

The Eyes of the Wall: Space, Narrative and Perspective

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for
Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University

March 2012

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Abstract

The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories is concerned with dialectics of seeing and perceiving as they pertain directly to a corporal understanding of interiority and exteriority, architectural framing and notions of dislocation in relation to place. This practical submission is a site-specific installation that engages in a reciprocal dialogue with its environment. The individual sculptural works which demarcate the parameters of the installation are hybrids of domestic architectural forms, (namely the wall, the window and the door) and internal furnishings such as the curtain and the bed. These hybridised metal and resin constructions frame the interior of a site, a tennis court located within my immediate Grahamstown environment. The placement of familiar objects generally associated with the home and notions of security and privacy, within the open, exposed and permeable enclosure of the tennis court evoke a sense of displacement within the viewer. This supporting document, *The Eyes of the Wall: Space, Narrative and Perspective*, considers the key conceptual concerns informing my installation. In this mini-thesis I address the relationship between domestic architecture and the body, examining the notion of framing as fundamental to the individual comprehension of space. I position my work in relation to that of Mona Hatoum drawing on the similarities that exist between her practice and my own. In the first chapter of this paper: *My House/Your House: Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins* I address the relationship between domestic architecture, framing and the body, and ‘contamination’. Within Chapter Two: *Narratives of Division* I engage with the idea of multiple ‘short stories’—personal and collective narratives—and their connection to issues of division and dislocation. Chapter Three: *Seeing Blindness* discusses the possibility that perspective, or at least one potential approach to perspective is concerned with that which one cannot see, an acknowledgment of the implicit relationship between seeing and not-seeing. Each of the three core concerns expressed in the title of this mini-thesis, *The Eyes of The Wall: Space, Narrative and Perspective* intersect within the site of *The Eyes of The Wall and Other Short Stories*. It is at this intersection that the shadows of stories within stories within stories insert themselves, like phantom limbs into the gaps and tensions framed by the forms of the installation.

Declaration of Originality

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

Rachel Baasch

27 March 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are three significant women who I would like to thank profusely for surviving and supporting this Master of Fine Art submission: my practical supervisor Ms Maureen De Jager; my theory supervisor Professor Ruth Simbao; and my mother Mary-Anne Baasch.

Ms Maureen De Jager and Professor Ruth Simbao, thank you for guiding me with elegant proximity and confident distance.

Ms Maureen De Jager your enthusiastic approach to my conceptual and practical endeavours was met with trust and space. The warm and stimulating place that you have provided throughout my fine art studies, has allowed me to move freely while simultaneously having access to your creative advice and extensive intellectual knowledge of the indefinable boundary between practice and theory. You have willingly assisted me and supported me throughout my six years at Rhodes University. Thank you.

Professor Ruth Simbao you have devoted extensive time and energy towards the realisation of this installation and its supporting document. You have also shown sensitivity towards my individual strengths, talents, idiosyncrasies and weaknesses with grace, patience and wisdom. I cannot begin to express my gratitude within such a short passage of acknowledgement. I feel privileged to have worked with you, and I look forward to future projects.

Mom, you were my first teacher and my greatest framework of reference for human strength and endurance. You have nurtured, encouraged and generously fed my creative imagination. Your own love for the visual arts and extensive knowledge of literature, art history, music and theatre has provided me with a comfortable environment in which to indulge in the pleasures and passions of creative language, thank you.

I would also like to thank Rhodes University and in particular the Department of Fine Art which has assisted me financially and practically. Professor Dominic Thorburn, thank you for always taking the time to listen to my questions and queries. Thank you for your accommodation of my practice and genuine interest in the realisation of my work as well as financial assistance in the form of the Raymond Pullen Award. You have been an engaged and present Head of Department, thank you.

I would like to thank John Gillim, head of Postgraduate Financial Aid and his assistant Liezl Strydom for assisting me to apply for, and obtain scholarships, bursaries and loans in order to support my postgraduate studies. Thank you to the National Arts Council, the HB Webb foundation, the National Research Foundation and the Mellon Foundation through my association with Ruth Simbao and the Visual and Performing Arts of Africa research group for playing a large role in financially supporting my practice.

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Introduction:

Prior to the identification of a defined practical or theoretical field of research regarding this Masters submission, I travelled from my home in Grahamstown, South Africa to Mozambique, conducting research on the notion of borders and boundaries. While staying at a hostel in Maputo I found myself reminiscing about the city of Durban where I was born and raised. It was the humidity which seemed to evoke the memory of ‘home’, the sensation of thickness in the air as if you are trapped in the steam of boiling water. It was incredibly hot and the air felt dense with moisture. As I sat with my flesh merging into the plastic covered furniture, I wrote the following passage:

In the centre of Glenwood, a suburb of Durban, there is a man who has sat in the same chair, on the same patch of concrete, watching the area that I grew up in for as long as I can remember. The house next door has three gargoyle sculptures attached to its wall. Each of the sculptures is protected by metal burglar guards which stretch along its length. The watchman’s presence has become wall-like, he mediates, observes, and to some extent controls the flow of human traffic and behaviour within his immediate environment. He is the permanent eyes of the wall; a deterrent, a buffer, a separator preventing the unwelcome, mediating the inside from the outside.

The above passage points directly to the title of my installation, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories*. This title is a reference to the relationship between domestic architectural forms and the way in which these forms are based on one’s understanding of the body. It also points to specific issues of mediation, of boundary marking and the monitoring of space due to one’s desire for a safe and stable ‘home’. Within the context of South Africa, the separation of internal and external space is heightened by real and imagery threats to one’s security. Narratives of division—emphasised by a fresh history of legalised segregation instituted through the Apartheid government—continue to lurk in the intimate spaces between people. There are no actual walls present within my installation, yet they are narrated and imagined into the space through language. They are further implied by the use of architectonic¹ constructions which physically reference the window and the door. These typically outward facing structures are hybridised with internal furnishings, specifically the

¹ “Architectonic: Of or pertaining to architecture” (Oxford English Dictionary)

curtain and the bed. These forms emphasise the absence of the wall, and thus one is able to project the intimate ghosts of previous walls into the “gaps and tensions” framed by the installation and its zones of contact and separation (Lefebvre 1991:184).

I have repeatedly found myself recalling memories through what one might term a ‘site-specific-narrative lens’. In my own recollections and constructions of past experience, I have observed the inseparable bond between “place” and “memory” (Zherlang 2003:13). The lens through which one views, formulates and interprets previous encounters is bound within one’s comprehension of place. One’s perception of a place is directly dependant on the experience and understanding of the individual human body as it inhabits, marks and occupies physical space. According to Tim Cresswell (2004:8) “space is a more abstract concept than place”. An unknown space can become a place through the act of naming, mapping and occupation. Through the demarcation and framing of an open, unknown and potentially threatening space, one can convert the indefinable properties of space into place, thus rendering it a “meaningful” and manageable “location” (Cresswell 2004:7). In the differentiation between space and place, Cresswell (2005:8) cites Yi-Fu Tuan who has “likened space to movement and place to pauses—stops along the way”. He writes:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...The ideas space and place require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause, each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan in Cresswell 2005:8).

Central to my site-specific installation, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* (Fig1) and this supporting document, is a preoccupation with issues of interiority and exteriority, architectural framing, geographic location, and ways of seeing and perceiving. The sculptures that make up the body of this installation consist of hybridised architectural forms which frame the interior of a site, a tennis court² (Fig 2). This site is fenced containing an inside, yet simultaneously stands open,

² The tennis court is situated on the St Peter’s lawns on the Rhodes University campus, Grahamstown, South Africa. On one side of the court is the Rhodes Fine Line Press and Print Research Unit, in this building one can find the Rhodes Fine Art print studios and the Digital Arts Labs. On the other side of the court is the Photography Department. Behind the court is St Peters Chapel.

unsheltered from the elements. It is porous and subject to the fluctuations and unpredictability of the outside. The inside and the outside filter into one another through the permeable wall³ that is the meshed fence and the absence of a ceiling covering the tennis court enclosure. While building these structures I have consciously (and at times unconsciously) sought to mimic and re-iterate certain aspects of the tennis court such as the fence, whilst simultaneously referring to an interest in the notion of ‘openness’ within ‘closedness’⁴.



Fig 1: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* (2012) (installation view at night), resin and metal, tennis court, dimensions variable, photography by Pablo Zapata.

The artwork discussed within this half-thesis divides and mediates the flat territory of the tennis court using fragments of architecture and furniture built into screen-like structures. I have chosen to separate the components of the installation into three

³ This is a metaphorical reference to the wall; the fence is not a wall but can be likened to one in the sense that it encloses the basic body of the tennis court.

⁴ This is a reference to Islamic architecture and is related to the research I conducted in Zanzibar, Cairo, Jerusalem and Petra in 2010. One of the structural aspects that I noted through my observations is the use of open space within closed space. For example, one can enter a public building or private home only to find that within the closed perimeters of the property there exists another opening. This opening is generally walled and floored yet it has no ceiling.

related series, *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* (Fig 3), *The Eyes of the Wall 201-202* (Fig 4, Fig 5) and *The Eyes of the Wall 301-304* (Fig 6-Fig 9). These sculptural elements of the installation are not necessarily designed for individual analysis or display as singular, compact and finite art objects. The tennis court is not an ‘alternative’ gallery space but an integral part of the overall conceptual and practical realisation of *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories*. The use of seemingly arbitrary numbers within the titles of these works is an allusion to the notion of several on-going narratives potentially activated by the installation. Each of the architecturally derived partitions is embedded with multiple short stories. These stories are open ended and fragmented. Certain signs and signifiers indicate my own engagement with and personal investment in each of the pieces, while others allude to the narratives of anonymous individuals through the traces left by their occupation of intimate space. Furthermore, these numbers point to the multiple short stories already present within the context of the site, the “hauntings of past inhabitation” that filter into the *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* (Cresswell 2004:2).



Fig 2: Detail of tennis court before sculptural installation.



Fig 3: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* (2012), (installation view at night) resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Pablo Zapata.

The Eyes of the Wall, 101-103 (Fig 3) hybridises the window and the curtain into three semi-transparent resin casts that hang from a wall-sized metal frame within the tennis court enclosure. *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (Fig 4) and *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (Fig 5) combine used bedsprings with window/curtain hybrids that mirror the forms of the first three sculptures as well as the grid-like fencing of the tennis court. *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (Fig 6) presents the viewer with a life-size resin door, moulded and cast from a found object within my local Grahamstown environment. The door is embedded with fragmented signs and signifiers that point to its previous history and function within a specific place and time. *The Eyes of the Wall 302-304* (Fig 6-Fig 9) integrates fragments of the door into framed bedspring screens. Accompanying the visual aspects of the installation are sound pieces or ‘sound poems’ which capture the echoes, hums and reverberations of everyday movement between internal and external domestic spaces. These sound poems reference intimate domestic life as one would normally find within the walls, doors and windows of the home.

The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories is concerned with the articulation, occupation and psychological implications of the lived body within physical space. The way in which one perceives and understands both the internal self and the

external environment is directly influenced by the structures, borders, boundaries and territorial demarcations which exist within such environments. Spaces and places, as well as the individuals who occupy or move through them are continuously engaged in a process of narration, mediation and transformation. As human beings, we operate within already existing narratives as we consistently transform and construct new histories, new stories that are influenced, informed, mediated and reactive to the multiple narratives operating within one context.

This half-thesis provides in-depth analysis of the technical and conceptual evolution of the sculptural works which make up *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* installation. In the same document, I position my own work in relation to that of Mona Hatoum, dealing specifically with two of her installation pieces, namely: *Light Sentence*, 1992 (Fig 19) and *Present Tense*, 1996 (Fig 17). I have divided the thesis into three chapters: Chapter 1: *My House/Your House: Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins*, Chapter 2: *Narratives of Division*, and Chapter 3: *Seeing Blindness*. This script examines the intersection of space, narrative and perspective as it pertains to my own practice as well as the above mentioned works by Hatoum.

In the first chapter I discuss relevant aspects of the technical process involved in the creation of this practical submission. *My House/Your House: Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins* places emphasis on the influence of the frame in the formation and construction of one's understanding and enactment of the self (Grosz 2008:16). In the discussion of my own work, I consider the notion of 'contamination' in relation to the framing of space and thought. I elaborate on particular aspects of the window, the bed, the curtain and the wall as they function specifically within the context of intimate domestic space. I go on to examine the connection between architecture and the body, placing emphasis on the idea of the skin as a porous boundary between the self and that which is considered external to the self. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991:174) clarifies that "for any living body... the most basic places and spatial indicators are first of all qualified by that body". *My House/Your House: Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins*, expands on ideas of the living body as inseparable from one's sense of space and place.



Fig 4: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* (showing *The Eyes of the Wall 201* in the foreground) (2012), resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 5: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (2012) (installation view at night), resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Pablo Zapata.

Chapter Two, *Narratives of Division* considers the distinguishable yet inseparable connection between physical space and narrative. In ‘The Poetics of Uncovering’, Jessica Morgan (1997:1) refers to Mona Hatoum’s “oft-circulated life-story...of a Palestinian born in Lebanon and exiled in London, in 1975 due to the outbreak of war”. According to Gannit Ankori (2006:172), “the human body... is the prism through which instability and disorder come into being... the human being is also the ultimate victim of the disruption of the coherence of the spaces it inhabits”. *Narratives of Division* analyses the site-specific installation *Present Tense*, presented at the Anadiel Gallery in Jerusalem. This work can be explored in relation to the “complex task of locating an individual sense of identity within collective histories and narratives of belonging and displacement” (Said 2000:177).

In the article ‘Invention, Memory, and Place’, Edward Said (2000:177) asserts that “ours has become an era of a search for roots, of people trying to discover in the collective memory of their race, religion, community, and family a past that is entirely their own, secure from the ravages of history and a turbulent time”.

It is imperative that one employs a certain criticality in the treatment of an artist’s biographical information and its possible artistic manifestations. At the same time one can argue that both personal and public narrative, inform, influence, and consistently filter into the individual’s perspective of both the internal self and the external environment to that self. It is for this reason that I present and examine aspects of my own narrative as well as that of Hatoum within the second chapter of this study.

Chapter 3, *Seeing Blindness* examines my own practical interrogations of what it means to see or to perceive in relation to place, space and the body. It is possible to suggest perspective, or at least one theory on perspective is in fact bound within a realisation and acknowledgement of blindness (Elkins 1996:11-12). If perspective is premised on the concept of a vanishing point, a point at which a construction of the real disappears and is no longer seen by the naked eye, then it may be possible to suggest that to have perspective in relation to something, someone or somewhere is in actual fact an acknowledgment or acceptance of that which cannot be seen, understood, named, captured, categorised or retained.

Both my own practical interrogations as well as those of Hatoum are concerned with dynamics of inside and outside, and in so doing they touch on issues of openness and

closedness. Sarah Nuttall (2000:4) addresses a perception of South Africa “as a closed space that needs a window out onto the world”. She makes reference to Njabulo Ndebele who “signals the need for an opening, for a transformation of thought”, and notes that a closed space fosters and allows for the “projection outwards of fears of chaos, marking a psychic closure” within the individual (Nuttall 2000:4).

Nuttall’s (2000:3) discussion on the “narrative of closedness” is specific to a South African context, yet her articulations on the necessity for “new forms of imaging” in relation to identity and place can also be applied to an analysis of Hatoum’s work. In the catalogue *Mona Hatoum* which accompanied an exhibition of the same title, Dan Cameron (1997:26) comments on the ways in which “Hatoum’s sculptures confront us with situations and scenarios in which our perceptual integrity—our sense of place in the world—is subtly called into question”. On the nature of exile, Edward Said (1997:111) explains how “seeing the entire world as a foreign land” promotes an “originality of vision”. According to Said (1997:111) “most people are aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions”. The notion of exile and dislocation can be examined within the context of South Africa. The legacy of forced removals officially implemented by the Group Areas Act in 1954 points to both physical and psychological displacement of ‘non-white’ individuals within specific segregated areas. These displacements and narratives of division can be said to inform one’s perspective on the world, affecting the way in which one negotiates the self and the spaces one inhabits.

Through the appropriation and construction of architectural frames *The Eyes of the Wall and other short stories* seeks to examine the idea of what it means to ‘look’ to ‘see’ to ‘perceive’ in relation to a notion of the “home” as one’s “first framework of consciousness” (Zerlang 2003:13). This site-specific installation implicates the viewer within a frame and thus he or she is made to engage with the absence and presence of seemingly familiar forms within an unfamiliar setting.



Fig 6: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (installation view on tennis court) (2012), resin and metal, 220 x 50 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 7.1: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 302* (installation view on tennis court) (2012), resin and metal, 300 x 200 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 7.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 302* (2012), resin and metal, 300 x 200 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.

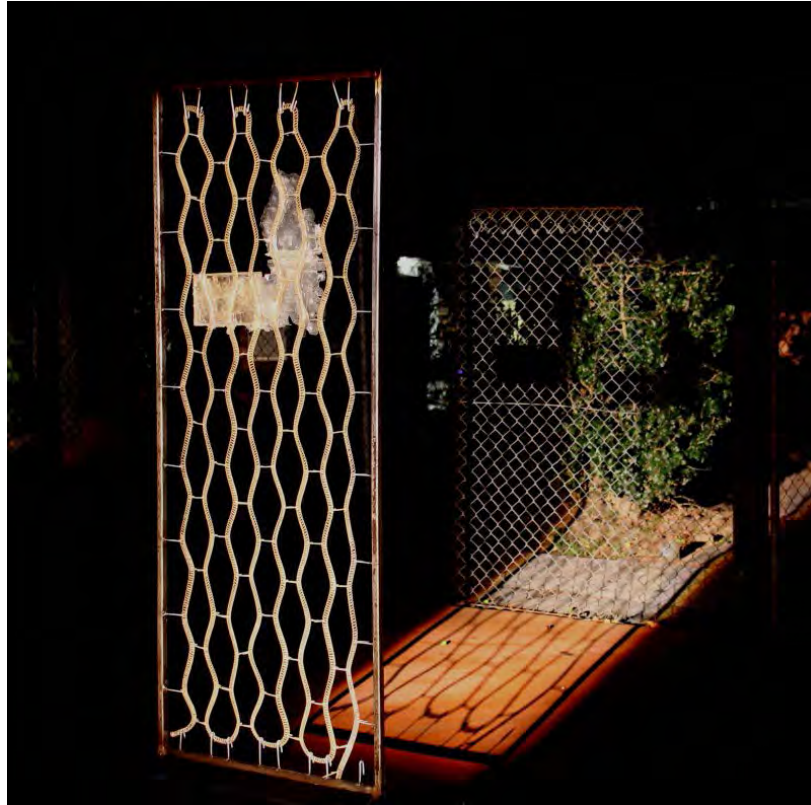


Fig 8.1: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 303* (installation view on tennis court) (2012), resin and metal, 70 x 200 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 8.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 303* (2012), resin and metal, 70 x 200 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.

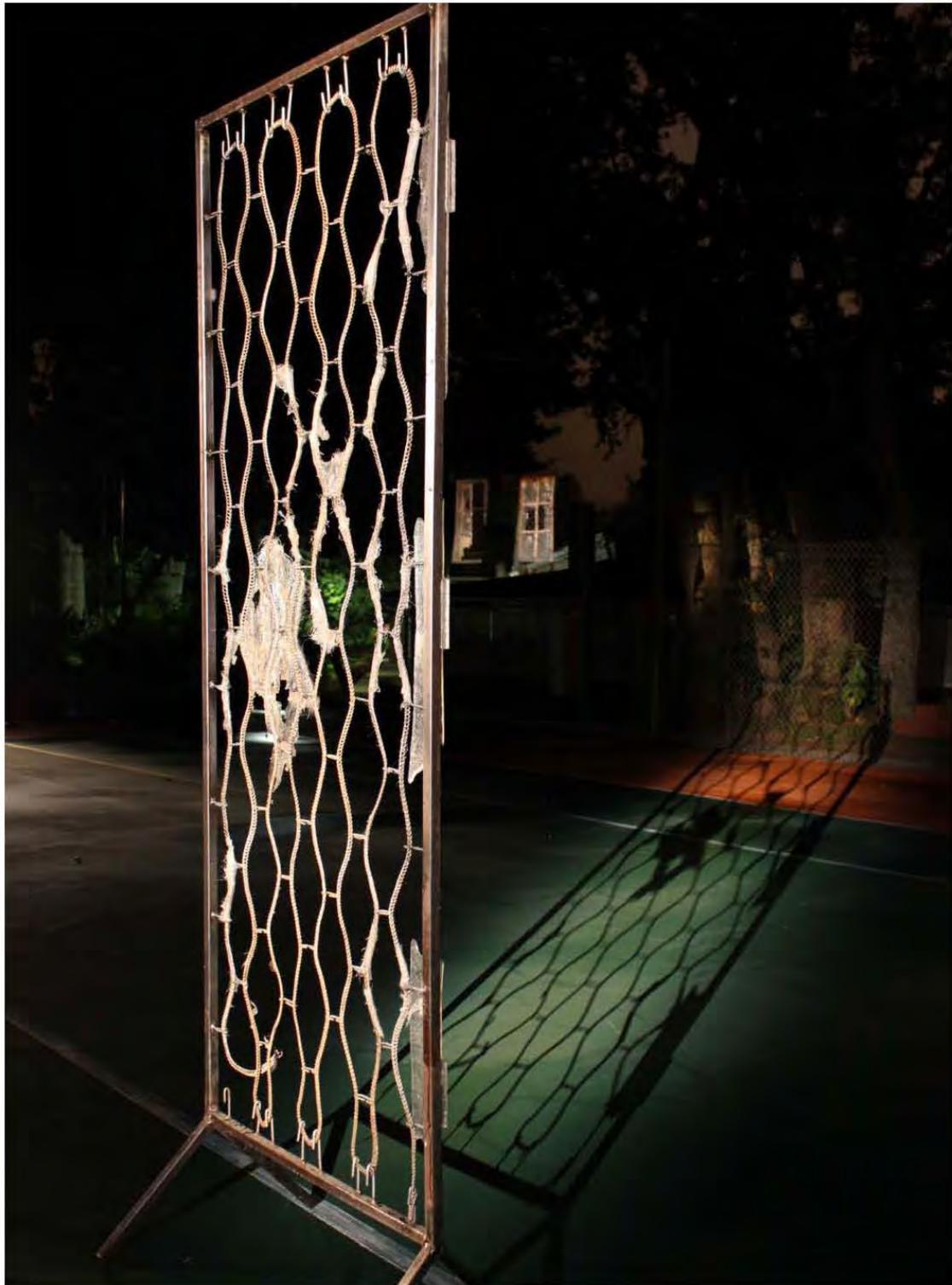


Fig 9: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 304* (installation view on tennis court) (2012), resin and metal, 70 x 200 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.

Chapter 1

My House/Your House:

Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins

In *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz (2001:39) explains that the representation of “space” is a “compliment of the kind of subject who occupies it”. The wall, the floor, the door, and the window are all architectural manifestations of the human body⁵. Juhani Palasma (2005:17) notes that “architecture is fundamentally confronted with questions of human existence in space and time...it domesticates limitless space and endless time to be tolerated, inhabited and understood by human kind”. As Henri Lefebvre (1991:170), author of *The Production of Space* confirms:

There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.

1.1: Frame—Process—Contaminate

1.1.1: Framing Space/Framing Thought

The frame (Grosz 2008:16) functions both conceptually and practically within *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories*. According to Elizabeth Grosz (2008:16);

The emergence of the ‘frame’ is the condition of all the arts and is the particular contribution of architecture to the taming of the virtual; the territorialisation of the uncontrollable forces of the earth...The frame is what establishes territory out of the chaos that is the earth. The frame is thus the first construction, the corners, of the plane of composition.

My practice makes use of freestanding metal and resin frames. The existing fencing of the tennis court demarcates an area within the already framed property of the

⁵ For further reading on the relationship between architecture and the body within a West African context see Blier, S. 1994. *Anatomy of Architecture: ontology and metaphor in Batammaliba architectural expression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

University campus. Within this site, I work with hybridised windows, doors, beds and walls which partition and section off a second space within the larger zone of the court.

As human beings we are constantly situated within multiple frameworks, these frames are spatial as well as psychological and directly inform the way in which we comprehend the world. In his discussion of the “establishment of space” Henri Lefebvre (1991:117) notes the “perpetual process of decipherment” that is simultaneously objective as well as subjective and necessary in order for the human being to understand his/her position within space. It can be suggested that the naming, organizing and categorizing of information, places and people is a form of cognitive framing.

The way in which one selects, categorises, analyses and presents information within a written document can be described as a form of framing. My choice of language, of theory and philosophy, the influence of my personal narrative and context, my education and upbringing, are all factors which frame or assist in framing that which I choose to present to the viewer of my installation and the reader of this document. The process involved in the realisation of *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* entails the physical act of making the sculptures under discussion, as well as the psychological and cognitive engagement with the various factors which have lead to the production of the works.

One can argue that the site of the tennis court is the place in which the frame as thought and practice collide. *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* creates a space-frame that encases the viewer while simultaneously drawing his/her attention to the notion of framing.

1.1.2: Contamination

Through the act of writing and building the components of this submission, I have encountered what one could term ‘contaminants’, particles or environmental traces which mark the contamination of the ‘outside’ within the ‘inside’ of these works. These contaminants also present themselves in the form of ideas, concepts and thoughts which permeate the framework of defined narrative and pre-conceived theory. As Grosz (2001:61) explains:

Thought confronts us necessarily from the outside, from outside the concepts we already have, from outside the subjectivities we already are, from outside the material reality we already know. Thinking involves the wrenching of concepts away from their usual configurations, outside the systems in which they have a home, and outside the structures of recognition that constrain thought to the already known.

The Eyes of the Wall 101-103 (Fig 3) combines the window and the curtain to form three semi-permeable resin casts. The process involved in the creation of these casts is layered in its forms, concepts and technical methods. My initial attraction to the objects was somewhat subconscious. It is only through a process of self-reflection and an awareness of external influences that allows for an explanation of these structures for the purposes of this half-thesis.

1.2: Fixed Frames and Fluid Curtains

1.2.1: Window/Curtain Hybrids

Interested in the domestic window as an object, *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* began with the creation of a silicone and resin mould of a six pane wooden window frame. The found item was located in the back of a furniture workshop in Grahamstown. After moulding the first side of the object I prepared its reverse by filling in the potential hooking points between the two halves using clay. It was through an engagement with this aspect of the exercise that I noted the possibilities of the window as a sculptural surface, a surface that I could use to introduce an additional domestic form, such as the curtain (Fig 11).

The curtain, although functional, is not a fixed frame that is built into the home like the window. The window is generally understood to exist in one of two states, it is either open or it is closed⁶. Built into the body of the house, this architectural frame is primarily immovable. Typically made from fabric (or other equally fluid material), the lines of the curtain are softer and more organic than the defined horizontals and verticals of the window. The curtain is usually attached along one top horizontal bar,

⁶This is in reference to a working, functional window (i.e. one that is not broken). The window can of course vary within its state of 'openness' from a slight slit to wide open.

allowing the other three sides to hang freely. Whilst extreme weather conditions may rattle the windows and penetrate the cracks, a slight breeze will cause no movement of the window. The curtain on the other hand is capable of reflecting even the most subtle stirring of air emanating from a household fan in the far corner of a room.

When looked at directly from outside of the house, the direction of one's gaze places the window in front of the curtain. If one is looking through a pane of glass or a gap in an open window, the curtain can provide an additional layer of visible mediation. A thin semi-transparent curtain will reveal a select portion of visual information, while a heavy thick fabric has the ability to deny vision altogether. The perspectives that are offered through the window when one is positioned on the outside of the house will differ to those which are offered on the inside of the same space. In his discussion of "spatial architectonics" Lefebvre (1993: 209) notes that:

As a transitional object it [the window] has two senses, two orientations: from inside to outside, and from outside to inside. Each is marked in a specific way, and each bears the mark of the other. Thus windows are differently framed outside (for the outside) and inside (for the inside).

In the sculpting and casting of the curtain I have deliberately rendered it fixed, continuous with the solid and rigid structure of the window frame. As a unit the object is neither window nor curtain but a fusion of both. When examining the object from the window side, the window takes on some of the properties of its other half. The fluid folds of the curtain disrupt the geometric lines of the window. When examining the piece from the opposite side, the curtain has adopted certain properties (such as fixity and solidity) characteristic of the window (Fig 10-11). Both the window and the curtain point to notions of revealing and concealing. The curtain can be associated with the intimate, concealed space of the internal while the window faces outwards into the external space of the revealed. That which is concealed is commonly associated with the inside. The space of the intimate, the personal and the vulnerable is generally framed within a notion of the internal. That which we choose to reveal, expose and present to the world is connected to a concept of the outside⁷. The outside and the inside are not defined, cleanly separated entities that can be examined in isolation. As Grosz (2001:65) aptly confirms:

⁷ In Chapter 3: Perspective and other ways of looking I expand on this issue, examining dynamics of inside versus outside as they pertain to one's understanding and perspective of space and narrative.

The boundary between the inside and the outside, just as much as between self and other and subject and object, must not be regarded as a limit to be transgressed, so much as a boundary to be traversed... boundaries are only produced in the process of passage: boundaries do not so much define the routes of passage; it is movement that defines and constitutes boundaries. These boundaries, consequently, are more porous and less fixed and rigid than is commonly understood, for there is already an infection by one side of the border of the other; there is a becoming otherwise of each of the terms thus bounded.

In the casting of the individual window/curtain hybrids I selected a clear resin. The nature of the resin and the open enclosure necessary to work with these harsh chemicals is such that it is almost impossible to prevent small insects and other environmental markers from becoming trapped within the layers of the cast. Furthermore, the nature of the resin enclosure as a shared working space means that the odd particle, hair strand or colour pigment (signifiers of the practice of other individuals, of other processes), unavoidably present themselves within the trappings of the layers. After endless frustrated attempts to remove these traces, I eventually gave into the inevitable 'contamination' of the outside within the inside of these casts. At the same time I became aware that unlike other casting mediums such as concrete, resin is a volatile substance, easily influenced by a change in the external environment. The resin layers behave differently depending on the weather patterns—some cast in winter, others in spring or summer. I would regularly discover anomalies, differences that occurred despite my use of the same mould, the same resin/chemical compound and the same technical method. I decided to view these contaminations as positive and accept the inclusion of small insects, colour variations and the traces of my engagement with the objects as a part of the artworks themselves.



Fig 10.1: detail of window from *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* (2012), resin and metal, 50 x 100 cm, photography by Lindi Arbi.



Fig 10.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of a window from *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* (2012), resin and metal, 100 x 50 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 11: Detail of curtain from *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* (2012), resin and metal, 100 x 50 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet



Fig 12: Detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* in the *Wet Paint* postgraduate exhibition (2011), resin and metal, photography by Rachel Baasch.

1.2.2 Window/Curtains and Sites of Projection

In its initial stages, the window-curtain casts of *The Eyes of the Wall 101-103* (Fig 3) were intended to form the individual facets of one large free-standing wall-like screen. Informed by an interest in the screen as a site for projection, I refer to Grosz's (17:2008) articulations of the manner in which "architectural framing produces the very possibility of the screen, the screen functioning as a plane for virtual projection, a hybrid of wall, window, and mirror". According to Grosz (2008:14):

The partition projected forward induces the wall, which constitutes the possibility of an inside and an outside, dividing the inhabitable from the natural (chaotic), transforming the earth itself into a delimitable space, a shelter or home. The wall divides us from the world, on one side, and creates another world, a constructed and framed world, on its other side.

While I remain drawn to the notion of the screen as a site for projection, my participation in the Rhodes Fine Art postgraduate group show *Wet Paint* (July 2011) influenced a change in the direction of the work. For the group exhibition I submitted three window-curtain casts, each of which varied slightly from the next. The first of the three pieces contains traces of the initial wood-clay hybrid that had been used to make the mould. The second cast had undergone an internal chemical reaction (that I am yet to explain), causing small droplets to coagulate on the inside of the cast between the window and the curtain. The third had been subjected to a wind storm and contained a trapped moth in its one corner. As opposed to rejecting the casts for their lack of sameness, I decided to work with the small, minor differences within each and use these imperfections in informing the subsequent work which followed.

In the *Wet Paint* exhibition (Fig 12), these three pieces were suspended from the ceiling of the gallery⁸, appearing to float like sections of architecture removed from the usual solid context of the house. It was after seeing them in this space that I could confirm two things. Firstly, I was certain of my initial decision not to present the works within a gallery space, despite the fact that they could potentially function

⁸ The *Wet Paint* exhibition took place at the Alumni Gallery in the Albany History Museum in Grahamstown during the National Arts Festival (28 June- 8 July 2011). Curated by Dominic Thorburn (HOD Rhodes school of Fine Art) and Maureen De Jager (head of sculpture), the exhibition showcased works-in-progress made by Post-graduate students at Rhodes University.

successfully within it. Secondly, I would create multiple individual free-standing frames, hanging these three pieces from metal supports scaled to the size of a wall as opposed to fixing them to the ground in one large screen.

1.2.3: Interior Framing and Furniture

The viewing of these pieces on *Wet Paint* prompted further exploration into the use of additional architectural structures which manifested in the sculptural works which followed. *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (Fig 13) and *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (Fig 14) consist of free-standing, screen-like, metal structures, each of which has been scaled to the size of a single bed.

The metal bed springs stretched across the surface area of these welded frames are found objects. Cast in resin onto the diamond shaped springs on the upper half of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* is a window/curtain. In a similar respect I have cast the same resin hybrid onto the lower half of the rectangular springs of *The Eyes of the Wall 202*. These structures raise the floor beneath the bed to form a hybrid of floor, bed, wall and window. In relation to these forms Elizabeth Grosz (2008:14) explains that “the frame’s most elementary form is the partition, whether wall or screen, that, projected downward, generates the smoothness of a floor, that ‘rarefies’ and smoothes over the surface of the earth, creating a first (human) territorialisation”.

The bed falls into the object-driven category of “furniture” (Grosz 2008:15); it functions within the walls of the home, yet the forms of furniture reiterate the frameworks of architecture. The bed can be seen as a physical raising of the floor, a smaller section of demarcated space, framed and reserved for the private zone of sleep, illness, weakness, intimacy, birth, death, dreaming and reproduction. These are all activities or conditions which render the human being vulnerable, requiring protection within the safety of the inside. According to Grosz (2008:15), the “frame re-enacts itself and its territorializing function through furniture”. In the same discussion, she notes that “though classified as objects in our everyday language, furniture can be seen as an interior replication of architecture” (Grosz 2008:15). One can argue that “the closet is a box in the box, the mirror a window onto the outside, the table another floor”. It can be further maintained that “furniture” enables the body to be most directly affected by, but also protected from, the chaos of every outside” (Grosz 2008:15). As Bernard Cache (1995:30) states:

For our most intimate or abstract endeavours, whether they occur in bed or on a chair, furniture supplies the immediate physical environment in which our bodies act and react; for us, urban animals, furniture is thus our primary territory. Architecture, object, geography—furniture is that image where forms are fused together.

The choice of found objects in *The Eyes of the Wall 201-202* induces a similar notion of difference within sameness that occurs within the first window/curtain series. The bed springs are collected from different places within my Grahamstown environment, each bearing the trace of intimate domestic life. While these items provide indicators of private narrative, I have no knowledge of their previous owners or the experiences which mark these objects. Some of these bed-springs were found at dump sites or scrap yards on the outskirts of Grahamstown. Others were acquired through Rhodes Housekeeping, having previously been used in the rooms of students living in university residences. Due to the used quality of these objects, they are ‘imperfect’. Slight strains and twists in corners, the odd broken or bent spring, patches of rust and the remnants of paintwork all contribute to the lived nature of the works. The floor beneath the private zone of the bed is projected upwards and forwards into a fence-like screen. These structures that can be ‘looked at’ or ‘looked through’ as they cut, break and segment the particularities of the landscape existing behind it. The porous nature of the bedsprings is re-iterated by the grid-like wire fencing of the tennis court. The interior space of the site is visually accessible from outside of the boundaries that demarcate the parameters of the court.

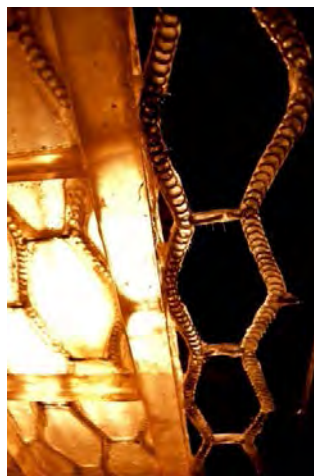


Fig 13.1: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, 200x70 cm, photography by Russell Bruns.



Fig 13.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, 200x70 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 13.3: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, 200x70 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 14.1: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (2012), resin and metal, 200x70 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 14.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (2012), resin and metal, 200x70 cm, photography by Lindi Arbi.

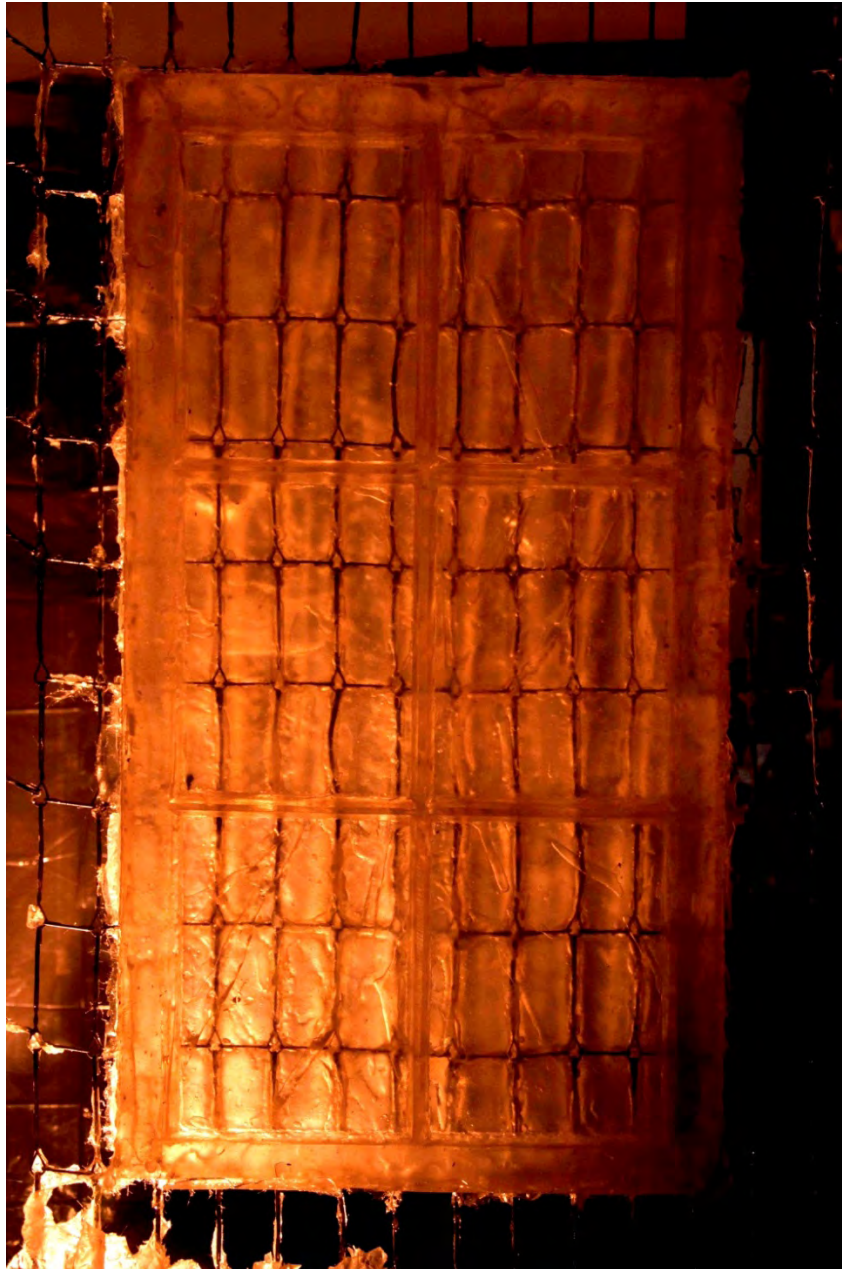


Fig 14.3: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (2012), resin and metal, 200x70 cm, photography by Russell Bruns.

1.3: Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins

1.3.1: The Skin as Boundary

It can be argued that human beings model physical and psychological structures, ideologies and actions on an understanding of the inside and the outside; separated by the boundary that is the skin—a boundary that is permeable, porous and living.

The structure of the skin shares similar properties to the structure of the house or the home, mirroring a psychological conception of skin. The skin functions as both physical and metaphorical threshold, a mediator between the external world and the internal self. Every minute of the day this threshold is active, generating new cells to replace old ones, absorbing and excreting water, oxygen and carbon dioxide. This semi-permeable border has areas of uncertainty such as the mouth, the eyes, or the genitals, where it becomes harder to differentiate between the inside and the outside. The mouth for example is arguably both external and internal; the lips mark the area of transition between the regulatory layer of epithelial cells and the intimate, fleshy opening of the mouth. The lips are exposed, presented externally on the body yet they seem part of the internal, an extension outwards of the mouth. The inside of the mouth marks an entrance, an opening, a door and a passage to the inside. This mouth-door can be compared to a pocket, a folding, an internal pouch that can hold and control the transition of matter and verbal expression between the interior and the exterior.

Like the skin of the body, the walls of the home serve the purpose of separating the internal from the external. The walls of the home also contain openings, thresholds and zones of transition in the form of doors and windows. The wall is generally sealed and painted, implying an impenetrable surface, unlike the permeable nature of skin. While this may be true, the wall is not simply a flat impassable facade with a few defined areas of transition in the shape of windows and doors. There are a number of hidden pores and openings such as air vents, electricity cables or water pipes that are not as obvious as the window or the door. The air vents allow air as well as sound to travel through the parameters of the house. Water systems and electric cables can connect a number of homes to one another as each draws power or water from a single source in an area⁹. These water pipes and electric cables can be likened to the internal veins and capillaries of the human body, these networks carry energy, water and waste in or out of the body in a similar respect to the home.

⁹ If there is no power in the home, one often finds oneself peering out the window at neighbouring houses to see whether they too have no electricity in order to ascertain if the problem is singular (such as an unpaid electricity bill) or collective (in the form of a general shortage or malfunction in the area). The same can be said for running water. If one discovers that there is no water in the house, one's first instinct is generally to enquire with the neighbours in order to determine whether the problem is collective or singular.

1.3.2: The Door to the House that is not a Home.

Following a similar pattern with regards to the process employed in the earlier works that make up the installation, *The Eyes of the Wall 301* presents the viewer with a life-size resin cast of a wooden door. Like the window/curtains, the door hangs from a metal frame, differing in the sense that it is scaled to the size of a wall and not a bed. The walls are implied but not physically present within *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories*. Like the door and the window, the wall can vary in terms of its materiality, its appearance and its symbolic significance within different environments. In South Africa one can encounter spaces that signify a heightened sense of the twice or even three times walled, the basic walls of the house are reiterated by additional walls surrounding the garden or greater piece of property. The private areas of the garden and home are twice framed, twice removed and twice protected from the threat of the chaotic outside. This closure of space invites neither physical nor visual entry.

According to Lefebvre (1991:209) the door is “transitional, symbolic and functional”. The door marks a passage of entrance or exit between two spaces. It functions to separate the external environment from the internal area of the home. As Lefebvre (1991:209) explains, “the object ‘door’ serves to bring a space, the space of a ‘room’, say, or that of a street, to an end; and it heralds the reception to be expected in the neighbouring room, or in the house or interior that awaits”. The door can be opened to welcome guests or visitors into the comfort of one’s home. It can also be closed shut in the face of the unknown or the unwanted.

In Bachelard’s (1958:222) reference to the door, he alludes to the powerful relationship between narrative and space: “a mere door can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect”. He asserts that “if one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one’s entire life”. As a “threshold”, Bachelard notes that “the door schematizes two strong possibilities...at times it is closed, bolted, padlocked, at others, it is open, that is to say, wide open” (Bachelard 1958:222).

Historically, human beings have attempted to deny the permeability of the body through the tabooing of physical excretion, and other abject bodily functions. Similarly, the human being has also attempted to close off the house to the external world, adding to and expanding on the basic walls, windows, floors and doors through measures of security that block openings and access points. There are a variety of environmental or circumstantial factors that result in the closing of the body and the home, which unfortunately relate to fear and anxiety, often in relation to legitimate threats to one's security such as crime or violence. The problem with such a closure, a blocking off, is that like the human body which cannot survive if it is unable to excrete, expel and absorb.

The negative effects of rendering the house, the home impermeable can arguably act to stunt the psychological growth of the individual and furthermore his/her ability to interact with other individuals beyond the personal boundary. According to Grosz (2001:67) "the outside is not a fixed limit but moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and folding's that altogether make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of an outside".

One's physical understanding of that which is internal and that which is external (marked by the boundary of the skin) is extended into the spaces one creates and constructs. Each of these constructions engages in dialectics of movement between the human body and the boundary. As Gaston Bachelard (1994:211) suggests these "dialectics" of space influence and inform every aspect of social and private life. One can argue that the demarcation of physical space is directly related to individual and collective narratives of occupation and inhabitation. The notion of home, of safety and security through the sensations of belonging and protection resonate with most if not all human beings. It is hard to deny the inseparable and mutually informative issues of space and narrative and the far reaching implications they have for perspective.



Fig 15.1: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (2012), resin and metal, 220x50 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 15.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (2012), resin and metal, 220 x 50 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata

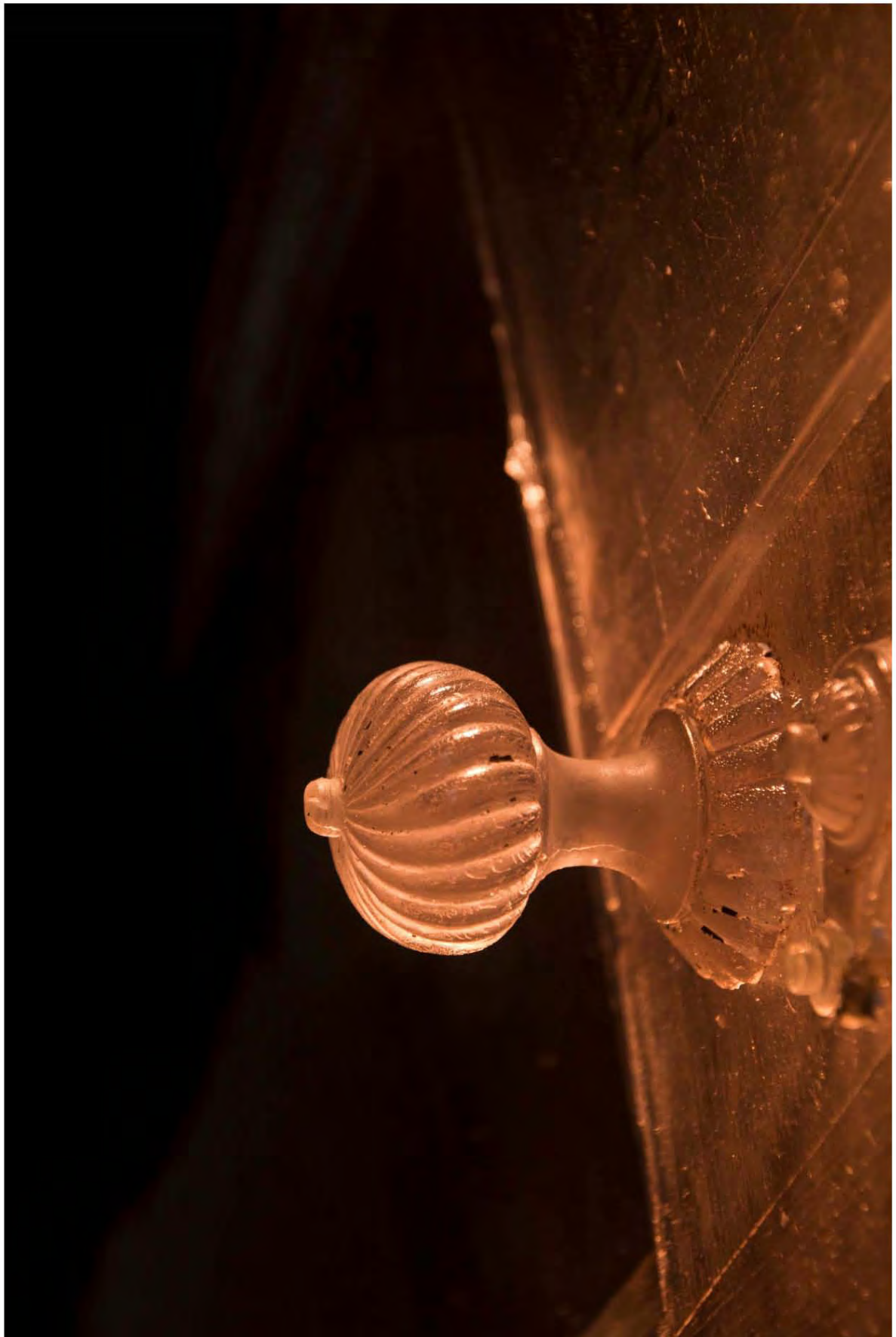


Fig 16: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (2012), resin and metal, 220 x 50 cm, photography by Russell Bruns.

Chapter Two:

Narratives of Division

According to Achille Mbembe (2001:4) identity is bound within the occupation and negotiation of “territories”, and as such one can argue that a concept of the self is imagined or manufactured in relation to “place”. Martin Zerlang (2004:12) states that:

Memories rely on places...when the place has been constructed in the mind, it can be used as a fixed point for memory. Using its walls for support, finding one’s bearings from its columns, gathering one’s thoughts in its nooks and crannies. Place and spirit reside together.

There are numerous ways in which the individual narrative is affected by the relationship between memory, place and imagination. Zerlang (2004:12) makes reference to a nostalgic “longing for places that can provide identity and, at the same time, act as a point of departure for orientation”. *Narratives of Division* addresses ‘short stories’ of displacement and division in relation to geographical and psychological understandings and experiences of space as they pertain to my own practice and that of Mona Hatoum.

2.1: Longing for Belonging and the *Imaginary Home*

2.1.1: Narrative and imagination

According to Martin Zerlang (2003:13), “the house is the first world the individual experiences and is therefore the benchmark against which all later conceptions of the world are determined”. If the house is indeed the “first framework of consciousness” (Zerlang 2003:13) upon which identity is formed, it stands to reason that a definition of the self is likely to develop according to “dialectics of inside and outside” (Bachelard 1958:211) as they pertain to the personal experience of the house or the home. It can be further argued that the various and multiple particularities and dynamics within each territory, home, shelter or dwelling can affect the way in which

the individual perceives him/herself in relation to the “symbolic structures” within his/her context (Nuttall and Michael 2000:12).

In his explorations of the domestic space Gaston Bachelard (1964:5) notes that “the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to [his/her] shelter [and] experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality by means of thought and dreams”. According to Bachelard (1964:5):

[I]nhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home...the imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build “walls” of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection-or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts.

In the longing for identity through place, there is a tendency for the human being to behave possessively, at times even irrationally. The fear of the loss of identity, of self, can result in the aggressive claiming of space, or a frantic closing, a psychological and physical bordering up of the self and all that is valuable to that self.

As Edward Said (2000:183) suggests in his discussion of the “geographical¹⁰ imagination” there is good reason to argue that belonging in relation to place is largely imaginary. In ‘Minding the Gap: Migration, Disapora, Exile and Return in Women’s Visual Media’, Lindsey Moore (2009:26) discusses the problematic generalisations associated with artists such as Hatoum who are categorised within a framework of “exile” or “diaspora”. Moore (2009:26) speaks of practitioners with “Middle-Eastern affiliations” rather than emphasizing terms such as “origin”. She explains that the geographic removal from “places construed as points of origin” means that the “Middle-Eastern places they evoke are also partly constructs of memory, narrative, imagination and affect” (Moore 2009:32). As such, Mona Hatoum is contextualised within this discussion on the basis of her “affiliations” with the Middle-East (Moore 2009:32).

As implied by the title of this thesis, the primary thematic focus of the practical and theoretical aspects of this study, are driven by three core interests: space, narrative and perspective. These three issues act as points of connection and disconnection between

¹⁰ Edward Said (2000:180) defines his use of the term geography as “socially constructed and maintained sense of place”.

my own work and that of Hatoum. It is legitimate to argue that these are universal concerns and undercurrents that run beneath the structures of multiple disciplines, communities, histories and individual lives. Hatoum's sculptural and installation practice engages the viewer experientially within personal and collective narratives of displacement. As an individual I have my own micro-history, my own intimate narrative which is created, influenced and interpreted by my conceptualisations and experiences of spaces, and the perspectives offered within these spaces. This narrative is set against the backdrop of numerous other stories and histories within my South African context.

2.1.2 Narrative and self

I was born in Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa in 1987 to parents categorised during Apartheid as 'white'. Three years later my father passed away in an accident that I witnessed with my mother and younger brother. The nature of memory is such that I am uncertain as to what recollections of that period actually relate to real events, and what parts and pieces I constructed within my imagination. According to Roberts and Roberts (1996:23) "memory is not passive, and the mind is not simply a repository from which memories can be retrieved". One can argue that memory is regularly constructed according to how we desire to see the present as well as the future.

As a child I perceived myself as different, an outsider to the so-called nuclear 'whole' I considered desirable. As far as I was concerned the children within my environment existed in families containing two parents. I now realise that there is no such thing as the consistent nuclear 'whole', yet I remember the sensation of incompleteness I felt regarding my family. A part of my constructed family 'unit' was missing, absent, and my sense of stability and security was removed at a young age. Early in life, I was acutely conscious of the volatile nature of life and death, understanding that nothing, no-one, no home, no parent or relative is concrete and reliable.

The "framework of consciousness" in which I experienced the world within my formative years was to some extent unstable, incomplete and consistently aware of the difference between myself and my peers (Zerlang 2003:13). The imaginary notion of the nuclear, complete and consistent home, acted as a point of separation between myself, and a longing for something that existed for others but could never be possessed by my family and I. Furthermore, I recall a sense of my house, my home as

permeable and open to outsiders. The literal and figurative space that was left by my father consistently enforced an idea of the incompleteness of our unit which was reiterated by our relations and interactions with the rest of our community.

In retrospect I believe that I imaged my family as a house with three walls. In place of the fourth wall, the space designated for the figure of my father, there existed an opening, a sudden and violent rupture that exposed our trauma to the outside world. In place of a wall there lay a pile of rubble, pieces and parts of an invasive and unclean removal.

At this point it is worth noting that I am not in any way attempting to equate the small psychological traumas of my childhood with the multiple narratives of oppression, violence and segregation within a South African context of Apartheid. There is no comparison between my psychological displacement within an essentially privileged and nurturing South African home and that of the disadvantaged and dehumanised reality of those individuals that were derogatorily categorised by the Apartheid government as ‘non-white’¹¹. I was never denied access to education nor were my family members forcibly removed from their homes or communities. I did not experience real discrimination, racism or oppression, yet I share a country, a territory, a home with numerous people who did. Furthermore, I was raised in the aftermath and re-conciliatory phase of South African post-apartheid society. I existed and in many ways continue to exist outside of the difficult narratives of others sharing the territory I call ‘home’.

My motivation or intention behind the disclosure of my personal narrative is an attempt not only to provide a small section of insight into an aspect of the conceptual underpinning of my practice, but also to state my position, my perspective, my frame of reference with regards to the material I am addressing from the outside as well as the inside.

My understanding of my father is constructed and imaginary. I learnt about his character, his life through descriptions and bedtime stories told to my brother and I as children. Narrated and mediated by my mother’s recollections of my father, I became aware at a young age that memory constructs, translates and builds that which one

¹¹ This term was used during Apartheid in South Africa to distinguish between the privileged racial category of ‘white’, enforcing its false ideology of ‘superiority’ over persons of other racial groups deemed ‘non-white’—the negative of the so-called desirable positive.

perceives as reality. Internally I perceived myself as an outsider to the stability and normality of other children within my context.

In my imagination I constructed and narrated myself into a position of ‘outsideness’— I was on the *outside*, an observer of the *inside* I considered to be the complete family, the nuclear whole, within which I could never be included and to which I could never *belong*. As an adult I realise that I only ever defined this *outside* in relation to what it was not, the negative of the positive *inside*, a position that could not exist without its binary and privileged opposite. The *incomplete* was constructed in opposition to the privileged space of the *complete*. The *dysfunctional* arose as secondary to the *functional*. My understanding of such a position framed the early and formative moments of my existence.

2.2 Narrative and Hatoum

2.2.1 Narrative and Framing

Whilst conducting my research I encountered two relatively recent publications mentioning the work of Mona Hatoum, *Contemporary Art from the Middle East*, 2009 and *Palestinian Art*, 2006. In both texts, the authors, Lindsey Moore and Gannit Ankori state the particulars of their own narrative as it relates to their position on the work they are discussing. In the essay ‘Minding the Gap: Migration, Diaspora, Exile and Return in Women’s Visual Media’ Lindsey Moore (2009:27) notes that “it is necessary to mark [her] critical location as a white British non-Arabic speaker, with privileged access to certain archives and audiences, but very limited access to others”. She goes on to explain the impossibility of an “ideologically innocent” position, yet expresses her desire for a “cross-cultural viewing scenario” with the “potential for mutual illumination” (Moore 2009:27).

In a similar respect, Gannit Ankori (2006:7) writes that “although [she has] made every effort to approach the material gathered and presented within [Palestinian Art] as objectively as possible” it is imperative to note that her “subjective position as an Israeli-born art historian dealing with Palestinian art during a period of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians cannot be ignored”. She provides the reader with an

account of her relationship to the material. In the preface to *Palestinian Art*, Ankori (2006:8) writes:

I was born in Jerusalem and named after my father's sister, who was killed by the Nazi's as a child. From the age of four, my family and I were perpetually on the move. I went to about ten different schools. I was always 'the new girl'. I remember my first day at an elementary school in Columbus, Ohio. A boy named Billy F. carved a Swastika into my chair. Later that day I was beaten up for 'killing our Lord'. I couldn't speak a word of English, but remember voicelessly articulating the Hebrew word *Lama* –why?

In her account, Ankori (2006:8) describes another incident at “a Jewish school far from where [she] lived” where she was labelled a “dark and primitive Israeli” by “two girls who told [her] that they were American” and she on the other hand was not. She explains that “during summer vacations, [they] always went ‘back home’” (Ankori 2006:8). "Back home" referred to Jerusalem, but according to Ankori (2006:8), there too she consistently felt like an “outsider”. Ankori (2006:8) frames the developmental years of her life as unsettled, describing herself as “displaced and mute”, unable to locate any sense of “belonging”.

The history of Hatoum and her family's exile to Lebanon speaks of a specific experience of the house and of issues of placement or displacement. According to Ankori (2006:121):

Mona Hatoum was born in Beirut in 1952, the youngest daughter of Palestinian exiles. Her extended family came from the Galilee region, from Haifa, Nazareth and their rural environs. Hatoum's father was employed by the British Mandatory government of Palestine, and the family led a comfortable urban existence in the coastal city of Haifa. On the 21-2 April 1948, as Jewish forces began to bombard the city's Arab districts, the Hatoum family was forced to flee their home, along with most of Haifa's Arab population.

In her discussion Ankori (2006:124) notes the “intellectual bond” shared by Hatoum and Edward Said: “both are exiled Palestinian Arabs who operate...within the English-speaking West”. They exist and function “simultaneously inside and outside both cultures” (2006:124). It is this position which can inform and encourage a variety of perspectives in relation to the existence of multiple narratives of division.

2.2.2: Narrative and Practice

Hatoum expresses a desire to steer clear of a direct didactic connection between her biographical history and her practice, yet acknowledges the inevitable influence her circumstances have had on her mode of expression. In discussion with Claudia Spineli, Hatoum (1997:134) explains:

The fact that I grew up in a war-torn country; the fact that my family was displaced, a Palestinian family that ended up living in exile in Lebanon, has obviously shaped the way I perceive the world. It comes into my work as a feeling of unsettledness. The feeling of not being able to take anything for granted, even doubting the solidity of the ground you walk on.

Ankori explains the specific circumstances surrounding Hatoum's experience of exile. Born to Palestinian parents in exile in Lebanon, one can propose that Hatoum's understanding of her identity as a Palestinian is based (at least to some extent) on the recollections, descriptions and representations articulated by her parents. She was born into a family already displaced and traumatised through the sudden and violent removal from their home in Haifa. She forms part of what Ankori (2006:121) refers to as a "second generation trauma", noting that "although Mona Hatoum did not experience the *Nakba* first-hand, her family's violent uprooting from Palestine affected her profoundly".

2.2.3 Slippery floors

In 1992 Hatoum travelled to Jerusalem for the first time¹² where she produced the installation *Present Tense* (Fig 17- Fig 18). In an interview with Michael Archer, Hatoum explains that her initial concept had to do with "turning the gallery into a hostile environment" yet upon arrival she notes that "the environment outside was so hostile that people hardly needed reminding" (Archer 1997: 26). There are a number of ways in which this work can be analysed in relation to issues pertaining to geographic space and narrative. Ankori provides an apt description of the context informing Hatoum's art-making in a specific place at a specific point in time. She writes:

¹² Mona Hatoum identifies herself as "Palestinian", yet explains that neither she nor her family had been able to return to what was once Palestine and is now Israel up until 1996. Hatoum's parents have not been able to return at all since their exile in 1948.

In the spring of 1996 Hatoum ‘returned’ to a place where she had never been before; she came to her mother’s Palestine, which was no longer Palestine; she went back to the ‘home’ which was never actually her home. Trying to leave behind the past and the future—with their impossible and painful elusiveness—she attempted to situate herself squarely in the *Present Tense* (Ankori 2006:141).

The installation consists of small blocks of Nablus soap¹³ arranged geometrically into a large grid on the floor of the Anadiel gallery in East Jerusalem. Pressed into the soap are tiny red beads which describe the contours and boundaries of the map drawn up through the Oslo Accords and signed in 1993. On her interpretation and utilisation of the map (Fig 17, Fig 18), Hatoum explains:

On my first day in Jerusalem I came across a map divided into a lot of little areas circled in red, like little islands with no continuity or connection between them. It was the map showing the territorial divisions arrived at under the Oslo Agreement, and it represented the first phase of returning land to the Palestinian authorities. But really it was a map about dividing and controlling the area. At the first sign of trouble Israel practices the policy of ‘closure’; they close all passages between the areas so the Arabs are completely isolated and paralyzed (Archer 1997:23).

The notion of parallel and intersecting narratives pertains to this piece. Hatoum explains the multiple readings and interpretations of the public in response to this installation. On the one hand, the use of soap as a medium that will eventually disintegrate was understood to imply the eventual irradiation and dissolving of the harsh borders restricting and separating Palestinian communities. On the other hand Hatoum recalls the connection established between the use of soap and the experience of Israelis in concentration camps during the Holocaust. As Jessica Morgan (1997:19) elaborates:

Hatoum’s work does not simply demonstrate the far-from-satisfactory solution to the Israeli-Palestinian war, as soap, in which the border defining beads are embedded, dissolves and gradually washes away,

¹³ On the significance of the Nablus Soap, Hatoum says the following:

I decided that I would like to do something with this local soap made from pure olive oil...I saw that particular soap as a symbol of resistance. It is one of those traditional Palestinian productions that have carried on despite drastic changes in the area. If you go to one of the factories in Nablus, the city north of Jerusalem which specialises in its production, you feel you have stepped into the last century. Every part of the process is still done by hand, from mixing the solution in a large stone vat, to pouring it on the floor, to cutting and packing it (Hatoum in Ankori 2006:152).

suggesting that the conflict might one day be resolved. Still, the glistening redness of the glass does not seem to predict an entirely peaceful solution, and the “positive” interpretation could be reversed if the metaphor of washing away referred to eradication, both in relation to the final solution (itself associated with the soup of Auschwitz’s showers) and the Israelis own often violent frustration with their intransigent Palestinian neighbours.

If one were to consider the physical foundations upon which a house is built, it is of course preferable to locate an area that is solid and stable. A floor that is made from multiple disconnected pieces of soap constitutes an unstable, fragmented ground upon which to construct and locate a sense of identity in place. It stands to reason that if the foundations upon which “one’s framework of consciousness” is established is slippery, potentially disappearing beneath ones feet, then the sense of self that is formed on such ground is similarly destabilized and uncertain.

The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories is influenced by my personal narrative within a South African context. While I have never experienced dislocation or exile due to physical displacement imposed by oppressive systems such as Apartheid, I do believe that a sense of psychological unrest permeates the nature of my work. My intention is not to divulge a sentimental recollection of my childhood and life history as the primary motivation for my artistic practice. I want to remain transparent in my own understanding of narrative, staying true to a belief in the inevitable filtering of the subjective position into the artistic product.



Fig 17: Hatoum, *Mona Present Tense*, (1996), Installation, dimensions variable, Anadiel gallery, East Jerusalem.



Fig 18: Mona Hatoum, detail of *Present Tense* (1996) Installation, dimensions variable, Anadiel gallery, East Jerusalem.

Chapter 3:

Seeing Blindness

Medical experts have shown that a great deal of vision is unconscious: we are blind to certain things and blind to our blindness. Those twin blindnesses are necessary for ordinary seeing: we need to be continuously partially blind in order to see. In the end, blindnesses are the constant companions of seeing and even the very condition of seeing itself (Elkins 1996:12).

In the article ‘Lessons in Blindness’ Peggy Phelan elaborates on the notion of ‘not-seeing’ in relation to *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. Phelan (2004:1280) speaks of the way in which the play dramatizes the “rhythm of looking...it oscillates between seeing and blindness, between figuration and abstraction, between the void at the center of sight and the contour of the slender ridge that brooks it”.

3.1: Inside-out

3.1.1: Paradox of Position

In *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz (2001: xv) examines a notion of the “outside that is both paradoxical and perverse”:

It [the outside] is paradoxical insofar as it can only ever make sense, have a place, in reference to what it is not and can never be—an inside, a within, an interior. And it is perverse, for while it is placed always relative to an inside, it observes no faith to the consistency of this inside. It is perverse in its breadth, in its refusal to be contained or constrained by the self-consistency of the inside.

In the same discussion, Grosz explains that philosophically speaking the outside is always on the inside of something else. To stand in one’s garden looking at one’s house may be considered an outside position, yet while one is on the exterior of a building, one is still within a piece of property, a road, an area, a suburb, a town, a country, a continent, and so on. According to Grosz (2001: xv) “the outside is the place one can never occupy fully or completely, for it is always other, different, at a

distance from where one is”. It is impossible to be on the outside of everything, “always outside”, as Grosz (2001: xv) confirms that “to be outside something is always to be inside something else”.

Imperative to this analysis of Grosz’s (2001: xv) theories is the point she makes concerning the perspective that is offered through a detachment from the intimacy and immediacy of the inside. To occupy an outside position is “to see what cannot be seen from the inside” yet while the position of ‘outsideness’ offers an insight that is difficult to gain from within, to be on the outside of (something) is to lose the possible comfort, security and sense of belonging which can be felt through the insider position, whilst potentially gaining the “ability to evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others” (Grosz: 2008: xv). In “The Dialectics of Outside and Inside” Bachelard (1958:211) observes the influence of “spatiality upon thought” and writes:

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative.

In the formation of knowledge and understanding one relies on the comparison of binary terms, hence the outside is reliant on the existence of an inside. The implications of such binaries have far reaching affects in terms of how the individual negotiates and perceives his/herself in relation to the outside, the so-called space of the ‘other’.

3.1.2: Inside Self/ Outside Hatoum

I am on the inside of my practice, my observations, constructions and articulations in relation to *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* are subjective. While I consistently attempt to reflect and examine my work from various external perspectives, I cannot assert a purely objective position. With regards to Mona Hatoum, I am necessarily on the outside of her work. I have no claims to an intimate knowledge of her personal methodologies or conceptual frame of reference. Through

the research process I may endeavour to gain as much information and insight as possible, yet ultimately my position is that of the outsider. Furthermore, while the outside position on Hatoum's work may allow for a less intimate reading of her practice, this reading is still bound within an awareness of my own intimate subjectivity. It is thus relevant to note that the subjective is not necessarily bound exclusively to the internal. In the same capacity one can argue that the objective is not directly synonymous with the outside. If one can understand and allow for a filtering of the internal into the external and vice versa then it is certainly possible to propose the same regarding subjective and objective points of view.

The subjective and the objective are bound to one another, dependant on the existence of each other and continuously informing and influencing one's individual perspective. It is imperative that one allows for a 'contamination', a psychological and cognitive transgression of thought. As Nuttall and Michael (2000:23) suggest "the point is not to affirm one's theoretical identity but to have an encounter that threatens it". One can argue that the defining and demarcating of internal space is associated with a fear of the chaotic outside, an anxiety that is bound to the irregularity of the unknown, and the threat that the unknown seems to represent.

3.1.3: Memory, Invention and the Apartheid Imagination.

Within the context of a South African space one can argue that whilst one builds bars, gates, walls and fences in the aid of physical security, there is the simultaneous construction of psychological walls, invisible thresholds and screens of protection and projection. One is not necessarily aware of such screens as mechanisms of control and separation despite the influence they have over perceptions of the internal self in opposition to the external other. These divisions allow for the projection of imaginary fears and perceptions of the chaotic outside.

With regards to the "closure of South African imaginations" (Nuttall and Michael 2000:5) prompted by imperial and colonial ideology and legally instituted through the Apartheid government, one can argue for the existence of irrational fears and misconceptions, imaginings and exoticisms of individuals who threatened the so-called purity of white South African colonialists. A large part of the intention behind the implementation of Apartheid was to prevent mixing and 'contamination', yet it is impossible to prevent matter or thought from entering another zone, another territory

if the metaphorical door or window has been opened. The authority exerted over the South African population by the Apartheid system could not prevent the inevitable creolisations and hybridisations of thoughts, ideas, cultures or genetics. Nuttall and Michael (2000:5) note that “alongside the closure of South African imaginations there exist intimacies and connectivities, other ways of seeing”. These alternative ways of seeing and forms of intimacy managed to surface despite Apartheid and the narrative of closedness it enforced.

3.1.4: Perspective and Hatoum

In the article ‘Invention, Memory and Imagination’ Edward Said (2000:182) speaks of the “unending struggle over territory, which necessarily involves overlapping memories, narratives and physical structures”. As he explains:

The interplay between geography, memory, and invention, in the sense that invention must occur if there is recollection—is particularly relevant to a twenty-first century example, that of Palestine, which instances an extra-ordinarily rich and intense conflict of at least two memories, two sorts of historical intervention, two sorts of geographical imagination (Said 2000:182).

In her discussion of Mona Hatoum, Ankori includes a section from a letter written for Hatoum by her mother and translated from Arabic to English by the artist. The letter explains her mother’s psychological trauma and discomfort in an unfamiliar place. In the letter she acknowledges the impact her emotional suffering could have had on her daughter, explaining her own experience, whilst sympathising with Hatoum’s suffering and displacement. The excerpt cited by Ankori (2006:123) reads as follows:

You say you can’t remember that I was around when you were a child. Yes, things were different for your sisters, because before we ended up in Lebanon we were living on our own land...with our family and friends around us always ready to lend a hand. We felt happy and secure and it was paradise in comparison to where we are now. So if I seemed to be always irritable and impatient, it was because life was very hard when we first left Palestine. Can you imagine us having to separate from our loved ones, leaving everything behind and starting from scratch, our family scattered all over the world, some of our relatives we never saw again to this day? I personally felt as if I had been stripped naked of my very soul. I’m not just talking about the land and property we left behind, but with that our identity and sense of pride in who we are went out the window. Yes of course, I suppose this must have affected you as well, because being born in exile, in a country that does not want you is not fun at all.

And now, that you and your sisters have left Lebanon, you are again living in another exile and in a culture that is totally different to your own. So when you talk about a feeling of fragmentation and not knowing where you really belong, well, that has been the painful reality of all our people.

This extract points to a number of possible issues concerning the formation of Hatoum's identity within her seminal years as a child. One can argue for the mediation and construction of identity through narrative. It can be suggested that Hatoum's understanding of the traumatic conditions into which she was born were conveyed to her by her parents through their own translations and perception/recollections of the events which placed them in an undesirable situation. The letter was originally written in Arabic by her mother and the artist has translated it into English herself, thus one can argue for the existence of a thin layer of mediation and interpretation influencing the English readers understanding of its contents.

As an artist, one is informed by multiple concerns, experiences and emotions. One may be able to recognise many of these influences, yet others lie dormant in the subconscious. Furthermore, it is the artist's choice as to whether he/she reveals or conceals their darkest/deepest secrets. One can argue that even if we choose to reveal our innermost regrets, fears and desires, we cannot escape our own subjective position, our own perspective. As Bachelard (1994:13) suggests, all that we are able to communicate to others is an "orientation towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively" for that which is secret "never has total objectivity". In this sense I can only analyse Hatoum's practice in relation to the information that I have access to. Thus it becomes necessary to affirm the limitations of such analyses and my own subjective blindness in relation to her work.

3.1.5: Perspective and Practice

In an interview with Claudia Spinelli, Hatoum refers to the installation work *Light Sentence* (Fig 14), a piece comprised of two rows of empty wire mesh lockers and a motorized light bulb. The light bulb moves independently up and down the space, extending the material objects of the installation up the walls and along the floor, engulfing the spectator. The light bulb moves, thus the structures of the installation and its shadows are constantly shifting. Hatoum (1997:134) notes that the piece is indirectly bound within her experiences of "unsettledness" and the "feeling of a

constantly shifting or even threatening environment”. The grid-like cages engage the spectator; one can look through them or walk around them, as if manoeuvring a series of changeable fences. According to Hatoum (1997:134), “the spectator becomes enmeshed in the shadows of the cages” physically implicated, en-framed within its material and virtual forms.

This notion of ‘unsettledness’ within Hatoum’s work is discussed further within the book *Palestinian Art*. Ankori (2006:123) refers to the direct relationship that exists between physical space and the body when dealing with issues of displacement or exile. She makes note of the manner in which Hatoum’s “feelings of unsettledness...are frequently expressed through the body—the body of the artist, the body of the mother, the body of the spectator, and surrogate objects that represent the absent human body” (Ankori 2006:123). In ‘Dream houses: Installations and the home’ Gill Perry addresses the work of Mona Hatoum amongst other contemporary installation artists such as Rachel Whiteread, Louise Bourgeois and Doris Salcedo. In her discussion, Perry notes the possible experience of the viewer when engaging with works such as Hatoum's *Light Sentence*, 1992 (Fig 19) and Bourgeois’s *Passage Dangereux*, 1997 (Fig 20) that utilise architectural forms to physically implicate the spectator within the framework of the installation. *Passage Dangereux* (Fig 21) consists of a “long corridor made of chain link fencing, intersected by smaller compartments on either side”. Inside this passage are “chairs, tables, mirrors, glass bowls and ornaments, bits of faded upholstery and other domestic bric-a-brac” (Perry 2004:238). Certain items have been morphed into “semi-corporeal forms”, evoking a sense of the uncanny.

Perry (2004:235) compares the grid-like fencing to a “wire mesh skin” that cuts, frames and segments the various pieces of furniture, household items and bodily sculptures, when looked at from outside the corridor. These same objects are experienced differently once the individual is inside the confines of the frame. Once inside, the same ‘wire mesh skin’ dissects and fragments the space external to the experiential art work. According to Perry (2004:248) “the experience of each work is full of contradictions”, while the “wire enclosures and architectural structures suggest containment” the use of “flickering lights and moving shadows” in pieces such as *Light Sentence* work to disorientate and “confuse our sense of where the enclosures might begin or end”. Perry (2004:248) explains how this utilisation of forms acts to

“frame the viewer” in addition to the space that is occupied and affected by the forms of the installation. In the same chapter she discusses “the ways in which installations can shape spatial and perceptual relations aesthetically” (Perry 2004:234). She notes that certain works “encourage the viewer to reflect on his/her changing relationship with the objects in the display, and on the ways in which those objects might affect viewers’ perceptions of the environment” (Perry 2004:234).

In a discussion of the installation works made by Hatoum between 1989 and 1996, Guy Brett (1997:68) refers to her use of a “space-frame” as one of the primary characteristics of these constructions. According to Brett (1997:61), “the spatial structures” used by Hatoum affect the viewer both “optically and corporeally”. The artworks are experiential. The dividing and demarcating of actual space over and above the aesthetic qualities of the work, activates the boundary between viewer and artwork, thus altering one’s perception and understanding of the existing space. Brett (1997:61) states that, “In order for the majority of Hatoum’s pieces to be successful, the viewer must first be able to see ‘through’ them to a point where historical references can co-exist with the viewer’s current perception”.

Spaces and places are experienced, not simply viewed from a distance. Hatoum’s (1997:134) installation pieces mark a “shift from a situation of representation to a desire to create an actual and real situation that the audience could experience for themselves.” She speaks of her need “to explore the phenomenology of the space and materials to create a direct physical interaction—a kind of gut reaction to the situation before the process of questioning and associations begins” (Hatoum 1997:134). According to Perry (2004:234) contemporary installation practices have the potential to invite the “viewer to respond kinaesthetically”, thus the spectator is encouraged to physically participate and engage with the forms beyond the detachment and removal encouraged by work which focuses solely on the distanced, contemplative gaze.

Like Hatoum my own practice is concerned with the viewer’s implication within structures which divide and demarcate one’s experience of physical space. As previously mentioned the tennis court as a site is fenced. It is separated from the rest of the landscape by metal cubes and diamonds that allow visibility yet simultaneously mediate and frame both the external and the internal spaces in which it operates. The ‘wire mesh skin’ of the tennis court is reiterated by the metal bedsprings stretched

across the structures of the *Eyes of the Wall 201-202* (Fig 13- Fig 14) thus assisting in the segmentation and dissection of the environment. These same devices simultaneously frame the spectator within the boundaries of its forms.



Fig 19: Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence* (1992), wire mesh lockers, slow moving motorized light bulb, Installation, 198 x 185 x 490 cm, Chapter, Cardiff.



Fig 20: Louise Bourgeois, *Passage Dangereux* (1997), mixed media, 264 x 356 x 876 cm, Hauser and Wirth Collection, St Gallen, Switzerland.

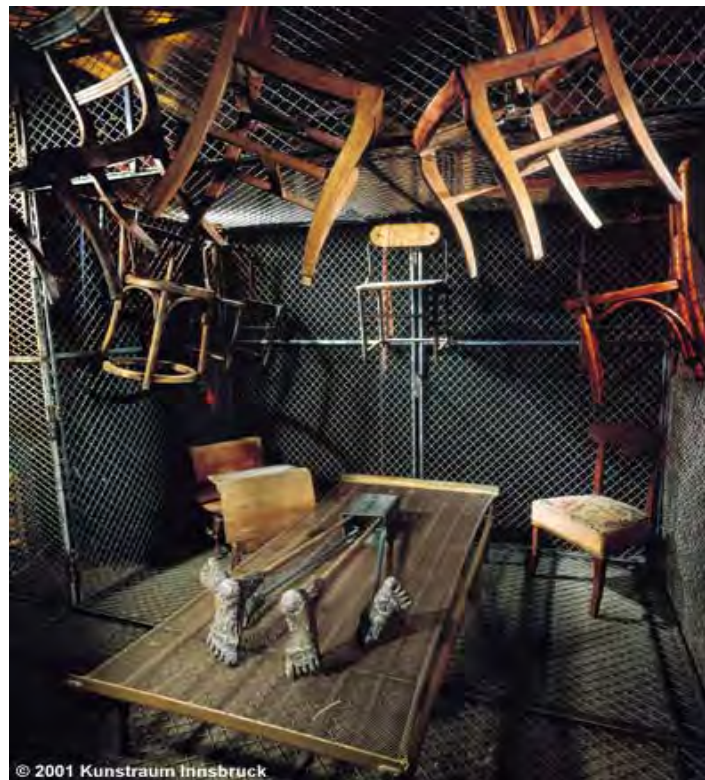


Fig 21: Louise Bourgeois, detail of *Passage Dangereux* showing hanging chairs and feet inside compartment, 1997, mixed media, Hauser and Worth Collection, St Gallen, Switzerland.

3.2: Perspective and Practical Process

3.2.1: Proximity and Distance

The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories is built around an interrogation of what it means to ‘see’ or ‘perceive’ in relation to dialectics of space and the narratives that contextualise or inform such space. In the preliminary stages of its conceptualisation, my practice was concerned with the creation of transparent or semi-transparent sculptural screens which distort and deform that which exists on the other side of the frame. It is very rare that creative art processes fall neatly and conveniently into pre-determined conceptual frameworks. There is a consistent interplay between the deliberate, calculated aspects of art-making and the un-expected, accidental directions that characterise the final product and its potential resonance¹⁴.

Since my first recognition in 2010 of the most basic areas of interest pertaining to this creative submission, I have actively engaged in a process of reflection that is both intimate and detached. I have attempted to move between a looking and learning that focuses on proximity in relation to distance (Kerkham [Simbao] 1999: 97)¹⁵. At the same time I have endeavoured to remain open and porous in my reception and examination of research material, allowing for a contamination of the unknown and the unpredictable within the confines of defined thought and preconceived theory¹⁶.

3.2.1: Denied Visions

James Elkins (1996:12) clarifies “the inconstancy of vision and our helplessness to control how we see the world”. In the *Object Stares Back*, he writes:

¹⁴ This has been my own personal experience of the art-making process, others may disagree entirely with my observations.

¹⁵ The acquisition of information and understanding through experience is a fundamental underpinning of my practice. In an attempt to interrogate the relationship that exists between the individual and his or her environment, I have moved in and out of spaces that are both foreign and familiar to my own. In 2010 I travelled to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. On each occasion I spent a significant amount of time writing, documenting, and photographing my own observations of the spaces themselves. Placing primary focus on the spaces in-between, the borders, margins, “fringes” and “edges” which define and separate one’s notion of the self (McClintock 1995: 24). Whilst I extended my research beyond the perimeters of my own familiar space, I also revisited personal spaces, such as the Durban house I grew up in. No longer owned by my mother, it is a piece of architecture that has simultaneously become alien and familiar to me

¹⁶ I am committed to fostering a self-aware and self-critical attitude to any area of knowledge or information that exists outside of my zone of understanding. For this reason I will continue to actively approach my study material from as many different views and directions as possible, engaging in a process of looking and learning that is porous, open and aware of the narrative that lies beneath my own understanding of the world.

No matter how hard we look, we see very little of what we look at. If we imagine the eyes as navigational devices, we do so in order *not* to come to terms with what seeing really is. Seeing is like hunting and like dreaming, and even like falling in love. It is entangled in the passions—jealousy, violence, possessiveness; and it is soaked in affect—in pleasure and displeasure, and in pain. Ultimately, seeing alters the thing that is being seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism (Elkins 1996:11-12).

As explained in Chapter 1, *My House/Your House: Walls, Windows, Doors and Skins*, *The Eyes of the Wall 201* and *The Eyes of the Wall 202* merge the window /curtain with a combination of floor, bed and wall to form individual screens scaled to the size of standard single beds. Through the layering and integration of the casts into the bedsprings, the window/curtain hybrids tend to deny vision as opposed to allowing it as I had initially intended. In many respects I can attribute this to my personal anxieties concerning the structural integrity of the sculptures. *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (Fig 13) is the first piece I created whereby the springs are required to support the weight of the resin cast in place of a rectangular armature. At this point I was uncertain as to how the different aesthetic and technical components would work together. My fear translated into overcompensation. This particular cast is much thicker than it is actually required to be. Multiple layers of resin and fibre glass tissue add unnecessary reinforcement in areas connecting the inside of the window and the inside of the curtain to the diamond shaped membrane of the bedsprings. This extensive (bordering on obsessive) layering of resin and tissue glass has resulted in forms which deny the very function they imply.

In the instance of *The Eyes of the Wall 201*, the large resin hybrid encases the springs in a solid and defined rectangular blanket. One can see the tight metal loops clearly embedded within the window panes and curtain drapes, yet the object continues to prevent one from 'looking through' as I had first intended. The denial of vision created by these objects pushes one to look around the area contained within the defined boundaries of the window/curtain into the open spaces between the springs. To encourage this shift in the direction of one's gaze, I began to work into the bedsprings with small amounts of resin, encasing them in such a way that is suggestive of insect cocoons or cracked peeling skin (Fig 22 and Fig 23).

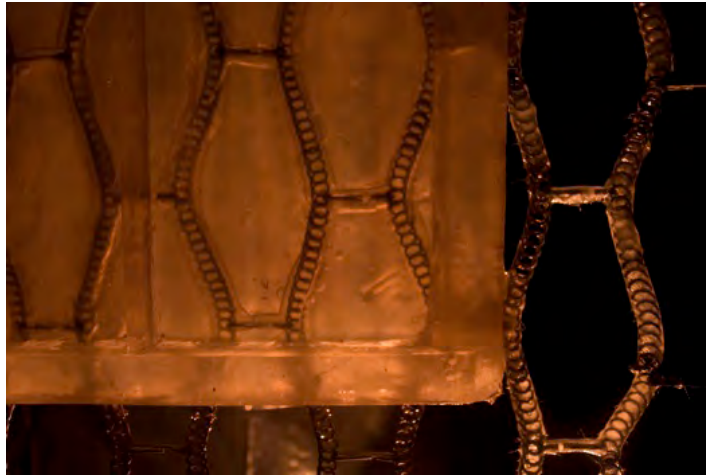


Fig 22: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, 220 x 70 cm, photography by Russell Bruns.

Whilst working thin layers of resin into the metal networks and supportive bedspring structures of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* and *The Eyes of the Wall 202*, I simultaneously started to make what I refer to as ‘ghost’ casts. These casts came about entirely by accident. The first ‘ghost’ was the product of leftover resin mixtures poured into an open cast while working on other sculptures. Structurally weak and incomplete, these pieces are the antithesis of their solid, opaque counterparts.

I have been forced both literally and figuratively to acknowledge my own blindness as it translates into sculptures, artworks which do not allow vision in the way that I had first proposed. Whilst working with ideas around seeing I was forced to move beyond the boundaries of the framed and planned into the realm of the accidental. I had to relinquish a certain amount of control in order to change the direction of my looking and thus the manner in which I was able to express that looking. Elkins (1996:12) explains that “there are things we don’t see, even when we are looking straight at them, and other things we stare at obsessively, so that we are blind to everything else”.

The presence of the window and the utilisation of a glass-like medium act as signifiers of framed architectural structures that can be looked through, yet these objects deny their typical function. Unable to see-through the dense resin cast, one is made to look beyond its borders into the network of supporting springs. In certain areas the springs are encased in thin layers of resin, while other sections have been left bare. The

creeping resin skin grows into and out of the central window core. This resin and metal membrane contains its own zones of opening and closing.

If seeing is bound within transformation, within “metamorphosis” and not “mechanism” as Elkins (1996:12) claims then it stands to reason that to ‘have perspective’ regarding a situation or experience implies far more than the act of ‘looking’ or seeing. It suggests the activation of multiple senses and the evocation of numerous histories, narratives and spatio-temporal frameworks in the creation of one or more perspectives. It is further interesting to note that perhaps perspective or at least one possible theory around perspective could be connected with a non-seeing. An approach to perspective that is premised on the recognition of that which one cannot see, the real that disappears in the very moment that it is located



Fig 23: Rachel Baasch, detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (2012), resin and metal, 200 x 70 cm, photography by Russell Bruns.



Fig 24: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories, Ghosts* (2012), resin and metal, 50 x 100 cm (each), photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 25: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories, Ghosts* (2012), resin and metal, 50 x 100 cm (each), photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 26.1: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Lindi Arbi.



Fig 26.2: Rachel Baasch, detail of *Ghost* attached *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, 50 x 100 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.

Conclusion:

Installations and the Home

The site can be recognised as a specific place in which space, narrative and perspective intersect. My attraction towards site-specific installation as an artistic strategy is connected to the way in which the artwork comes into being only through its specific placement within a local and thus intimate context. Furthermore, the notion of an installation as experiential requires that it is actually experienced. As the individual moves through *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories*, he/she becomes framed and contained within the parameters of the artwork, thus forming a part of the installation itself. It can be suggested that the simultaneous familiarity and unfamiliarity of the domestic forms “invites the spectator to find stories that will somehow explain the work”. In ‘Dream Houses: Installations and the Home’ Gill Perry (2004:235) suggests that the “actual process of viewing constructs its own narrative” She goes on to explain that “as spectators move in and around the work, they explore different viewpoints—and explanatory stories—as they go along”. The viewer may associate with and respond to the everyday domestic forms of the installation, recalling his or her own personal memories and narratives of the house or the home. However the dislocation of these structures within an open and exposed space can evoke a sense of displacement.

Additional features such as the use of artificial light and sound are affected by the other sounds and light as they occur naturally within an outdoor context. *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* has the potential to change depending on the time of day, the weather patterns and the individual positioning within or without the framework of the tennis court. Furthermore the actual installation itself alters and transforms the existing space and the way in which that space is perceived. According to Kristine Stiles (2004:186):

One might think of installations as inhabiting sites, using media and often entailing a relationship to architecture...installations may be permanent or temporary, situated in interior or exterior spaces, and are often interdependent with architectural contexts or natural environments.

The Eyes of The Wall and Other Short Stories is a response to the context in which it is located. While certain elements can be planned in advance or prepared beforehand, an outdoor site-specific installation such as *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* is exposed to the unpredictability of the outside. Stiles (2004: 187) notes that it is important to differentiate between “site-specific installation and non-site-specific installation”. Site-specific installation is generally found outside of the gallery space, yet an installation inside a gallery or museum can also be site-specific. Site-specific installation is primarily “responsive to or determined by a place” and engages with the context of a specific location (Stiles 2004:187). Site-specific installation is concerned with the body and its relationship to a place or a site.

As a site-specific installation, *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* can be likened to the home in more than one respect. I have made use of basic architectural structures such as the window, the wall and the door which frame the exterior of the house. I have hybridized these outward facing forms with interior furnishings such as the curtain and the bed. The free standing frames which demarcate an area within the tennis court enclosure are architectonic in the sense that they pertain to and are derived from architecture within a domestic setting. These architectonic constructions make no formal use of the actual human body, yet the textures, scale and medium of the forms have a corporeal resonance. In his poetic, somewhat nostalgic articulations on the “embodied” experience of domestic space, Bachelard (1994:48) explains:

The house is first and foremost a geometrical object, one which we are tempted to analyze rationally. Its prime reality is visible and tangible, made of well hewn solids and well fitted framework. It is dominated by straight lines. A geometrical object such as this ought to resist metaphors that welcome the human body and the human soul. But transposition to the human plane takes place immediately whenever a house is considered as space for...intimacy.

The house frames a section of space which becomes a home through the movement of individuals within it, and the attribution of meaning through physical occupation. The dialogue that exists between exterior and interior space as it relates to the home and the body can be compared to the nature of installation. Installations such as *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* create spatial frameworks which “literally situate the viewer inside the frame” (Potts 2001:6). Installation as a practice is flexible, responsive and experiential. Site-specific installation engages objects and structures in

a “dialogue with their immediate material, historical and social contexts” (Stiles 2004:186).

The phrase “The eyes are the windows to the soul” is a common, somewhat clichéd proverb which implies that if one were to examine or gaze into the eyes of another, one could transgress the boundary of that which is concealed in order to catch a glimpse of the internal feelings, emotions and character of an individual. This proverb points to the way in which human beings associate physical structures and objects with the human body. The body is our primary point of reference and thus most (if not all) of the ways in which we perceive and negotiate the world is based on our understanding of the body. Elkins (1996:128) speaks of the “urge to make a continuous shape out of the pieces of our visual world”. He notes that when confronted with an “unfamiliar object...we seek a body in it; we try to see something that is like ourselves, a reflection or an other...we try to understand strange forms by thinking back to bodies”(1995:129). Through the inhabitation of a house, the human being invests the space with meaning through the lived body and its interactions with other bodies. A house becomes a home because we live in it, furnish it, move through it and attribute value to it through our existence within it.

The materiality of the resin has a skin-like quality. Like the skin, the resin changes over time. Initially the substance is clear but as it dries and ages it tends to take on a yellow corporeal appearance which is suggestive of the skin. As a boundary the skin bears the traces of lived human existence. Scars, marks, creases, blemishes and areas of discoloration act as signifiers of individual interaction between the internal self and the external environment. In a similar respect to the skin the resin also carries the traces of its exposure to the outside world. As a sensitive substance, it can pick up the lightest smudges of a fingerprint, an insect or hair strand that is caught inside the layers of resin will be visible through the external surface. Resin that is exposed to the sun for extended periods of time tends to distort, acquiring curves and bends which reference the organic folds and undulations of the human form. These apparent deformations are not to be regarded as simply negative; the lure of installation lies in its ability to integrate itself into or communicate with the given environment. The metal of the free-standing frames and the bedspring networks stretched across them will also change over time through their exposure to sunlight and rain, gradually rusting from a dark grey to an array of oranges, browns and burnt reds.

As mentioned in the introduction, I have titled the individual pieces which make up the installation in order to discuss them within a written document. Although sculptural, the various parts that constitute the installation as a whole are not singular self-contained objects. Take the example of a home. A particular building (the house) exists in a location, a town, a city, a village. It has a specific address, such as 71 Hunt Road. The house may be surrounded by other buildings, other houses. It may have a particular view from the front window. On the walls, floors, doors and windows one may find finger prints, scratches, stains and other signifiers of inhabitation. Specific plants in the garden, faulty plumbing or creaking floorboards,— these are all elements constitute a specific and meaningful space such as the home. One may decide to move out of the present residence in order to make a new home elsewhere. One can move all the furniture and personal belongings but the view from the front window, the tree one climbed as a child, the step where one frequently stubbed one's toe, the sound of the next door neighbours' dog are all contributing factors that constitute the home at 71 Hunt Road. The specificity of that particular context cannot be replicated or relocated to a new location. Similarly *The Eyes of the Wall and Other Short Stories* has a unique relationship with its' specific environment. The creaks and groans of my house merge with the scratches and stains of your house to create a new environment that in turn engages reciprocally with notions of space, narrative and perspective.



Fig 27: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (2012) (daytime view), resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Pablo Zapata.

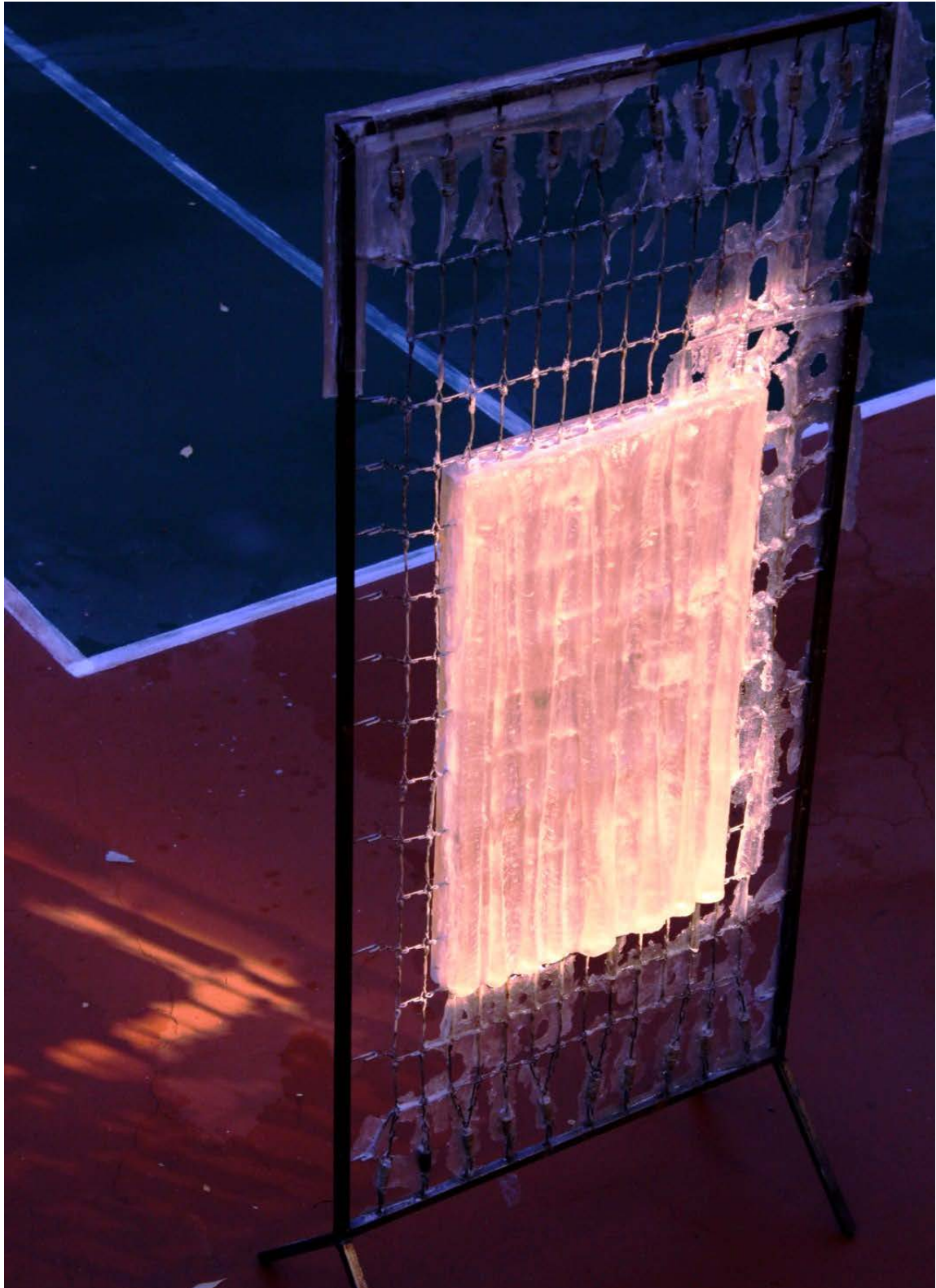


Fig 28: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012) (installation view at sunset), resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 29: Rachel Baasch, *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012) (view through attached *Ghost window*) resin and metal, dimensions variable, photography by Lindi Arbi.



Fig 30: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (2012) (showing insect trapped in resin), resin and metal, 220 x 50 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 31: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 301* (2012), (showing insect trapped in resin), resin and metal, 220 x 50 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 32: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 304* (2012) (showing bedsprings), resin and metal, 200 x 70 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.

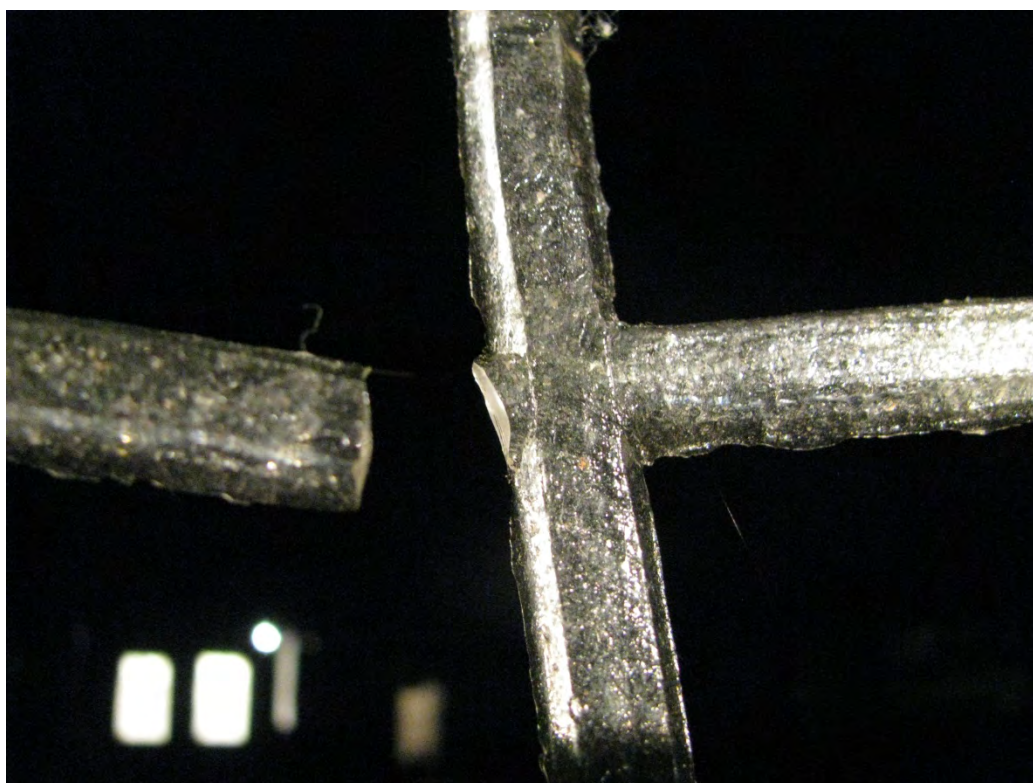


Fig 33: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 201* (2012), resin and metal, 220 x 70 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 34: *The Eyes of the Wall 303* (2012), (daytime view), resin and metal, 220 x 50 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 35: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall, Ghost* (2012), resin and metal, 100 x 50 cm, photography by Pablo Zapata.



Fig 36: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 101* (2012), resin and metal, 100 x 50 cm, photography by Bevan De Wet.



Fig 37: detail of *The Eyes of the Wall 202* (2012), resin and metal, 220 x 70 cm, photography by Lindi Arbi.

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