free people, who in some instances married Europeans. Female slaves gained their freedom by marrying a European, but never by marrying a Khoisan. Marriage between slaves was not recognised, and if two slaves joined they were termed as 'paired'. Children of slaves belonged to the slave owners and could be sold. Indeed, these children were lucrative assets. Children who were fathered by the burghers or soldiers were free, though often not included as heirs. Children from a union between a male slave and a Khoisan woman were also free. There appear to be no records of male slaves having married Khoisan women and the assumption is that these men would not have gained their freedom through such a union. It seems also that unions between male slaves and white women were always considered illicit (Shoeman, K. 2007. *Early Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652 – 1717.* Protea Book House: Pretoria).

As life was particularly tough for slave women, they sought whatever chances may have presented themselves to be potentially manumitted. It was thus not unusual for female slaves to form relationships with the crew that brought them to the Cape or with local men once they arrived. While between 1680 and 1690 VOC ships carried well over 50 000 people, the majority men, past the Cape, it appears to have been 'mainly local white men that fathered the steadily increasing halfbreed population at the Slave Lodge', Schoeman (2007: 158) points out. Such relationships were not normally formalised, however. Schoeman (2007: 157) cites De Wet: '60% of the male freeburghers over the period 1657 - 1707 remained single for lack of suitable partners.'[16] Yet some of the relationships between burghers and female slaves (which the VOC found themselves unable to control) resulted in unions solemnised in marriage. It is from these that one can trace slave women who were widowed.

Whereas Italian Renaissance widows had to manipulate their circumstances in order to gain power, widows at the Cape automatically became wealthier and increasingly sought after and there appears to have been no gender-based anxiety over inheritance. Indeed, in a double twist of fate, freedom came through marriage, wealth through death, and for a male, marriage to a widow almost certainly meant economic fortune. In Europe however, the death of a married man instantly set in motion a politics of repression and control over his widow as male heirs feared losing the family fortune through re-marriage.

The Dutch widows at the Cape - despite images depicting hardworking women in the Netherlands at this time - could not toil the virgin soil of Africa without help. As was the fashion of the day, the 'discovering' was done by Europeans, whilst slaves were used to

[16] De Wet, C. 1981. *Die Vryliede van die Vryswartes in die Kaapse Nedersetting, 1657 – 1707.* Cape Town: Historical Publications Society.

'conquer' the earth. Slaves were as valuable in accounting wealth as was the land itself. The fact is that there were more resilient slave women available for marriage than there were European women. With an average of twenty men to every one woman, there is no doubt they were in demand for sexual favours. For a slave woman the labour of her body in the performance of duties such as these may perhaps have been envisaged less as subjugation than as a potential path to freedom and independence. The vessel of her body as widow (for both manumitted slave and freewoman alike) became more empowered by each subsequent marriage. These women were not cast into roles compromised by the anxieties of male inheritance. Rather, they were in high demand as 'marriage material' and their resilience and survival as women was of utmost importance to a Colony with a huge gender imbalance. Nor were they discouraged from re-marrying or urged to retreat into cloisters, as was the case for the Renaissance widows. With each subsequent marriage they became wealthier and their farmland more extended.

Inter-racial marriage was common and children born of these unions became part of the European community. Genealogical research indicates that '…seven percent of Afrikaners have a non-European *stammoeder* or progenitress' (Gilomee 2003: 18). I narrowed my search for these women down to those who were widowed in the Cape, particularly those women who were either slaves or progeny of mixed marriages.[17] Marriage being the path to freedom for these women, how did their lives turn out after they were widowed? Catherine

[17] Having identified several women, it is important to note that available images reproduced in this thesis are dubiously attributed - there is no surety that they are who they are claimed to be, the exception being that of Anna de Koning prior to her becoming a widow. Of particular interest to me were the manumitted slaves Sara van der Kemp, Emilie Lehm, Rachel MooiRiver, and Catharine van Pallicatte. These women were posthumously awarded The Order of Disa on 18 December 2005, which formed part of an exhibition *Bind the Ties* at The Slave Lodge in Cape Town.

van Palicatte, a black woman, was born in 1631 and died a wealthy widow in 1681. Sara van der Kemp, a woman of colour, was born in 1792 and died in 1861. She married 58-year old preacher Frans Meyer when she was only fourteen and settled in Bethelsdorp. She was widowed at the age of nineteen, in 1811. She settled in Uitenhage in 1816 where she remained to her death in 1861. The Uitenhage Museum has made several attempts to trace her present-day family, but despite advertising in the local newspapers, there have been none forthcoming with concrete information. She is remembered in indigenous oral and written history, but her appearance is not recorded in any image.

What happens in the absence of visual representation? What legacies are lost? There is an abundance of written documents for the period under discussion, but is that enough to prompt public memory? There also exist many paintings and prints, responding to 'the call of the exotic - explorers, chroniclers and topographical reporters… a wealth of Africana' (Berman 1970: 1). There may have been very obvious practical reasons for a lack of available portraiture. For even the most privileged in the Cape there was little time for portrait sitting and 'for the first 250 years the community was engaged primarily in the effort of drawing a living from the soil' (Berman 1970: 1).[18] The visual images that are available from that period depict street scenes and everyday life in the Cape. Looking at these

[18] The first European settlers at the Cape had come from Holland during the 17th Century. Their homeland at the time was enjoying a wave of great prosperity in trade and the growth of an industrious and stable middle-class had provided a new source for patronage of the arts. [It] became the art of everyday things (Berman 1970: 1). It was only in the 19th century when Thomas Baines, George Angas, Frederick l'Ons and Thomas Bowler were active in South Africa and with the advent of photography, that portraiture became more actively practised. Lady Ann Barnard, in her diaries *Paradise, Jan. 31st, 1799, Thursday; Friday, Feb.1; Sat., Feb.2* writes that due to her many necessary household duties 'the leisure for all the little elegancys (sic) or singularitys (sic) which by drawing or describing I coud (sic) fix on my paper & on my memory for the amusement of others are lost'. She was not a widow, but she has recorded, despite her frustration at not having enough time too pursue her talents, clear descriptions of how hard women worked in the colony in order to survive, husband or no husband.

representations we can determine a backdrop in which to place the widows under discussion. There is some evidence that slave women adopted a Western style of dress combined with that of Eastern origin, with no restriction or dress code expected of them as widows. According to Schoeman (2007: 147), visual evidence in the form of drawings by Caspar Schmalkalden done in the East between 1642 and 1652 show slaves wearing a combination of a sarong, a long skirt and loose blouse, some women choosing to use a headscarf, and often with babies strapped to their backs. Schoeman (2007: 218 - 219) relates: 'By the turn of the eighteenth century, there appears to have been a recognisable category of clothing known as "slaves clothes"' made from 'coarse, strong and cheap materials' and 'the bare foot is the mark of the slave'. Clothing, then, was less a 'bearer of names' as it was in Europe, and more a symbol of either freedom or subjection. Though there may well have been codes and symbols marking widowhood, we do not have any record of these.

Angela van Bengalen was apparently a beautiful slave of Indian origin owned by Jan van Riebeeck. He sold her to Abrham[19] Gabebema and when Gabebema left the Cape in 1666 he manumitted Angela and her three children, who were presumably sired by white fathers. In 1669 she married 32-year-old Arnoldus Willemz Basson. There were 7 children from this union. Widowed in 1698, she continued to conduct business and run her farms. She died in 1720 a wealthy and well-respected woman. She had increased the 6495 guilders she inherited from her husband to 15 000 guilders. One of her daughters, born to her when she was still a slave, was the previously mentioned Anna de Koning. Anna married Oloff Bergh who was well respected and when he died in 1724 she became 'an extremely wealthy widow' owning,

[19] Spelling from Schoeman.

amongst other land assets, the farm Constantia. Schoeman (2007: 355) describes an image of Anna de Koning which is presently held in Groot Constantia (Fig. 6):

> A black and white copy of a possibly monochrome portrait by an amateur artist, the original of which seems to have disappeared, shows the latter as a beautiful and elegant young Eastern woman in ringlets and dress fashionable in her day, holding a fan and a piece of fruit.

It was not uncommon for manumitted slave widows to have slaves of their own. Schoeman cites several instances in which widows were allowed to take slaves on their travels and Johanna Wessels (widow of Frans van der Stel, son of Simon - himself a 'man of colour') took one female slave back to the Netherlands in 1717.[20] Though we do have portraits of the van der Stel men, there are none of the van der Stel women. Nevertheless, the women brought to light here experienced vast alterations in their status from being slaves who were stripped of freedom, to successfully managing their financial independence. Indeed, as mentioned previously, they become an 'astute' and propertied entity: a 'widowarchy'.

Recent South African discourse[21] on the lives of slave-women reveals a fierce resistance to any attempt at memorialising without bringing up the socio-political scars that shaped these women's lives. As we shall see in the second chapter, contemporary attempts at memorialising these women may at the same time place them under erasure. Whilst Levy

[20] Other widows mentioned by Schoeman are the wealthy Engela Breda, who built a slave house in her garden in 1719; widow Ten Damme (Helena Gulix) 1726; Johanna Victor who was widowed in 1694 and later remarried to the Landrost of Stellenbosch Johannes Starenburg; Sofia van der Merwe, widow of Roelof Pasman in 1732; extremely wealthy widow Anna Hoeks who died leaving an inheritance of six farms in the Stellenbosch district and fifteen slaves. All of these widows were wealthy, managed their own farms and had a retinue of slaves. Widowed slave owners even made money from hiring out their slave. Adam Tas married a wealthy widow of slave-origin in 1705 and seemed to lead a leisurely life whilst his wife managed practical affairs; Claas Jonasz de Jonge, son of manumitted slave Dina van Bima, who was widowed in 1782, married a white widow Anna Maria Brits and thereby acquired the farms Liesbeek and Raapenberg.

[21] Two informative books published in 2007 reframe historical readings of women in South African history. These are: *Women in South African History: Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers.* Edited by Gasa, N. HSRC Press; and *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* by Meg Samuelson, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

accesses the vicissitudes of widows' lives through visual images of the time, we in South Africa have no such visual heritage. How does the complete lack of images affect historical memory? Gqola (2007: 33-34) draws clear distinctions between forgetting and what she terms 'disremembering'. As she observes in her essay on slave women in South Africa: 'Whereas both are inscribed by power hierarchies, disremembering is a more deliberate act of exclusion.' She argues that spaces where slaves were re-humanised allow for 'nuanced echoes' of representation, albeit a state of 'perpetual incompleteness'. Such has been the fate of the very first widow on record in South Africa - Krotoa - whom I discuss in the next chapter. Her story has been altered so many times in this nuanced echo of remembering that slippages have occurred. These 're-humanisings', or slippages, reveal altered states underway within the present marking of history, indicating a desire for a more unified identity.

CHAPTER TWO:

ACTS OF MEMORY

Memory is like the imprint or drawing in us of things felt.

Aristotle

Having established a brief record of widows in the early Cape, my particular interest is how they have become so deeply buried in South African history and the manner in which these women are currently being re-embodied. Recent exhibitions and artworks turn more regularly to the exhumation of information and preservation of memory in South African history than ever before. For example, the 'recuperation of memory in symbolic spaces' such as District Six and the Slave Lodge, indicates a 'regenerative impulse' that 'reincarnate[s] the absences and divisions that have made us what we are' (De Kock 1998: 65 - 71). There has also been extensive focus on issues of memory in theoretical writing, for example the essays in *Negotiating the Past: the Making of Memory in South Africa*, edited by Carli Coetzee and Sarah Nuttall and published in 1998. I shall draw on concepts put forward in some of these texts in the first section of this chapter.[22]

Would South African history have been recorded differently if visual images of Early Cape widows, from many different racial groups, existed? If public memory is transferred from objects within narratives to a space of memory contained within the political agency of the

[22] These include allowing for the 'polyvalence of meaning' (Nuttall 1998: 11); the 'recuperation of memory' (Nuttall 1998: 12) with particular reference to slave history; 'display as repossession' (De Kock 1998: 65) in terms of private and public healing; 'anchoring official memory' in an 'attempt to revive past histories and make new meaning for public memory' through institutionalised methods (Davison 1998: 145); and finally the necessary processes that allow for reconciliation between the past and present.

day, how is public memory anchored to existing - or non-existing - 'visual evidence'? In the introduction to *The Art of Forgetting,* Forty (1999: 2) reiterates the dependency of memory on the material object. He suggests that 'The Western tradition of memory since the Renaissance has been founded upon an assumption that material objects, whether natural or artificial, can act as analogues of human memory'. Forty further argues that fixing memory to material objects can also abet in the loss of memory. Here I digress briefly to give an example of the every-day materiality of memory.

Images found on local currency change hands countless times daily, though we barely look at them. For my generation, the image of Van Riebeeck remains as part of the brown one-rand note (Fig. 7). However, it has recently been revealed that this image was of an entirely different man: Bartholomeus Vermyden.[23] To remove this 'imposter' and replace him with the real Van Riebeeck is impossible. A space has been allotted in my memory, aligned with history, and I cannot undo it without an authentic replacement, for I do not know what the 'real' van Riebeeck looks like. The association between the historical narrative and the image is so great, that to lose the image throws the understanding of my primary-school history into chaotic questioning.

Astounding political and cultural leaps have been commemorated on our currency, from Apartheid images of power to the present day 'Big Five' on coins and notes. I have yet to see any images of women on South African currency. I make this point because the strength of a patriarchal image overshadows that of the female in South African history. Had I been shown text-book images of Anna van Bengalen or Catherine van Palicatte, for example,

[23] http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/vanRiebeek,j.

alongside the image of Jan van Riebeeck during my South African primary school 'apartheid' education between the years of 1966 and 1972, would my earliest years of formal education have been any different? My own visual memory-space was selectively appropriated through formative education and reiterated by daily exposure to male-centred currency, in essence a non-fact - since the images were in any case fallaciously attributed. It becomes virtually impossible to disassociate the image conjured by the name of Van Riebeeck as he reappears further along in this thesis, such is the power of the image. Once a visual image is attributed, it is hard to dis(re)member from it associations without having something else to occupy memory-space. Perhaps a blank outline takes the same shape of the image, since once an image is imposed upon the psyche it is exceedingly difficult to give it over to formlessness. If every image is already an imposter, it is the desire to give face to the unknown that becomes a conduit for memory. If objects aid and abet memory, and representation is a veneer of envisagement, what transpires when locating meaning necessitates altering the 'facts'?

Hall writes about objects having a 'polyvalence of meaning'. He states that 'objects or images with which we are presented may resist containment within the narratives of "memory" that we use' (quoted in Nuttall 1998: 11). A visual example of how objects complicate memory and how meaning is inserted because of the desire for narrative and form, can be unpacked in an analysis of a 2007 artwork by Andrew Putter called *Secretly I will love you more.* To put this work into an historical context, I shall begin with a brief history of the Cape and then go on to introduce the first widow at the Cape, Krotoa (Fig. 8), who has erroneously become the implied subject of Putter's artwork.

In 1487, the same year that Caterina Sforza was first widowed in Italy, Bartholomew Dias landed up the coast from Table Bay, having been dispatched by a Renaissance queen, Isabella of Portugal, to find a fresh route to the East.[24] The first settlement was established 165 years later by Van Riebeeck (he now of image unknown), accompanied by '110 men and 15 women and children' (Schoeman 2007: 11). He was to leave for Batavia ten years later, his presence having set in motion a change in the life of one Khoisan woman, Krotoa - or Eva, as he baptised her. Since apartheid has been abolished, several white South Africans have laid genetic claim to her. Krotoa is of particular interest because her historical rendering erases the tragic circumstances of her life, which were markedly more traumatic after becoming a widow. As previously stated, her widowhood was the first to be documented in South African history.

Most recently, the prize-winning artwork by Andrew Putter *Secretly I will love you more* has prompted a slew of articles making repeated reference to Krotoa being Van Riebeeck's adopted daughter. This is an inaccuracy that has not yet been challenged. Though it may seem at first to be a minor and irrelevant inaccuracy, it is within this smallest change in information - which supersedes evidence - that we find the larger shifts resetting public memory and meaning. These are not deliberate attempts to alter history, but are indicative of current changes and a desire to suture a rent in identity. Whilst the original interpreter -

24 According to records, just 100 years later in 1583, Antonio de Saldanha was the first foreigner to formally enter Table Bay. Skirmishes between Khoisan people and foreigners in Table Bay in 1510 and 1512 together with infamous storms and treacherous waters that pounded the coast, kept the Cape free of foreign settlement until Jan van Riebeeck landed there in 1652.

Krotoa - ironically has no say in the matter, she has conveniently become a metaphorical scapegoat upon which to project reconciliatory attempts at a disjunctive past.

Pertinent to Krotoa's life as a widow in history is the irony of how her story has been continuously but marginally altered by those who have appropriated her. This may serve to support the argument posed by Gqola that the women of the Cape Colony were placed under erasure by the manner in which their lives were documented in history. My extensive research confirmed that Van Riebeeck did not adopt Krotoa in any sense of the word. By baptizing her Eva, he only further alienated her from her roots. In fact she was passed on to his successor Zacharia Wagenaar who dismissed her. Clearly there were no familial bonds of adoption involved. [25]

McKinnon (2004: 43) states in *A Tapestry of Lives - Cape Women of the 17th Century* that 'she was both respected and mistrusted by the Dutch and her own people as she sought a balance between her two lives'. Furthermore: 'Officials noticed that when Krotoa acted as interpreter for those whom she favoured, she was inclined to do so selectively, changing the subject when something was said that would not meet with Dutch approval' (McKinnon 2004: 44). She could therefore have had a profound effect on these politics. As more Khoisan learned to speak Dutch, her services were less in demand and she turned to prostitution for a few years before marrying a Danish surgeon or sick-comforter, Peter van

[25] She was not a slave, but was the niece of the prominent Khoisan leader Herrie. She served in true liminality as an interpreter between her Khoisan group and the settlers. She had lived within the Castle from the age of ten. She wore eastern attire and reverted to Khoisan dress when not in the Castle, slipping easily between the required 'servant' identity and that of her Khoisan origins, though this may not have brought her respect or a fixed identity from either group.

Meerhof, in 1664. Despite her slightly chequered history, the 'Dutch held Krotoa up as a role model to other Khoekhoe women' (McKinnon 2004: 46). As a wedding gift, the Company transferred Van Meerhof to Robben Island to oversee the prison. Krotoa was desperately unhappy there. Her husband subsequently died on a slave hunting expedition to Madagascar, and as widow she had two more children by different fathers. It appears that she suffered from loneliness and displacement and turned to alcohol for succour. She resumed a life of prostitution on the mainland and, after an incident where she 'insulted the Commander at an official Company dinner, he banished her to Robben Island… where she died five years later' in 1674 (McKinnon 2004: 51). She was apparently buried in the castle, and thus - even in death - bastioned within a politically claimed space.

Andrew Putter's video *Secretly I will love you more* (Fig. 9) is a staged re-make of a 17th-century painting, '*Portrait of a woman*' by Pieter de Putter (Fig. 10).[26] The woman in the video is meant to represent Maria de Quellerie (Fig. 11), wife of Jan van Riebeeck, singing a Khoisan lullaby. The viewer is led to presume by a text-board accompanying the work that she is singing to a Khoi-khoi child.[27] Pollack (2008: 2), in *South African Art Times* romantically describes this work as 'a story of joyous self-discovery set in the palmy, pre-

[26] There is no familial link between Andrew Putter and Pieter de Putter. Hayden Proud states in Codart (2009) that the work was 'based on a portrait by the artist's namesake' and that it 'proposed a topical "what if" scenario on 17th-century inter-racial relationships for a post-apartheid South Africa now engaged in a continuous quest for reconciliation' (http://www.codart.nl/442/).

27 *Secretly I will love you more* is a looped 3-minute video sung in Khoi-khoi, translated here in English:

> Do not fear me little one - welcome into our home!
> How beautiful you are, little shiny one, with your woolly hair, smelling of sweet buchu.
> Your differences from me make you so precious! Your smallness belies your significance.
> Meeting you has changed us forever. I will love you as I love my own children:
> Secretly I will love you more.
> The warm summer wind blows and makes me dream.
> I dream of your people and my people changing each other.
> Welcome into our home precious child (Spier 2007: 166).

colonial days before curiosity yielded to prejudice, when both Europeans and indigenes were utterly fascinated by the exoticism each embodied for the other'. What is problematic is not so much the artwork itself, as the inferences of mother-child bonding which have translated - with an ambiguity that seems to dog her - into articles that neatly assume this adopted child to be Krotoa. The child being sung to has been named Krotoa, not directly by the artist in the artwork but by the popular press, and is thus now firmly written into popular culture as Van Riebeeck's adopted daughter.

Neil Pendock discusses this artwork in an article in the *Financial Mail* called 'Khoikhoi Connections'. He capitalises on the now fashionable icon Krotoa and casually reworks her history in an article, linking her 'step-dad' to a contemporary wine-estate:

> Andrew Putter's prize winning and provocative portrait of Maria van Riebeeck singing a Khoikhoi lullaby to her adopted daughter, Krotoa, at the Spier Contemporary 2007 art exhibition on Dick Enthoven's Spier Wine Estate confirms that Australians are not unique in their appropriation of indigenous cultures. The irony is that Krotoa died an alcoholic at the tender age of 31. Her step dad, Jan, was founder of the SA wine industry (Pendock 2008).

The only likely truth in this article pertaining to Krotoa is that she did indeed die an alcoholic. The article goes on to exemplify a wine named 'Vastrap':

> Vastrap is produced by a "joint venture between the Solms and Astor families and the Wijn de Caab Trust, the beneficiaries of which are the historically disadvantaged residents and employees of Delta farm and its environs". And this is no black economic empowerment company either, as a visit to the Museum van de Caab on the farm quickly confirms. In a very real sense, the descendents of Krotoa and her strandloper forebears are now harvesting the fruits of a historical reality: the one that resulted in the indigenous pastoral communities being displaced by European colonists with a curious habit of dividing common grazing land into individual-ownership farms (Pendock 2008).

Pendock's use of Krotoa to exemplify an initiative in the wine industry leaves one with a somewhat drunken sense of her history. The workers at Delta farm are descendents of slaves

in all likelihood, not of Krotoa. This error may be largely in part due to the inferences of the artwork itself, which provided critics with a springboard to leap off into fashionable rhetoric. Although iconographically poached by inference, Krotoa herself is not evident in the artwork.

Evocative and poignant as this work may be, it evokes a conjured nostalgia. This false nostalgia is reinforced by articles such as the one below, posted on the internet:

> We know by now that the work is about Maria Della Quelleria singing a lullaby to Krotoa, her adopted Khoikhoi child. Apparently many artists have made work around this story, which makes it even more of an achievement that Andrew Putter managed to convey with such impact. As the stolid portrait, replete with the stereotypes it conveys, is interrupted by the small movements of the mouth and the infinitely fragile tenderness of the singing, so the 'counter-tale' of the anomalous relationship of these two historic characters is of the enthrallment and affection which differs from the stereotypes of racist antipathy that burden our society (Littlewort 2008).

In Sue Williamson's (2008) discussion in Artthrob of Putter's video-installation she also mentions that the artwork was 'inspired by the story of Maria de la Quellerie who, shortly after her arrival in the Cape in 1652, adopted a Khoikhoi girl-child'. Williamson (2008) suggests that:

> The intimacy of the mother-daughter relationship subverts the racial segregation and conflict that usually characterise South African histories. With *Secretly I will love you more* Putter puts forward an alternative narrative of love and longing between traditionally conflicting cultures.

I go so far as to suggest that de Quelleria's lullaby has become a seditious ritual - every repetition reinforcing an untruth. This rendering of Krotoa serves as an example of the fallibility of memory, and how objects aid and abet the process of forgetting. Since objects decay, we could say that in memory (attached to objects) there already resides a built-in iconoclasm, an inherent self-destruction. The desire to fix memory in time may go against

the very nature of memory. Nevertheless, attempts at permanence can outlive the natural brain and, as such, collective memories in a social structure are often focused through adherence to memorials or monuments. Whilst allowing for, in the interpretation of Putter's work, 'polyvalence of meaning', there has come to light the strong desire within our present history to be reconciled to the past. It is of importance that the inaccuracy of historical information has slipped between the gaps during the 'display of repossession' of a relationship between De Quelleria and a Khoisan child through the singing of a lullaby. Of relevance are the meanings displayed within those gaps created by inaccuracies. Coetzee (1998: 112 -114), in her essay 'Krotoa remembered: a mother of unity, a mother of sorrows?' states that there is a new kind of nationalism arising in South Africa - inspiring 'Afrikaners to try and find a connection with an African identity' and that this link to Krotoa fulfils a 'desire for wholeness' despite her previously being 'typecast as a bad mother'.[28] But, as Coetzee (1998: 114) warns, 'there is a risk of remembering the country's history in a way that ignores oppositions of the past'. Coetzee (1998: 114) observes that 'Instead of the spotlight falling on the Dutch man (whose portrait used to be represented on all South African banknotes), it falls on a Khoikhoi woman; his Europe meets her Africa, and she is the symbolic, if not historical, champion'.

By evoking a link between the more assertive role as foreign white mother singing a lullaby to an adopted Khoisan child, Putter has collapsed the mother-child/white-black roles back and forth upon each other and has succeeded in offering what Küchler, after Assmann,[29] (in

[28] This quest for unified identity has been given renewed attention. Jacob Zuma, in his campaign run-up to the 2009 General Elections, commented: "Of all the white groups that are in South Africa, it is only the Afrikaners that are truly South African in the true sense of the word" (Quotation in *The Sunday Times*, 19 April 2009).
[29] Assmann, Jan. 1992. *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in Frühen Hochkulturen*. München: Beck.

Forty 1999: 59-60) describes as a 'comparison between modes of remembering, a poignant insight into the forgotten domain of displacement and forgetting':

> …the first mode is a temporal metaphor, referred to as eschatological memory, which assigns a political and messianic forge capable of bridging across a lost present to a desired future that is envisioned in the past; the second mode is a spatial metaphor, referred to as animatorical remembering, which initiates a momentary collapse of past and present, distance and proximity into a single point that is exploded out of a linear and narrative time construction.

Secretly I will love you more, together with articles describing the work, has 'forged a bridging across a lost present to a desired future that is envisioned in the past' by inter-changing the geographical and political facts (Küchler 1999: 60). In all of this, we have forgotten that Krotoa, who moved freely between her own Khoisan family and the Castle, was in no need of adoption. She had a home, and it was Maria who was in fact displaced geographically. In an interview with Putter, Lloyd Pollack (2008: 4) observes that Krotoa 'is unable to assume her old identity… for she has made the epic journey in space and time'. She (who is now 'Krotoa the adopted' by inference) - has become the 'temporal metaphor' or 'eschatological memory', as she underscores contemporary political desire fostered in modern South Africa. The technique used 'initiates a momentary collapse of past and present' by quoting the 17th-century painting, altering it imperceptibly and bringing it to life through modern-day video format. This moment of perception, what Küchler (1999: 60) calls *erwecken* (German verb 'to awake') where 'momentous sensation of past, present and future collapse into a single point' creates in the viewer nostalgic desire. At the precise moment this sense of '*erwecken*' occurs to the viewer, the lullaby dulls the senses: after all, lullabies are meant to soothe one into sleep. This representation circumnavigates linear time and collapses the viewer clearly into the present for, as Pollack (2008: 2) says, we are the 'Hottentot other

her audience has become'. We are displaced, Krotoa is displaced - and the lullaby completes the ruin of memory.

Nevertheless, it is within that ruin, once precariously re-assembled, that we are tentatively reconciled between past and present. Gqola (1985: 25) writes:

> Most thinking on memory focuses on precisely its refusal to remain distantly in the past and insists instead that it has an ever-presence which is mutable…those whose egos extend into the past for a sense of completion emphasize the importance of the ancestors or those of the past who are believed to give meaning to one's present existence. This view may be likened to a helix in which, while there is a sense of movement, the helix at the same time, turns back upon itself and depends upon the past from which it springs to guide and determine its nature; the past is an indispensable part of the present which participates in it, enlightens it, and gives it meaning.

The structure of this 'helix' has been retraced through an artwork made by a white South African male who, no doubt unwittingly, abetted a re-working of history. To use Gqola's words, one could argue that the desire of the 'ego' for a 'sense of completion' in 'present existence' has Oedipal undertones: together with inferences of the recent claims of Krotoa as *stammoeder,* she only becomes rightfully so by means of European adoption. We do indeed trace the widows of the early Cape through a white (male) European mind. Gqola (2007: 39) rightfully warns in the conclusion to her essay that, in our attempt to 'decode and analyse those meanings that *can* be gleaned from conventional historiographical sites', we should be careful that we do not 'collude with systems that lead to ambiguous visibility'.

De Kock (1998: 63), in her essay 'Cracked heirlooms: memory on exhibition', discusses the 'disjunctive process of memory' and how 'their meanings are revised'. She states that, in this process, 'fictions of consolation'[30] are constructed and identity is recomposed. *Secretly I will*

[30] De Kock cites Sacks 1985: 2.

love you more has been popularly consumed in a way that fulfils all these criteria. Though my analysis of the altered perceptions underpinned by this artwork may seem somewhat harsh, it is nevertheless important to concede that the processes this artwork have set in motion tally with contemporary ideas about the structure of memory. In this sense, the artwork straddles a space between fiction and fact, allowing for a cohesive putting together of past and present. Though re-embodied as an adoptee in the present, Krotoa resists containment. She moves between narrative spaces riddled with gaps. Though her 'history' has been altered by *Secretly I will love you more,* she herself remains singularly in an unresolved state, resisting memory in true widow-liminality.

I now turn my discussion away from the images - or lack of images - that memorialise, to an image depicting hidden processes of widowhood situated in relatively contemporary rural South Africa. Using insights provided by social studies research conducted in the Eastern Cape on widowhood, I take an in-depth look at a spitbite etching by Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe, most likely produced at Rorke's Drift, called *The Widow* (1969: Fig. 12). The instant that a woman's status as widow becomes public knowledge she is required to take on new responsibilities. As with Renaissance widows, she may be expected to display - and not exceed - distinctive signs of grieving in public. Internal grief is usually hidden not only indoors but within the widow's own psyche. In a study undertaken by Maqashalala titled 'An analysis of support systems among widows in the Tyhume Basin, Ciskei, South Africa' (1984) he investigates the experiences of 100 widows from villages surrounding the Alice District in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. He states that 'Most societies fail to provide

effective cultural methods of coping with death',[31] indicating that there is a lack within the community in terms of the assistance it affords women in negotiating the adjustment from the position of wife to widow (Silverman 1972: 95 - 102). I unpack *The Widow* with this hypothesis in mind and in light of Joni Brenner's comment that Shilakoe's work 'both documented the world around him and also reflected with great sensitivity the accompanying anguish, frustration and pain within his community' (Brenner 1995: 207).

This work represents half-light. A thin, bare breasted and pregnant woman stands in a gateway, her hips tilted towards a child some distance away. Her arms become part of a boundary wall, yet she appears suspended off the ground. Footprints, possibly those of an absent person, lead away from between her legs and disappear into the words 'Lost' in the foreground. Her feet are splayed: one foot points towards the child whilst the other is outward upon the path. This dichotomy of feet and footprints act as traces of relationships between people and spaces, both absent and present. Empty space pervades the etching, giving objects within the image a sense of dislocated 'floating' heaviness. Overbearing and divergent shadows move in all directions, defying conciliation. Subtle incongruities of tone and posture pull and push the objects within the narrative, lending a sense of unease. The widow is pinioned in a literal and psychic space of desolation, between day and night, past and future, located in a landscape of stark but disorientating reality suspended between life and death. Shilakoe was only 22 years old when he made this print, yet despite his youth, he

[31] Silverman, P.R. 1972. 'Widowhood and Preventative Intervention.' *The Family Co-ordinator*. 21 (pp. 95 - 102). The variables in assessing support systems for widows in the rural region that Maqashalala has taken into account are: the age of the widow (older widows tend to adjust better to widowhood than those under the age of 45 with dependant children); the effect of 'anticipatory grief' (the expectation of the death of the husband); and the effects of social support and emotional support on the psychological wellbeing of the widow. This research, conducted in the Eastern Cape, focuses on areas of 'human experience and pathology, including loneliness, widowhood, mental and physical disease, stress, alienation, powerlessness, and helplessness' (Maqashalala 1984: 11).

has captured the widow's situation in a moment of remarkable suspension. Brenner (1995: 207) notes that Shilakoe had a particular knack for this insightfulness and writes of his works:

> Perhaps the compelling and uneasy nature of Shilakoe's images lies in the knowledge that these 'ethereal' images have been drawn from the painful realities of the people of his community. There is constant tension between the soft, dreamlike imagery and the everyday hardships which they reflect and question.

Though at first glance the image has a 'dreamlike' quality, *The Widow* expresses the tension of internal hidden grief. Many traditions require a widow to remain indoors for an appropriate term of grief confinement, and since the represented widow is depicted outdoors, we may assume she has either completed the required time or can no longer keep her grief hidden through her isolation. Either way, the home, metaphor for family and female body as a place for private grieving, is desolate. She stands in the gap between the starkness of home and the child, and with elongated arms, supports herself upon the ambiguously depicted gateway to public life. She marks this space with her body, which, dysmorphically, contains all her grief. Irrevocably altered by loss, she remains nameless and is thus a metaphor for the experience of all widows. Hovering within a scene of devastation, the widow appears ambivalent. This ambivalence could be attributed to her altered state, requiring her to move back and forth between roles of mother and public widow, without easy resolution.

Nel and Givon, in a 1990 Catalogue accompanying the Standard Bank Guest Artist Award and titled *Cyprian Shilakoe,* commented that 'images in Shilakoe's work seem to be snatches from an indeterminate and all-enveloping continuum, a continuum where edges blur, smudging the relationship between inner experience and outer reality' (quoted in Brenner

1995: 207).[32] In contrast to the contained Renaissance images of widows discussed in Chapter One, *The Widow* lacks sentiments of memorialisation. It is devoid of any direct reference to the deceased and is a bleak scene of disaster within which a bewildered widow and child are suspended singularly in perpetual grief. Whilst viewer, child, and widow stare directly at each other, one becomes aware that this scene is not a public viewing, but a private moment outside of the home. The large shadow between them may be that cast by ourselves - or 'society'. We become aware of our own presence as an intrusion, and perhaps our 'failure' to 'provide methods of coping' as previously cited by Maqashalala. Thus our own state as viewer is altered to that of voyeur as we observe the intimacy of her grief, powerless as we are to effectively engage. As the blurred boundaries between private and public mourning clear, what remains is the widow as disembodied between realms, caught within her own body. In the third chapter, I shall explore, through my artwork, the private and public spaces a widow must by necessity inhabit, and bring the disembodiment a widow may experience as she moves between them, into acute focus.

32 Some of Shilakoe's last images reflect thoughts about mortality, and a sense of loss seems to dominate. Despite dying so young, his work has continued to resurface over the last 40 years. 'The most recent retrospective of his work was exhibited in Durban in 2007 and he has been received several awards posthumously. In 1990 Shilakoe was the posthumous recipient of the Standard Bank Guest Artist Award, which recognizes accomplished artists, offering them renewed and wider acknowledgment' (Brenner 1995: 208). That the artist had a particular propensity toward expressing the 'inner experience and outer reality' becomes more poignant when viewed in the light that he had a premonition of his own death and died in a car accident in 1973 at the age of 26.

CHAPTER THREE:

RITUAL PROCESS – MAKING ART

The professional art-practice component of this Master's submission focuses on my own experiences as a widow. The process I often follow when making art involves, literally, digging my way into materiality and then digging my way out again. The act of making art provides a form of ritual for me, one where I can investigate otherwise insoluble issues. Insightfully, my Art Practical Supervisor Maureen de Jager suggested the title *Unearthed* for the component of my Master's exhibition that refers to the private viewing of hidden things below the 'ground' - the land of the sensory and the abject.[33] A second exhibition titled *Anon.* focuses on that which is above the 'ground' and thus more overtly part of the land of symbols and language. I have inverted the conventional relationships of 'she who was left behind' by burying 'her' (myself as widow) and 'he who is dead' (my late husband) by referencing 'him' above the ground in an attempt to articulate the dialectic between my own presence and his absence. The physical absence of my husband in relation to the presence of memories, which reside within myself as traces of him, are exhumed and examined. I shall discuss the works and their processes in the order in which they were made, and explore the slippages of the objects and their meanings between the two spaces of exhibition.

[33] Kelly (1997: 23 - 39) states that during the Renaissance there were clear distinctions between that which was 'the sense (below) and intellect (above)'. Through art practice I have explored these two spaces and their distinctions with this in mind.

The first sculpture, cast from a mould of myself, intentionally subverts traditional portraiture of widows. This naked self-portrait, *Self* (2006: Figs. 13 and 14) exceeds attempts at containment and shows signs of decomposition, unlike the portraits discussed in previous chapters that are underpinned by ideologies that advocated bodily control. The tradition of portraiture usually has an element of immortality, whereas this portrait of myself is decaying. The decision to use my body as a starting point for my practical work was based on the fact that I had, through the experience of being widowed, lost the MATTER of my husband. My body was initially a stand-in reflecting upon the loss of my other and signifying my not being able to see myself reflected in my mirror (my husband). The losing and subsequent mutable redefining of myself is a strong element of my widowhood. I had a desire to see myself physically apart from myself, but in the third dimension. It was, however, mainly an attempt at a mute and impossible marker for the loss of the physical presence of my husband.

The next sculpture was taken from the mould of *Self*, but cast over a mannequin. *Second Self* (2006: Figs. 15, 16, 17 and 18) was then completely encased in a solid block of polyurethane. I carved and burned back into the block to rediscover the sculpture, choosing not to liberate it entirely and thereby exemplifying the pull below the ground into the formless. This doubling of self between layers of being hidden and revealed brings to mind Otto Rank's theory that 'the double was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an "energetic denial of the power of death," …this invention of doubling [serves as] a preservation against extinction' (Rank 1914). The shoring up and doubling within *Second Self* acts as preservation against the ravages of grief that exert a strong pull towards the grave, and the desire to 'become' the lost love. The excavation of *Second Self* alternately

denies this state of formlessness. The widow's striving for 'preservation against extinction' is exacerbated by a double-negative for the middle-aged widow: she loses both the safety of marriage within which she may have grown old alongside her husband, and she exceeds the physical containment of a youthful body. In effect she finds her status altered, consigned to a space aside from mainstream society, and becomes invisible as a woman in her widowhood. Schmahmann (2004: 62) writes in *Through the Looking Glass* that 'The tradition of regulating and containing female bodies in art… creates a taboo against showing… the bodies of older women'. Schmahmann brings into discussion a sculpture by Wilma Cruise titled *John's wife (white)* (1995: Fig. 19). In this sculpture, Cruise 'takes as her theme the psychic experiences of the post-menopausal woman, and she explores these through a focus on the nude'. Schmahmann (2004: 62) explains that 'the figure represented in *John's wife (white)* is subject to a series of drives that cannot be readily positioned and ordered'. The lack felt by the loss of my husband (his dissolving) within my own body-memory (becoming invisible-widow and disordered-woman) led to the next artworks in the series: five mangled bodies of clay, distorted and disjunctive, utterly out of place and cringing tensely at their own presence. These maimed *Selves* (2006: Fig. 20) are an attempt to portray the effects of emotional trauma on the physical body. They are contorted and comfortless as they strive to contain 'a series of drives that cannot be readily positioned and ordered'. They work back towards a space in the world: a painfully nipped-in waist, truncated limbs, small gaping orifices all lean out for support whilst at the same time folding into themselves.

Freud integrates Rank's theme of the double with that of the Uncanny[34], where the 'Uncanny is that form of terror that leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar, but has become terrifying because it corresponds with something repressed that has returned' (Freud 1919: 218). Here the unfamiliar *Selves* (Fig. 21) are amputated by the death of the other - no longer at home within yet trapped by the body. The Uncanny is amplified by the fact that death is inscribed in every living thing, hence the inevitability of one's own death. Perhaps it is this instinctive knowledge of formlessness resurfacing to the conscious mind that determines our sense of the Uncanny. Phelan (1997: 5) explains further:

> Severed from the placenta and cast from the womb, we enter the world as an amputated body whose being will be determined by the very mortality of that body. Prior to recognising the specific content of an affective grief, perhaps the human subject is born ready to mourn.

Aside from the self-portraits, I made *'three graces'* (2006: Fig. 22), casting them from a 1960s mannequin. These works represent my primary responsibilities, my three children who became my muses. I have cast their own hands onto the mannequin bodies, thereby tracing their identity and selfhood and using their individual gestures. My three muses are of indeterminate sexuality, the children having been on the cusp of pubescence when their father died. This group of androgynous beings, united by their fatherlessness, parody the harmony usually attributed to the Three Graces in, for example, Boticelli's *Primavera* (Fig. 2). Bandaged, wounded, and mutely deformed, undone by loss, they are cast out from the Eden of an ideal family life. Nevertheless, as my source of inspiration, my muses gave me a tenacity so necessary in a time of grief. Though cast from the same mould, both genetically as children from the union of my husband and myself, and from the mannequin, they are

[34] Freud relates the *Uncanny* to the German adjective *unheimlich,* or un-homely.

sentient and individual. As such, they are apart in their experience of grief, separated from the familiar body, not unlike the child in Shilakoe's *The Widow*.

Finally, *Unearthed* contains 600 clay hot water bottles. The hot water bottle became my fetish object. As objects, hot water bottles were initially emblematic as insubstantial stand-ins expressing longing for the lost body and markers for the number of nights spent alone in the conjugal bed. I planned to make one bottle for each night alone so the bottles are displayed in a continuum along the circular gallery wall to indicate the endlessness of unfulfilled longing. I titled this series '*One more night with you*' (2006: Fig. 23).[35] The functionality of the hot water bottle is inverted by its representational materiality and has become cold, hard and unyielding. Compounding the insufficiency of this fetishistic object, representations of the human body as object are already inscribed with fundamental lack, thus provoking 'separation' (after Freud). According to Jacques Sedat, Freud's theory proposes that:

> …separation from the object is addressed in two ways: either by an impulse to master the object by breaking it, casting it aside, or by incorporating it into fantasy and so working it over in the psyche, or the subject bypasses the need for the object by regarding it as the lost object beyond the reach of self. With recognition of the absence of the object, we make a transition to a capacity to do without the object. When we do not recognize the object as lost we provoke melancholia, anxiety, mourning and pain.[36]

The hot water bottles were at first a poignant reminder of my physical aloneness as a sexual being. As objects, the bottles became a motif, which were later used again in *Anon.* although

[35] After a phrase in the song 'My All' by Mariah Carey - my husband had played it to me shortly before he died and I had not understood its meaning until after his death.

[36] Sedat's synopsis of Freud. S. 1920. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. (London: Hogarth Press. pp. 1-64) is found on www.answers.com/topic/lost-object.

made from different materials and serving different purposes. They became a primary element to be used again and again, providing a vehicle for personal transition and an altering in the grieving process. The repetition of these forms allowed a sense of order and pattern that facilitated cohesiveness, yet it was within this 'mastering' of the hot water bottles that their lack was repetitiously compounded: as stand-ins for the missing body, they were already insufficient. Ultimately, by reworking them from the empty bed to the space of *Anon.* the transitions from solid clay to clear plastic outlines, allowed for separation from the body towards understanding issues of memory.

It was whilst working with fired clay that I decided to bury the objects I had made. Practically, I was experimenting with ways in which to regain the lustre lost in clay once it is fired. Rubbing fat into the fired clay and infusing this with soil brought back some of the corporeality of wet clay and burying the butter-smeared objects was a practical concern. I obtained permission from the relevant municipal authorities, and with a sense of great unease (partly due to my lack of having any explanation at the time other than the need for a material process to occur), interred the work in seven separate graves over an area of approximately eighty square metres (Figs. 24, 25 and 26) at Waainek Cemetery.

Whilst my artworks lay buried, I was permitted to attend the entire six-month process of the Burial Exhumation Project at the Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) Project Site in Palapye (my marital home), Botswana.[37] It was only

[37] As was the case in Palapye, the excavation of graves and reburial of human remains throughout the Southern African region are done in close consultation with the community and those people connected to the deceased. In many cases, forensic archaeologists rely on information supplied by the indigenous population in locating unmarked graves. The importance of recognising local custom and belief is usually marked by a ceremony of symbolic release into custodianship. Exhumations are often performed as a process of identification or for

through the memory of the living that the burial sites could be located - whether under a tree or perhaps behind the traces of where a hut once stood (Fig. 27). I was privileged to closely observe the remains of those people exhumed. All that remained in some cases was dry soil flecked with bone fragment, and these were collected in zip-lock plastic bags to be re-buried in coffins. In other cases, as I examined bones, clothing and ritual objects of persons unknown, I was able to witness through traces of physical evidence the scant narratives of their lives. A green stain on a finger bone indicating a copper ring, layers of winter-clothing shoring up an empty space a body once filled, a tenderly crocheted cap on a small child's toothless skull. These poignant fragments were enough to indicate the wholeness of nameless individuals. This was representational of the value of a life, enfolded as it was in mortality. Despite the corpse being the hallmark of abjection (see Kristeva 1982) and the practicality of it being buried, there remains a trail of history that only dissolves long after the body does - be it in the mind of the living or in the form of documentation.

Driving back to Grahamstown after my stay in Botswana, I passed Waainek New Cemetery where my MFA sculptures were interred (Fig. 28). I realised I needed to rescue them from under the earth. If they were emblematic of myself, then I had no desire to remain in that space. Either decomposed or intact, the burial would have effected enough change to witness their altered state.[38] Coincidentally, exactly nine years to the day of my husband's death, I began the exhumation. On the surface, things had changed: vegetation had rehabilitated the burial pits and the soil had collapsed forming mounds and humps with protruding rocks that

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obtaining forensic evidence. In the case of BIUST, there were over fifty unmarked graves that required location and identification and the remains were repatriated before building of the new university could commence.

[38] In some religions, Islam for instance, an intact body is necessary for the soul to survive. In others, Judaism for example, complete decomposition is necessary for the soul to rest. Whatever the case symbolically, the artworks no longer belonged in that space.

redefined the space. Without the crosses as markers, I would have had difficulty locating the sites (Fig. 29).

As we excavated the first site containing the wool-sorting basket and hot water bottles, I found that the soil had sifted and separated. Small particles of decomposed wood and flecks of blue paint had worked their way up 90cm from the surface. The wool-sorting basket had completely disintegrated and the rotting blue-painted wood gave off an acrid stench as it mingled with liquids from the soil (Fig. 30). Containing the bottles in a basket, despite knowing that it would decompose, was not realised as illogical until the exhumation process was underway. The shards of wood and flecks of blue paint reminded me of the small shards of bone found I had seen in Botswana (Fig. 31). My memory of the basket, having been previously prompted - or apprehended - by photographic records as whole, was undone by the remaining fragments and the reality of decay. The only trace that indicated the form and pattern of the basket was the impression it left on the soil. The hot water bottles were in differing degrees of dampness, those on the deepest level were saturated, and others had water pouring out of them. There were fine webs in the bottlenecks and on the larger shards of wood (Fig. 32).

Rather than becoming too bogged down in recalling the process of exhumation, I will mention primary markers that indicate the altered states in memory and to the objects. After the burial I had forgotten the existence of one grave, set apart from the others, and had not marked it. I realised how relevant the ‘label’ or ‘tombstone’ are as aids to memory in locating the ‘lost object’ when we had to dig up what could have been in all probability the

grave of persons unknown. The photographs taken during the interment did not help much in terms of location. Clearly, my separation from the objects and subsequent shifts into memory had begun. Forty (1999: 6) states that 'for Freud, physical artefacts could no longer be analogues of memory, because mental material was not subject to the same processes of decay as objects in the phenomenal world'. Already there had been a decay of memory due to my initial refusal to relinquish the objects to their changed meanings and 'seen in these terms, objects are the enemy of memory, they are what tie it down and lead to forgetfulness' (Forty 1999: 7). This proved irrevocably my inability to fix accurate memory to the objects. The last objects to be unearthed were the contorted clay *Selves*. During the exhumation, one clay figure shattered (Fig. 33). As emblems of psychosomatic grief, the destruction of this figure was entirely fitting. Ironically, the surface lustre I had hoped to achieve was more effective on the polyurethane objects than the clay. For example, the 'three graces', propped up on the edge of the open graves now looked uncannily human and less plastic, though there was no smell of decay on them as was evident with the fatty clay (Fig. 34). Visually, the works were enhanced by the processes that had occurred closed off underground, by the roots that had grown into them and the soil that had compacted on them as well as by the underground water and their inaccessibility to light (Figs. 35 to 40). These sculptures had now become altered material monuments to a time of mourning, no longer stand-ins for my dead husband. Elsner (2003: 210) observes as follows:

> The preserved damaged object, in its own material being, signals both its pre-damaged state - a different past, with potentially different cultural, political and social meanings - and its new or altered state. In part, the meaning of the "new" monument is defined by its difference from its "old" monument… a deliberate change has occurred and that this has meaning, is offered by the object through its material form.

Unexpectedly, the work done on the exhibition *Anon.* proved far more brutal in calling up of memory, the processes of decay and the work of grief. If the abject is seated in the taboo of a rotting corpse, then the decomposition of visual images of a body once loved and touched proved a profanity beyond psychic abjection. I selected several images representative of my husband and replicated them to the size of one square metre. I then ripped them into sections of 15cm x 21cm and inserted the fragments into transparent hot water bottles which I had manufactured with mechanical assistance at Sondor Plastics in Port Elizabeth (Figs. 41 and 42). My plan was to re-assemble the images in a way that 'the body is "deprived of history, changed into a gesture", remains present in its representation though devoid of its meaning' and in so doing make him anonymous (Bronfen 1993: 228). The desire to keep him for myself was partially to guard him and in my doing so, the image of him 'loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment' (Bronfen 1993: 228). The idea of him becoming myth was very seductive as it provided a format whereby he and I could collude again (Fig. 41).

I found I was getting too involved with the untruths and desires, which are a trap of memory when putting together a biography. Psychologically, this was a far harder process to endure than the graveyard project. The plastic bottles were mere husks containing traces. The outline left behind in my own grave (Fig. 36) attested to a similar dialectic, tracing presence and absence. The desire to retain whole images was overwhelming. Phelan (1997: 3) investigates 'the possibility that something substantial can be made from the outline left after the body has disappeared'. The transition from my own body to symbolic world of image

and text was caught up in fresh mourning. Yet it is precisely within the image that mourning has already occurred. Phelan (1997: 3) explains further:

> My hunch is that the affective outline of what we've lost might bring us closer to the bodies we want still to touch than the restored illustration can. Or at least the hollow of the outline might allow us to understand more deeply why we long to hold bodies that are gone.

The literal fracturing of my husband's image in *Anon.* (despite the fact that photographic images can be endlessly replicated) resonated with the dismantling of the coping mechanisms that I had worked so hard to construct as a widow. I found this process extraordinarily difficult, as if I were destroying something viscerally sacred. I battled to reconstruct the images in a way that fragmented them beyond clear recognition. I realised that the narratives I had set up around my husband were there to protect both him and the sanctity of our relationship. In doing so, I had been safeguarding perhaps another deeper memory yet unrecalled. Forty (2001: 5) states that 'in mental life nothing that has once been formed can perish - that everything is somehow preserved and in suitable circumstances… can once more be brought to light'. The difficulty I experienced in fragmenting his image was caught up in guarding him, within my own memory, against erasure and over-exposure. Kuhn (1995:121) writes that 'Knowing that the lost object is irretrievable, one disavows that knowledge, and happily carries on remembering'. Yet it is in the construction of remembering that the greatest losses occur, for all memory is re-presentation.

In performing the work for *Anon.,* who was 'unearthing' whom? I had forgotten so much and as widow had felt beholden to, yet unable to, relive the roles we had set in our marriage. My widowhood was literally being unearthed, my role as widow was changing. This prompted me to consider the images in *Anon*. as being contained in a '*guilt-edged'* frame. Was it cruel

to deny my once-husband a face? The sacredness of family photographs are infused with treasured narratives, and yet it was my desire to work contrary to the notions set out by Kuhn (1995: 19-20):

> Family photographs are about memory and memories: that is, they are about stories of the past, shared (both stories and past) by a group of people that in the moment of sharing produces itself as a family… we will make our own memories, capture all those moments we will some day want to treasure, call to mind, tell stories about.

Was it untruthful to deconstruct him? My one-sided relationship with him had continued through memory, but had changed. The plastic reliquaries, as memory objects that were intended to preserve and counter the processes of abjection signified by the grave now become subverted. I found this 'de-abjectifying' extremely suffocating in terms of creativity. Using soil taken from outside our marital bedroom, backfill from his grave and earth from the path he walked daily, I then filled the transparent bottles with resin, mud and water and allowed the soil itself to mediate the transparent materiality of the hot water bottles as rigid, but leaking repositories for memory. This, in some way, would allow the mourning process to be perpetuated. As Kuhn (1995: 121) states:

> …memory fragments spinning off in every direction… that painful and obsessive passion of remembrance, that struggle to come to terms with loss, which marks the work of mourning: that which is mourned in this case being, as Freud might put it, an abstraction that stands in for the lost loved one.

Another element of *Anon.* is the reproduction of handwritten text as a trace, a record made by my husband during his daily life. By using this element (Fig. 42), I was partially absolving myself as biographer and wife: he had literally already written his own biography and I was entering a curatorial role. The de-contextualising (or re-contextualising) of his words in his own handwriting becomes likened to a monstrance (a portal for viewing relics usually

reserved for saints). This text, together with the 'disallowed' images parenthesised in the mass-produced plastic hot water bottles aid in the 'clouding of vision [which] is necessitated by the inherent unspeakability of trauma and the impossibility of properly representing the experience of pain, whether one's own or that of another' (Gibbons 2007: 59).

Not only does the handwriting allow for the re-working of that uncanny or unspeakable thing that resists containment, the repetitious scripting becomes, in the reconfiguration, an attestation to living presence whilst at the same time deleting it. As Bronfen (1993: 257) states:

> Repetition, engendering doubles, fragmentation or division functions as either a safeguard against or an omen of death. Repetition as the refinding of a love object engenders a libidinal identification with another over a sense of loss, so that love is inscribed with mourning… Finally, repetition also serves as an act that kills a body *avant la lettre* by replacing it with a symbol, which controls absence by virtue of such replacement.

The images in *Anon.* have degraded and the once meaning-filled objects have reverted back to paper and plastic. In and of themselves the content of the images and text is meaningless: despite attempts to hold onto memory, it undoes the referent. Neither the referent nor the processes of memory can be pinned down.

The plastic hot water bottles highlight the ambiguity of memory-work as open-ended and incomplete. Photographs exist as a partial view, a trace of the referent. Materially, parts have been selected, enlarged (converted to pixels), and printed (converted to pigment on paper). They are torn, altered and re-arranged, the pigment dissolves and the image is lost again and again. This speaks of the instability of memory and the inadequacy of any attempt to render it as fixed or given. Active attempts at re-membering degenerate into glimpses of clouded

vision. Should one surrender to this? Absolutely: there is no accountability one has to endure for this, since ironically, the burial place for memory may be 'memory' itself. The exhumation of memory reveals it in a continuously altered state that vacillates between presence and absence, solace and loss, form and formlessness.

CONCLUSION:

ALTERED STATES - In *Propria Persona*

Nothing fruitful takes place in man save through the intermediary of a loss of an object.

***(*Lacan 1988: 136, quoted in Phelan 1997: 130)**

In the course of my discussion I have invoked metaphors about the relationship of bodies to spaces. Psychoanalytic constructions about space and bodies in relation to objects and memory have underpinned my analysis, especially of my own work. What has become apparent within this analysis is the altered states that occur in transition from wife to widow, the change that occurs because of the absence of a husband to the presence of ever-shifting memories, and the alternating shifts from surface associations of widowhood to their buried depths and back again.

It is as if these altered states are the 'soil' that tenaciously strips and re-fleshes. Toward the end of this thesis, I worked copiously with soil in the practical component. The alterations it makes to objects are a fitting metaphor for the excavations of memory-work, and for the processes of widowhood itself. Pacteau (1999: 93), after Kristeva, writes that 'the corpse is the most sickening of bodily wastes, intolerable because "in representing the very border between life and death, it shifts this limit into the heart of life itself"'.[39] I propose that 'soil' as the stuff of altered states metaphorically absorbs 'bodily wastes', thereby facilitating transition for the widow. In the state of mourning the widow is representative of her dead

[39] Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* New York. Columbia University Press.

husband and as such she herself experiences the borderline 'shift[s]' of this 'limit into the heart of life itself'. In other words, linked to corpse, she too 'perturbs an identity' and herself becomes abject within both public and private realm. In her identity as widow she becomes, as woman, 'the in-between, the ambiguous' (Pacteau 1999: 93). Just as Kristeva's literal corpse, once it is buried, degrades and disintegrates, the widow too must become de-abjectified. However, it is imperative that whilst inhabiting the in-between state (within society) of mourning, she engage in primary negotiations in order to establish herself as independent of, yet within, the realm of her husband. Practically, these could include her financial circumstances, her continued support to her dependents, her position in the extended family and her status within the community in the larger sense. Ultimately though, she must actively negotiate sentiency within herself if she is to speak successfully with her own voice. It is whilst in the 'soil' or 'buried' state of widowhood, where she, though an outsider to normal everyday life, must engage at surface-level with the world around her in order to re-establish a suitably altered space within which she may flourish.

The works I made have literally undergone many altered states from the 'surface' to 'below' and back again. For example, they were buried, then exhumed and will be 'buried' again in the underground exhibition space of The Gallery-in-the-Round. *Second Self* started off as a mannequin buried in a cast of *Self,* buried in a block of polyurethane, partially excavated and then re-buried in the ground, exhumed and then 'buried' in the subterranean gallery, peeled back not only from layers of compacted soil but also from view. In *Anon.* we see the same processes underway with images in hot water bottles and with the clothing removed from the body, partially buried in plastics and extruding out again. These works, exhibited on the

stage of the Guy Butler Theatre, are surface symbols of text and image that trace human life, but like the clothing, are only semiotic outlines and coverings. From the Theatre above we see through the stage trapdoor to the chamber below where we see soil on the works, then as we descend into this space we see through a block from *Second Self* to *Self*, and through the self to the mannequin. This serves as a metaphor for the ways in which memory-work reveals and conceals, brings to light and pushes below again, providing an outline for the lost loved one, who, as Phelan (1997: 3) states, 'we long to hold'. We flesh and empty out memory, images and narratives over and over again, attempting to hold onto the lost love that disintegrates in every enactment.

In this thesis I have examined how women re-appropriated politicised spaces within the strictures of widowhood and discussed how these politics are caught up in the very space of a widow's physical body. For the Renaissance widows, the transition from wife to widow was from sexuality to desexualised abstinence and guardian of memory, which required subtle negotiation, whereas for slave-women of the early Cape, marriage altered their status from one of subjugation to freedom, with widowhood bringing great economic independence. Visual images of the Renaissance widows emphasise surface appearance, whereas the early Cape widows were deeply buried in history and are fleshed-out and mythologised through current historical discourse. Traces of these women are linked to their husbands either through image or language. Widows in Renaissance widow-portraiture reflect their husband's lives and were commemorated through images, while we can trace the early Cape widows only through archived records of their husbands, and they are thus remembered only in text. In my own experience as widow, I struggled with the dissolution of my husband,

fading memory, and my inability to reflect him through imagery and text. The altered state for women from wife to widow is liminal, ambivalent and unresolved as long as it is inhabited by the residues of 'lost love' - the husband. The experience is one of being formed and de-formed, faced and de-faced by widowhood. Just as Shilakoe's widow is the guardian of loss and seems to hover between two worlds, the widow is literally and metaphorically herself a trace of lost love. As keeper of shadowy traces, she herself becomes a shadow. Known only as 'the widow' she may find herself on the brink of dissolution. As a destabilising depiction *The Widow* is similar in this state to inferences within Putter's *Secretly I will love you more.* Krotoa, herself a widow and therefore tasked with re-membering, is subject to endless erasures as attempts are made to name, stabilise, and give face to the loss and uncertainties we attempt to suture in our present-day politics.

I have also shown how, for the widow, there is a dilemma of insufficiency at any attempt to keep memory of her husband 'alive'. Separated from the physical body of her husband, locating him in memory and yet not being able to access him, she becomes dislocated. Though Bronfen (1993: 257) states that 'the represented corpse effects a freezing of rupture', re-presentation provides only momentary glimpses of an altered past. The rupture caused by death is too great to encompass a way back from re-presentation to the time before the living body became a corpse. The reality of separation, though obviously a fact, is not easily acknowledged. Re-presentation is not substantial enough to freeze the rupture caused by death. The evidence, then, indicates that the widow herself needs to find a way to detach from her husband even though this may feel like a second death. Rowlands (1999: 131) explains further:

> Bereavement is a period in which the subject identifies with the absent person, idealises the person and attempts to become him or her, yet comes to realise the impossibility of this fusion... a process of being moulded by the absence of the other; and identity which cannot be sustained. Succinctly put - he [Freud] describes this as: *In a way the object must die twice, first at the moment of its own death and secondly through the subject' unhitching from its own identification. It is only then that the object can pass into history and the stones can be set - for mourning and memorial are a phase apart.* Memorials become monuments as a result of the successful completion of the mourning process.

Whilst the widow attempts to identify with the lost love -'to become him or her' - she also has to fight to survive against attempts to fuse with the lost love. The pull below, towards the buried self, absorbed into the formless earth, is counteracted by the pull above towards the unearthed self, who actively re-members, curates traces, fleshes out both self and the absent other. The 'successful completion of the mourning process' is not so much about a relocation of the lost object (or husband) in the form of a memory, monument or memorial, but how the widow identifies and relocates *herself.* Once separated from the role as material marker for mourning, the widow is free to re-embody herself. Grounded in the gravitas of her widowhood she may acknowledge 'what may now be coming to an end is the notion of *memoria*... [and the end of] conscious apprehension of past experience through material remains and *memoria's* displacement' (Forty 1999: 61).

My ritual as art maker was an attempt to contextualise loss, or as Kuhn (1995: 107) writes, it was 'in effect the pre-text for writing [or symbolism], for putting into text, that psychical struggle between holding on and letting go that characterises the activity of mourning'. Until my experience as widow, I had not made art, preferring to sublimate my creativity in roles of wife, mother and business-woman. Working materially has allowed me to give way to an alternate modality of expression, and realise my own necessity to make art. Schmahmann

(2004: 62) writes of artist Wilma Cruise's artwork *John's wife (white),* that 'the artist is both subject and object' and that she has given birth to herself. In articulating my widowhood as both 'subject and object', I have discovered agency as art maker. The contingency of meanings within the objects placed on exhibition provides a secure metaphor for the presentation of self as female artist.

The grave, by necessity and not choice, facilitates the unearthing of self so that the widow may speak *in propria persona* - on her own behalf, and at home in her own body. Unobserved, she can then step off the surface of the picture-plane and out into a space of her own choice.

Love After Love

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Leandro Bassano, *Portrait of a Widow at her Devotions*. ca. 1590 - 1600. Private Collection, The Web Gallery of Art.



Figure 2. Detail of the Three Graces from *Primavera*, by Sandro Botticelli c. 1482. On the right side, Caterina Sforza, Uffizi, Florence. wikipedia.org/wiki/Primavera.



Figure 3. Attributed to Niccolo Fiorentino, *portrait medal of Caterina Sforza* (obverse), bronze. c. 1488. Copyright the British Museum.



Figure 4. Attributed to Niccolo Fiorentino, *portrait medal of Caterina Sforza* (reverse), bronze. c. 1488. Copyright the British Museum.



Figure 5. Attributed to Niccolo Fiorentino, *portrait medal of Caterina Sforza* (obverse), bronze. c. 1498. Copyright the British Museum.



Figure 6. Anna de Koning prior to becoming a widow (artist unknown) www.capegateway.gov.za.



Figure 7. South African One Rand Note (Out of circulation). www.bidorbuy.co.za.



Figure 8. This image (artist unknown) is freely available on the Internet and has widely become representative of *Krotoa*, though there is no evidence that it is her portrait.



Figure 9. Andrew Putter. *Secretly I will Love you more*. 2007. Spier Collection.



Figure 10. Pieter de Putter. *Portrait of a Woman*. 1606 – 1659. Michaelis Collection.



Figure 11. Artist Unknown. *Portrait of Maria de la Queillerie*. 1629 – 1664. Cape Archives.



Figure 12. Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe. *The Widow*. 1969. Pretoria Art Museum.

Please note that Figures 13 to 42 of my own work are photographs of the works in progress, rather than the completed works as installed in the exhibition.

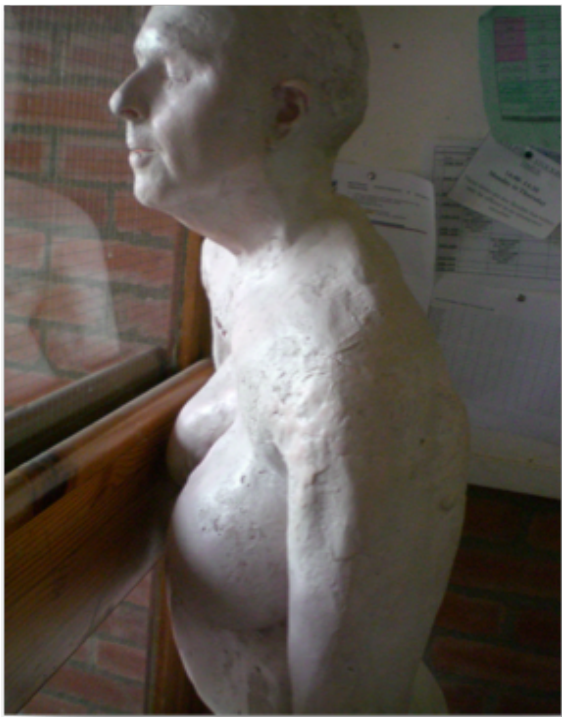

Figure 13. *Self.* 2006.



Figure 14. Cast *Self.* 2006. Taken from mould of myself. Polyurethane.



Figure 15. ***Second Self*****. 2006. Polyurethane, mannequin.**



Figure 16. ***Second Self.*** **Detail: left foot after being carved and burnt out of polyurethane block.**



Figure 17. *Second Self.* Detail: mannequin leg visible as armature.





Figure 18. *Second Self.* Detail: formations on the outside of the polyurethane block referencing skin, flesh and fat.



Figure 19. Wilma Cruise. *John's wife (white*). 1995. Fired clay (white pigment) and found objects. Collection of Brenda Schmahmann



Figure 20. *Selves*. 2006. 5 clay bodies. Fired.



Figure 21. Various details of five *Selves*. 2006. (Before and after being fired).



Figure 22. *'three graces'*. 2006.



Figure 23. *'One more night with you'*. 2006. 300 clay hot water bottles.



Figure 24. Allocated space and preparation of burial sites for artworks. Waainek New Cemetery, Grahamstown. September 2007.



Figure 25. Individual figures are buried in their own graves. September 2007.



Figure 26. Buttered hot water bottles were buried in a massive antique wicker wool-sorting basket.



Figure 27. Unmarked gravesite and exhumation in process in Botswana. 2008.



Figure 28. Waainek. 19 February 2009.



Figure 29. Gravecuts and the first excavation. February 2009.



Figure 30. Remains of the blue wicker basket. February 2009.



Figure 31. Trace of basket weaving and remaining fragments.



Figure 32. Unearthed hot water bottles and surface details showing webs.



Figure 33. One of the five *Selves* had shattered.



Figure 34. The *'three graces'* emerge.



Figure 35. '*three graces'*. Detail: decayed bandages.

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Figure 36. Groundwater had seeped up. Self remains insoluble.



Figure 37. The sculptures are re-united in the studio. February 2009.





Figure 38. *Second Self* is unearthed.



Figure 39. *Second Self*. Note the roots.



Figure 40. One of five *Selves* showing root growth and soil impaction.



Figure 41. ***Anon*****. 2008. Hot water bottle made in clear plastic and containing the earliest image of my husband (image seen prior to being reworked as object).**



Figure 42. ***Anon*****. Fragments of images re-presented as reliquaries, prior to being soiled.**

Please note that Figures 43 to 52 are of my completed works installed in the MFA Exhibition spaces titled *Unearthed* (Gallery-in-the-Round) and *Anon* (Guy Butler Theatre Stage). September 2010.

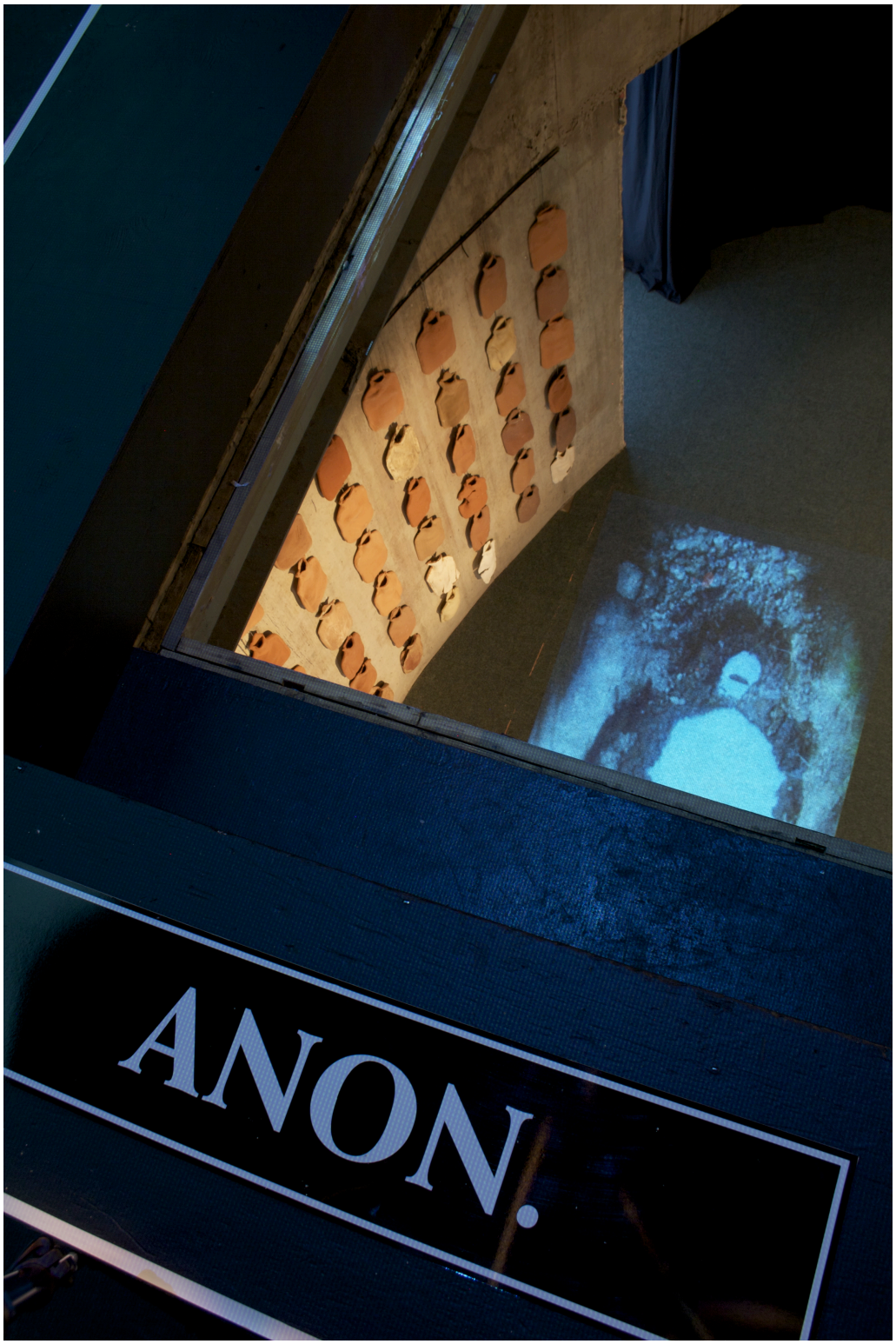


Figure 43. Partial view of *Unearthed* in Gallery-in-the-Round seen through trapdoor on Guy Butler Theatre Stage from exhibition space *Anon.*



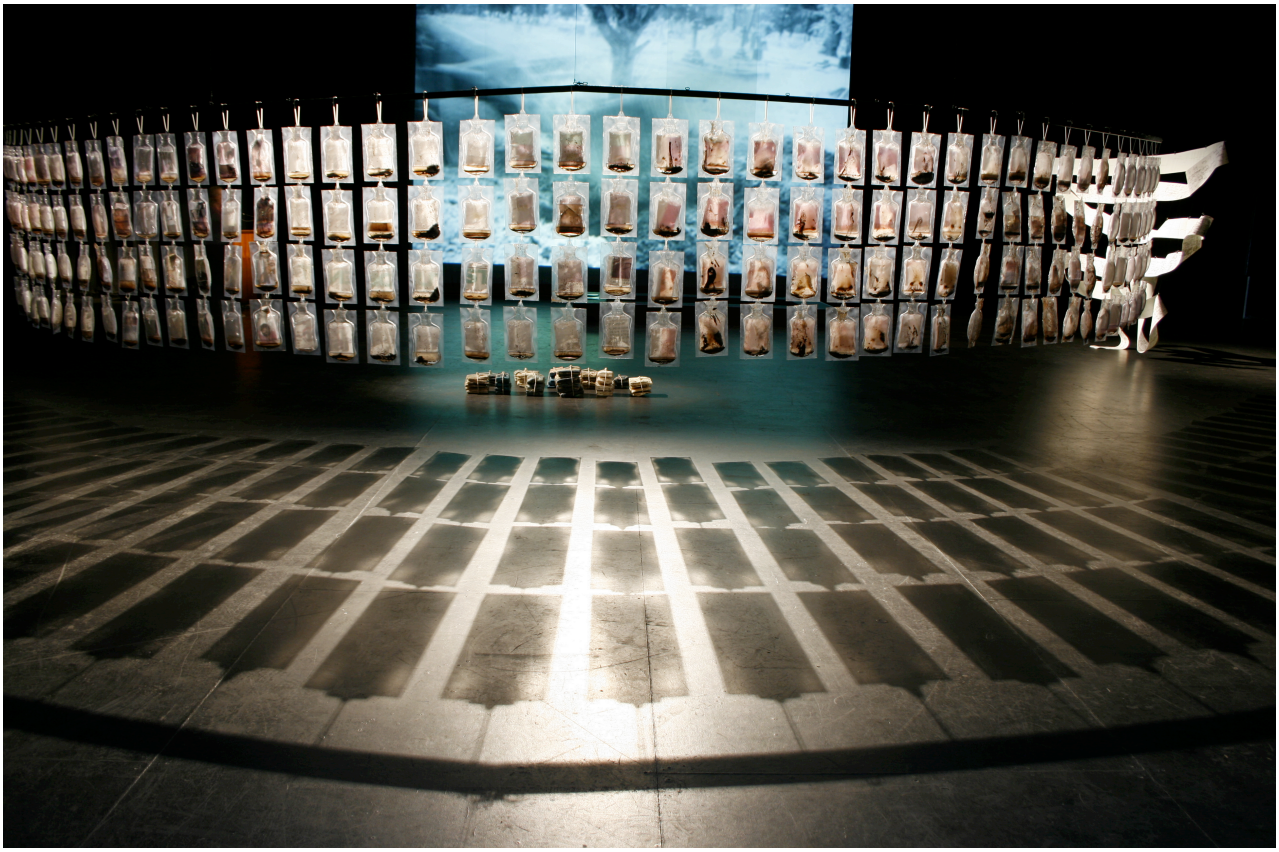


Figures 44 and 45. '*Unearthed*'. *Self, Selves, three graces* and hot water bottles





Figures 46 and 47. Selection of 600 hot water bottles and shards of broken bottles titled *One more night with you.*





Figures 48 and 49. ***Anon*** **showing plastic hot water bottles, projection and clothing.**



Figure 50. Detail of clothing.



Figure 51. View of *Anon* showing ECG with text.

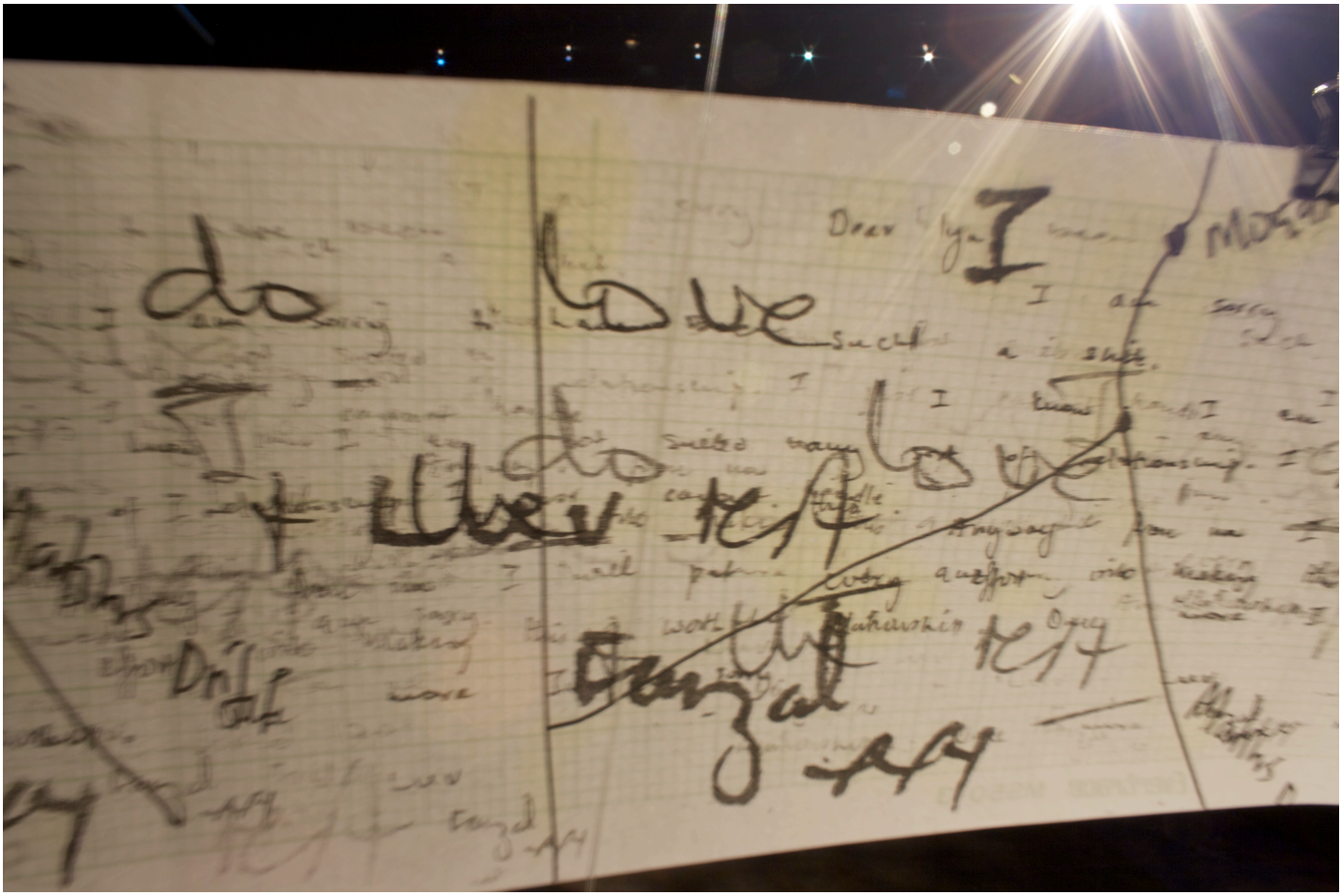


Figure 52. Detail of text on ECG.