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ROLES – “I AM AS INTENTLY OBSERVED AS THE PEOPLE I PHOTOGRAPH”



A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the
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by

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ABSTRACT

With this dissertation I propose an investigation of how the photographic portrait attempts to construct and confirm identity through the representation of types. Drawing from theoretical texts by Roland Barthes and Robert Sobieszek and engaging with my own process of self-portraiture, as a means of troubling the usual power relations involved between the photographer and the sitter, I will demonstrate the dialectical nature of these roles involved in photographic portraiture. Looking at Pieter Hugo's portraits of judges in Botswana permits me to deal with issues of masquerade and how fashions and uniforms mask an individual, allowing him/her to perform roles and stereotypes in society. Referring to another set of Hugo's images from his ongoing series *Looking Aside*, I will explore the paradoxical nature of the portrait through the dialectic of the 'self' and 'other'/ subject and object split through an exploration of notions of skin and prosthetic skin and the relationship to the liminal space 'opened' between subject and object, or viewer and image.

The title of this dissertation was derived from a quote by Pieter Hugo (2004):

I am as intently observed as the people I photograph. I am the novelty factor, not the other way around. These photographs are about an exchange that happens between me and the subjects.

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INTRODUCTION

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen (2006b) notes that contemporary portrait photography has taken two trajectories: portraitists are either stripping away context and environment, as seen in the works of contemporary South African photographer Pieter Hugo (born 1976), and the gigantic stripped-down dead pan faces of contemporary German photographer Thomas Ruff (born 1958); or, they are creating “a kind of auto theatre” (Law-Viljoen 2006b:1) in the dramatic dress-up self-portraits of the likes of American photographer Cindy Sherman (born 1954), Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura (born 1950) and South Korean Nikki. S. Lee (born 1970), who now works and lives in New York.

In my dissertation I will argue that Law-Viljoen’s trajectories of portraiture are not that clear-cut, and by looking at photographer Pieter Hugo – whose work falls into the former trajectory – and my own process of self-portraiture – which falls into the latter – I will demonstrate that both trajectories involve an element of role-play by both the photographer and the sitter. Although there is a degree of theatricality in nearly all portrait photography, I will deal with the concerns of the artist turning the camera onto him-/herself as a method of engaging in a self-reflexive¹ process of image making. By doing this, the artist undergoes a process of masquerading and role-playing as a means of

¹ Self-reflexivity in aesthetics is a process whereby the artist draws attention to his/her practice and/or influences on the subject matter. In postmodern times reflexivity has become a defining feature, which involves the destabilizing, de-structuring, and restructuring of forms of knowledge. According to Giddens (in Smart 1999:69,) “the entry of knowledge into the circumstances of action it analyses or describes creates a set of uncertainties to add to the circular and fallible character of post-traditional claims to knowledge”.

depicting the multi-faceted fusion that has become a trait of contemporary human consciousness.

In my own practice, in *Roles*, I have used self-portraiture to engage in a process of role-play through the imitation of the subjects I sought to photograph. The self-portraits are indicative of how entangled the artist-photographer is in the process of representing other people and by extension bring attention to the complexities of the gaze. According to Elkins (1996:19), seeing is pulled towards pleasure and displeasure and is therefore a painful experience because seeing changes the thing that is being looked at, and at the same instant changes the person who is looking.

The gaze is therefore tangled up in a web of subjectivity, and seeing is a dialectical interaction between the observer and the object. For example, when looking at a portrait, – the viewer brings along his/her own various codes of history, culture, signs, gestures, psychology and attitudes. During the process of interpreting the image, mostly – unconsciously, the viewer projects these preconceptions onto the image and the meaning of the image transforms (for the viewer) according to these predispositions. For example, when I page through a fashion magazine and look at various outfits and trends, projecting my own taste, I envisage what would suit and fit my own style, mentally accepting what I like and discarding what I find displeasing.

Having had various experiences of photographing people, I became intrigued with the dynamics between photographer and sitter. I am mostly interested in the final image,

whether it is fundamentally a representation of the sitter or of the photographer. Previously working in print media, I observed how, in many instances, I would walk into an environment and capture an image of a person. The person did not ask to be photographed and in most cases did not see the final images. Being directed by an editor, I in turn began directing people to pose in certain ways in order to get 'the shot'. The final image was then a reproduction of what I was looking for. The person involved had little or no say how, and in what context, they would be imaged.

This concern led me to look, initially, at portrait photographers who had sought out subject-sitters as icons and types in society. I was predominantly influenced by German photographer August Sander's (1876-1964) portraits of German National figures and types pre-World-War Two, which deal with social class and the physical effects of certain occupations. Sander's *Pastry Cook* (1928), (Figure 1), a full-length figure centered in his environment, dressed in a chef's coat and engaging directly with the camera², is a major aesthetic influence on my own work. The environment surrounding the cook contextualizes and situates him but he is the central element of the image.

I then looked at photographers critically exploring methods of photographic portraiture as a means of interrogating the roles of the sitter, artist, and viewer. Engaging in self-portraiture, artists such as Morimura, Sherman and Lee have inverted these roles, thereby

² Sander has taken the photograph at eye level to the cook, which allows the viewer to engage with the sitter at eye level, invoking a sense of social equality. Photographing the image at this angle, Sander has created a paradox because the body of work that this photograph is part of depicts various types of working class people who are in fact unequal to other social classes. This paradox is significant in terms of the associations of representation, and will be explored during the course of this dissertation.



Figure 1

August Sander *Craftsmen: Pastry Cook* (1928), Köln -Lindenthal,
Photograph, 25.4 x 19cm, Silver gelatin print
Allen Koppel Gallery, Germany

complicating notions of the gaze, and are dealing with the tenuous character of identity through representation of the 'self' and 'other'.

Graham Clarke (1997:1) introduces his book *The Portrait in Photography* with the claim: "The portrait ... exists within a series of seemingly endless paradoxes". Throughout the history of portrait photography, photographers have been dealing with the ambiguities and contradictions of the portrait. The portrait claims, by convention, to refer to an 'other'; it is an image of someone different to the viewer and the photographer. The role of the portrait photographer has traditionally been to portray a character, in much the same way as an author conceptualizes and constructs a fictional character. For the photographer however, unlike the author, there is an individual existing outside of the image, and the photographer for various social, anthropological or ethnographical reasons seeks out characters. The process therefore relies on the way in which the photographer chooses or is persuaded to portray this character.

Portrait photographers can be motivated in at least two ways: by a commission, or by a personal interest. In the case of a commissioned portrait, the process of looking at someone is more about portraying them the way they see themselves, the way they wish to be seen, and what type of publication or organization is commissioning the portrait. The process pivots largely around the image of that particular person that the photographer is obliged to convey. In other words, the photographer is expected to capture the sitter as he/ she wants to be seen.

The second motive, which is the concern of this dissertation, deliberately involves the intention of the photographer without any initial commercial or commissioned intent. This motive is indicative of the way the photographer looks at people, and it involves searching for some kind of meaning or nuance in the sitter's appearance: whether it is an expression, a type, a mood or combinations of these.

It is also important to note that various photographic technicalities influence the portrayal of a person. Elements such as lighting can instill virtually any desired character or mood in the subject. Flat, even lighting produces a seemingly more 'honest' and open impression of a face, while side lighting can create a dramatic moody effect. Strategic technical effects such as lighting sources, camera angles,³ and the way in which the photographer has chosen to crop⁴ the image are indicative of the artist's informed decisions and intentions in representing a sitter.

Critic Curt Glaser (in Sobieszek 1999:25) wrote in 1931 that "the model is only raw material, to be shaped by the artist's creative will". While Glaser's view is extreme, one can argue that the subjectivity or emotive quality one might find in a portrait photograph is that of the photographer, and the model becomes the ideal screen for the expression of the artist-photographer. Furthering this point Robert Sobieszek, in *Ghost in the Shell* (1999:27), claims that:

³ Taken at eye level the image simulates the effect of looking directly into the face of the sitter as equals, whereas a portrait taken from below, angled up towards the sitter, simulates the effect that the sitter is looking down on the viewer.

⁴ Common methods of framing a portrait through the lens, by means of cropping out information the photographer does not wish to include, vary from full frame (showing the full length of the body) to a head and shoulders crop or even in an extreme case just an eye is photographed and the rest of the face is cropped out.

Even the most affectless and mute faces portrayed ... contain at least the suggestion of some subjectivity behind them and at the very least present arenas on which we may project our own versions of what went before and came after the instant of the photograph ... the human countenance continues to serve as a site for speculation. It does not matter how abstracted the depicted face is, or if it is an icon, symbol or fiction; what concerns us is that it does still signify an other, another's face: an announcement of communication, the beginning of countless dramatics, a locus of potential passions, an allegory of the human soul, and a potential embodiment of personal ethics.

A representation of a sitter is therefore quite far removed from his/her original context and is subject to myriad presuppositions by viewers. This image of the 'other' – this supposed 'allegory of the human soul' – then becomes an important element to focus on when exploring notions of representation.

As previously mentioned, characters portrayed in portraits are also individuals existing outside of the image. These individuals or sitters, in most cases, consent to being photographed, and while posing for the camera, become involved in a process of projecting their identity and characters for the camera. Traditionally the portrait was used mainly as a tool by the upper class in western society to establish and confirm status (Clarke 1997:103). In most contemporary societies the portrait has become more of a democratic form of representing the 'self' and due to the extent of its use we are constantly faced with images of people and have become aware of the power the camera wields.

This awareness of the gaze of the photographer and the camera prompts the performance of the sitter. Sitters pose in a variety of ways, performing a persona with the intention, be

it conscious or unconscious, of projecting type, image, and status, to indicate their identity. Roland Barthes (1980:10), in *Camera Lucida*, describes his experiences of posing for photographs, as follows:

[O]nce I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing', I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice ... posing in front of the lens ... I do not risk so much as that ... No doubt it is metaphorically that I derive my existence from the photographer. But though this dependence is an imaginary one ... I experience it with the anguish of an uncertain filiation: an image – my image – will be generated.

Image and identity are projected through various indicators such as fashions, uniforms, environment and the performance of postures and gestures via body language. For instance, an informal family holiday snapshot might reveal a family, tanned, wearing casual beachwear, and smiling on a beach in Cape Town. This indicates that they are happy and are affluent enough to be able to take a holiday. In another example, a formal dance photograph representing an elegant couple dressed in expensive outfits indicates wealth and stature. Further examples include: a pose for a somber identity or passport photograph, a portrait for a lover, or a funny face showing off a sense of humour.

Sobieszek (1999:27) refers to the process of imitating the 'self' for the camera as a "theatre of expressions". The sitter willfully performs various emotions through a process of role-playing or engaging in pretense, in order to enact feelings or to mimic recognizable gestures, for example, holding onto a chin as if in deep thought, or gesturing for a waiter to bring the cheque. The pose is therefore only an index to the sitter,

representing a façade. Once captured, on film or digital storage device, this façade becomes a split-second reference to expressive attitudes, postures and features that are critical to public performance, but are only a fragment of a more fluid and organic subject.

Aware of public expectations, Barthes, posing for the camera, enters into a social ruse but simultaneously attempts to hold onto his 'individuality'. He (1980:12) states:

I lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing, but ... this additional message must in no way alter the precious essence of my individuality: what I am, apart from any effigy. What I want in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) 'self'; but it is the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image ... 'myself' doesn't hold still ... if only Photography could give me a neutral, anatomic body ... For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.

Coming out on the other side, Barthes realizes that the photograph merely classifies his status while simultaneously depriving him of his 'individual self' by freezing him in his expression and pose. These poses and gestures Van Alphen (1997: 248) notes as a mimetic portrayal of the 'self' through imitation. The imitations of the 'self' become references to the individual and Van Alphen (1997:245), referring to Barthes, states that, through the process of representing these indices, the 'self' is lost. As he states:

[The] loss of self is brought about because the objectification of the subject that bestows the experience of wholeness on it is a discursive transformation that translates the subject into the terms of the *doxa*, the platitudes of public opinion. The subject falls prey to a representation that constructs it in terms of stereotype.

It could be argued therefore that the loss of the 'self' – at the point the picture is taken – is a death; all notions of individuality cease to exist once the image is captured. The portrait is therefore a cipher⁵, concealing the meaning of the individual, and it becomes a reference to something which has already been named; it is an image of someone other.

Similar to the way in which Barthes poses for the camera, aware of the gaze, artists have critically posed in front of the camera, inverting the power of the gaze in order to deal with notions of identity construction through performance. Methods of photographic self-portraiture have been investigated since the advent of Surrealism (c. 1917). Artists such as Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Gilbert (born 1943) and George (born 1942), Gottfried Helnwein (born 1948) and Anselm Kiefer (born 1945), to name but a few, have explored methods of self-portraiture through performance and parody.

Sobieszek (1999:29) considers the notion that the artist-actor performing faked characterizations embraces the dual concept of the portrait through dissimulation. He states that through character imitation, performers conceal their own characters in order to assume the 'persona' of the fictional character. The artist-actor therefore splits him-/herself into two distinct selves, one in front of the camera and another behind the camera. Barthes (1980:10) speaks of the photographic image as being caught between "that of the observed subject and that of the subject observing". The image is therefore fundamentally paradoxical because it is caught up in the struggle between inside

⁵ An arithmetical symbol or character (o) of no value by itself, which when placed after any figure in a whole number increases its value tenfold. In terms of representation it is a person or thing of no importance or worth, a nonentity (*Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1970:166).

(subjectivity) and outside (representation and interpretation). We are therefore faced with a dual subjectivity. This split 'self' can be related to what Barthes (1980:31) sees in photography as a kind of primitive theatre involved with the cult of the dead⁶.

Character imitation can be read in terms of what Sobieszek (1999:126) calls a "cathode ghost". A cathode is a beam of electrodes producing a current that projects a luminous image on a florescent screen. Televisions and computer screens function in this way, emanating images via cathode beams. The character viewed on the screen is therefore a construct, a trace of projected light. By using the camera to double the 'self', artists are projecting constructed identities manipulated through a process of artifice.

Yasumasa Morimura, dealing with his identity as a Japanese artist and with concepts of originality, photographed himself masquerading as Duchamp⁷. Morimura, parodying Duchamp, is indicating that he and his ideas are in fact ready-made⁸ concepts. Morimura's repertoire consists of reworking renowned masterpieces and replacing the prominent subject with his face and/ or body. His presence in the quotations of 'original'

⁶ According to Barthes (1980:31-32) the first actors separated themselves from their characters by playing the role of the Dead. The actor is simultaneously dead and alive. In order to play out a role as someone other the performer needs to separate him-/ herself from society. In other words the performer cannot be both him-/ herself and the character; he/ she has to therefore go through a process of transformation whereby he/ she becomes the character. This transformation can occur through the use of make-up, dress and masks. Barthes uses the example of the painted face in Chinese Theatre as the façade created for the actor/ actress to become other and play out his/her role.

⁷ Despite many attempts I was unable to find a reproduction of this image. I was only able to locate literature on the image which was part of an exhibition entitled *This isn't a Duchamp is it?* (2004). With no trace of this image, I am inclined to metaphorically place it in a 'liminal' zone, where I have read about it, interpreted it and adjusted it to perform a role for my own purposes of analysis.

⁸ Duchamp made use of manufactured everyday objects which he converted into artworks and called 'ready-mades'. He made no alterations to the objects he found before he exhibited them. Honour and Fleming (1982:588) call this "the most iconoclastic gesture that any artist has ever made" since it was a rejection and revolt against accepted artistic canons. Duchamp insisted that the choice of his 'ready-mades', in one case a urinal, was based on a reaction of visual indifference. The significance of ready-mades shows that concepts and ideas precede the artist.

iconic artworks is a subversive gesture defacing the authority of Western subjectivity. He consumes the 'original' by exclaiming his identity; pasting his face onto all the images, he parodies and further asserts his own subjectivity and authority as artist by citing and reworking popular and iconic art imagery.

Morimura's practice of reworking images can be compared with notions of originality of the 'self'. Notions of an autonomous, self-referential, stable 'self' cannot be expressed because it does not exist. Sarup (19...:6), dealing with notions of postmodernity and questions of self-expression, draws from Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis in order to give explanation to the philosophy of individuality and society. Sarup (19...:7) notes that:

For Lacan there is no separation between the self and society. Human beings become social with the appropriation of language; and it is language that constitutes us as subject. Thus, we should not dichotomize the individual and society. Society inhabits each individual.

The 'self', 'individuality' and 'essence' are therefore constructs of society and identity is fundamentally, like Morimura's images, ready-made. Contemporary notions of identity are a product of the networks of influence on modern humanity, and Baudrillard (in Sobieszek 1999:30) states that 'man'

can no longer produce the limits of his own being, can no longer play nor stage himself, can no longer produce himself as mirror. He is now only pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence.

Baudrillard is comparing humanity to information networks and computers, making one think again of a cathode ghost. He emphasizes that the attempt to be a 'self' has led even

beyond performance. However, this discussion is focused on performance and posing as a means to indicate how limited the pose is as an *attempt* at 'staging the self'. The point I would like to draw from Baudrillard's quote is the 'networks of influence' that demonstrate the superficiality of modern identity, showing how influenced modern 'man' is by the media-based quality of the 'self'. One might argue that the recent interest among photographers in performative images indicates a heightened attempt to (re)find identity through masquerade and parody – but at a time when identity – at least for Baudrillard – no longer depends on self-staging.

Cindy Sherman, throughout her career, has staged herself as various characters such as unnamed actresses in undefined B-grade movies, made-up porn stars and denizens and monsters of fabricated and traditional fairy tales (Sobieszek 1999:229). Showing how identity construction is caught up in the realms of representation and the mass media, Sherman uses the camera as a means of doubling herself, with the purpose of representing the multifaceted nature of the modern 'self'. By repeatedly presenting herself in a variety of roles, she indicates the versatile nature of the 'self'. Critic Abigail Solomon-Godeau (in Sobieszek 1999:229) writes of Sherman that

the bulk of her work until now has been constructed as a theatre of femininity as it is formed and informed by mass culture... [Her] pictures insist on the aporia of feminine identity, indeed, of identity *tout court*, represented in her pictures as a potentially limitless range of masquerades, roles, projections.

While her method of role-play falls into the realm of investigating issues surrounding racial and sexual identity, provoking questions of identity surrounding the 'male gaze'



Figure 2

Nikki. S. Lee *The Seniors Project 15* (1999), New York,
Photograph, 30 x 40cm, Fujiflex print
Leslie Tonkonow Artworks and Projects, New York

and media stereotyping of femininity, it is important to note that most of the characters she assumes do not exist. By staging herself as fictitious characters or guises, she undermines the idea that the character, or by extension the portrait, is able to refer to somebody outside the image. She is therefore indicating that identity is unstable and functions only as a reference. Identity is a simulacrum, caught up in the realm of representation.

Nikki S. Lee, through her dress-up masquerade, delineates the space between the actual and the approximate in order to undermine notions of 'fixed' concepts of identity (Kee 2001). By placing herself directly into the environment of the various demographic categories, she has indicated that one can easily approximate identity, even to the point of over-replicating appearance, but that the original can never quite be reached through imitation. Lee spends from one week up to a month with various sub-cultures (such as senior citizens, yuppies, tourists or punks) in New York immersing herself into the environment and adapting the code of dress, behavior and body language of the given social group; and by imitating them she becomes a kind of caricature of the groups she depicts. Nikki S. Lee uses herself as the object of the gaze by masquerading the culture of a type.

Her modus operandi is to show how individuals are shaped through communities. In her photograph *The Seniors Project 15* (1999) (Figure 2), she is dressed up as a senior citizen and is seated in a diner with an unidentified elderly lady. At first glance (and without an awareness of the artist's intentions) one could easily mistake her for the role she is

imitating. By placing herself into a context she does not belong to, she demarcates the space between the actual and the approximate. Her new fabricated identity challenges fixed concepts of identity.

In my own practice I am interested in investigating the dynamics involved in the process of the photographer looking and initiating, directing, choreographing, manipulating and prompting the sitter in order to achieve a desired image. I explore the subtle yet poignant dynamics of photographic portraiture by critically investigating the discourse between the photographer and the sitter in the face-to-face encounter. Using myself as model and engaging in a process of self-portraiture and role-reversal, I intend to highlight the problems and nuances of representing the 'self' and the 'other'. This encounter allows for an investigation of how photography attempts to construct and confirm identity through the representation of types.

Drawing from theoretical texts by Roland Barthes and Robert Sobieszek, I will explore the roles of the photographer and the sitter in photographic portraiture. In Chapter One – 'Roles' – I will engage with my own process of self-portraiture as a means of troubling the usual power relations involved between the photographer and the sitter, and will deal with notions of the stereotype with the help of Norman Bryson in his text *Vision and Painting – The Logic of the Gaze*.

Pieter Hugo's portraits of judges in Botswana will be the focus of Chapter Two – 'Robes' – dealing with issues of masquerade and how fashions and uniforms mask an individual,

allowing him/ her to perform a ready-made role in society. Chapter Three – ‘Skin’ – deals with notions of liminality in relation to the photographic portrait’s inability to represent individuality. Referring to another set of Hugo’s images from his ongoing series *Looking Aside*, I will explore the paradoxical nature of the portrait through the dialectic of the ‘self’ and ‘other’/ subject and object split.

Chapter One: ROLES

The Master Tiler fulfils this system of recognition in an almost archetypal way. This figure whose assumed 'identity' is imaged almost wholly as a representative social type (Clarke 1992:80).

Taking my cue from Sander, for an academic body of work I sought out people working in the service industries and focused specifically on the people we generally do not see on a regular basis. The anonymity, at least in relation to me, of certain roles such as the cleaners, builders, and shelf-packers allowed me, by assuming their roles, to visually represent the space between the photographer and the sitter.

I also assumed the roles of iconic jobs in South African society such as the doctor, the fireman, the security guard, and the policeman. I extended the investigation beyond the anonymous work forces in order to deal with photography's role in identity construction through the representation of stereotypes. The word 'stereotype' was used extensively during the nineteenth century to signify a mold for creating multiple copies of printing type and thus connoting 'generalized replications' (Sobieszek 1999:122). In 1922 Journalist Walter Lippman (in Sobieszek 1999:122) was the first to use the word metaphorically, when he defined it as the as the "projection upon the world of our own values, our own position and our own rights".

Going into different working environments and meeting an array of people and dressing up in their uniforms confronted me with my own class and type. I am an educated, white, middle-class South African woman with no physical or emotional adversities. Because

of these circumstances I am situated as a type and am responded to in certain ways, and certain kinds of behavior are expected from me as a result of this classification.

Walter Benjamin (1999:520), debating the issues of photographic representation, stipulated that, be it in an anthropological, ethnographical, social or artistic context, “[w]hether one is of the Left or the Right, one will have to get used to being looked at in terms of one's provenance. And one will have to look at others the same way”. With the rapid development of techniques of reproduction, Benjamin (1999:523) proposed that the representations of an individual, reaching a wider audience through the media, have become a ‘collective creation’ and the gaze has therefore become a social function. Viewers classify the subject of a portrait in order to achieve control over the image, in order to understand the image of the person as someone other and to situate that person in relation to themselves.

Bryson (1983:140) elaborates that the process of understanding an other is tied up in a process of decoding the signs which are the expression of a given reality. Signs are decoded through a process of reflection, a discourse between the receiver and the sign, and the process depends on codes of social formation, which are part of a grander superstructure. The articulation of types is expressed through perceived codes rooted in artistic and media practice through various signifying conventions, in order to distinguish between classes. These signifiers are prescriptive codes of material knowledge and of social practice; they are ready known, and are conformed to for various practical rules of recognition (Bryson 1983:151).

The codes and connotations of stereotypes are used as modes of controlling interpretation through social knowledge. According to Bryson (1983:155):

The stereotype ... addresses me at a particular point in the social space ... its vocative appeal at the thing of value; yet a second later it withdraws that intimate contact and begins to speak impersonally, glacially, to the world at large – at the same time as it seems to find the mite worth taking, all the same ... [T]he stereotype addresses the viewer twice over, constructs him in two irreconcilable forms ... the stereotype resembles, one might say, the pre-recorded message.

Bryson (1983:155) relates the stereotype to the dream of an “essential image of the social formation” and it is through citation and imitation of the stereotype that identity is created.

Engaging in a process of role-reversal and dress-up self-portraiture, I attempted to imitate various roles and stereotypes in order to challenge the signs of identity construction through photography by inverting the usual power relations involved in portraiture, which cast the photographer as mastering subject and the one photographed as mastered object. In a manner similar to Lee, I was interested in placing myself into the environment of the subject but my concerns revolved mainly around the superficial interactions and fleeting relationship at the face-to-face encounter of the photographer and the sitter and how these moments are cast as a type of certainty and/ or true indication of an other.

I dressed into the clothes, shoes and accessories the people were wearing at the time, and they dressed in my clothes. I made no use of make-up (unless the person was wearing some and allowed me to use theirs) or wigs, and I did not move or set up any props; all I did was literally place myself in their role and into their environment. Any additional props or gimmicks would have detracted from the subtle gestures conveying the difference between myself and the person whose role I was assuming. Through this inversion of roles I consciously became an object of the gaze and engaged in an artifice of poses, expressions, and gestures with the camera, while the subject, of the reversal took on the role of the photographer and photographed me.

The process took about 45 minutes; I started out by engaging with the sitter, taking note of his/her name and job title, conversing about the work environment and the pressures and demands of the job. Regularly I was given a tour of the environment and informed about various idiosyncrasies of the job and place. When I had composed the shot with the camera on a tripod and an assistant holding the flash, I would place the person into the scene and mark the area where he or she stood⁹. The photographs were composed with the intention of showing as much of the location as possible, including tools and items of the trade.

⁹ I marked the floor for practical reasons of not cropping off the feet, as all the portraits are standardized full body shots. I was trying to maintain a certain distance between the subject and the camera for all of the images. The standard full-body composition with a maintained distance between the camera and the subject is repeated throughout the series. This is done repetitively with the intention of drawing attention to the compositional and philosophical implications of the distance between the camera and subject.

The best way to initially get to grips with the body language and gestures of the person was to ask him/ her to pose for me and to take a photograph. It was fascinating to note the things people do both consciously and unconsciously when faced with a camera. For example, some people immediately clasp their hands in front of their bodies in a closed gesture, while others open their arms. One of my favorite moments was with a man, a refuse collector, who stood in front of the pick-up truck with wide-open arms and his hands stretched out like a dancer. It was obvious that this was a self-conscious gesture, which expressed the stress and shyness of being in the spotlight while his colleagues were standing around curiously and commenting. Poses also differed according to uniforms; people in service-providing industries tended to present themselves in a posed 'professional' manner, for example those who work for the airlines, where their industry relies on their image.

With each new outfit I put on I tried to wear it the way the other person did, collars, socks, buttons etc. I would also wear the jewelry, necklaces, earrings and spectacles. I discovered that people wear their clothes differently according to the way they stand and hold themselves. I paid close attention to details such as hairstyles, the way people tilted their heads, held their shoulders, and stood with their feet turned in or out. All of these fine details are major contributions to the different ways in which people play out their identity and individuality within their roles.

While I intended to have little or no reference to the controlled environment of the studio, I was in fact invading and disrupting the environments with my assistant, a medium-

format camera, tripod, portable flashes, and, lastly, myself. The process was very controlled and the subject-photographer only had to look through the viewfinder to check the composition, ask me to pose differently and press the shutter. I used an assistant to control lighting and to overlook the process. This was a practical matter because of the need to standardize the images, to control the composition for aesthetic value, and to prevent any part of the body being cropped off. My invasion of the environment shifted it into an in-between space, turning it partly into a studio, demonstrating the impact of the intersection of the world of the photographer and the subject. For these reasons it was virtually impossible to completely relinquish control of the process.

It is important to note that, as subject-photographer, the person whose role I was assuming did not have absolute governance over the procedure; he/she in fact became an extension of my own process of looking. It could be argued then that the strategy I was using did not actually reverse the usual subject-object relationship in photography. Rather, what resulted from this strategy, was the subject-photographer being used like a secretary taking down a letter dictated by the boss – while the boss doesn't physically *write* the letter, the words are the boss's. The secretary is not empowered by being the scribe. I subsequently retain the power over the process, indicating that the sitter is not really empowered by taking the picture; the process pivots around my own subjectivity, which in this case is about how I, using myself as a tool to investigate notions of representation in portrait photography, am in a sense empowering myself to view myself – through the eyes of another – as a disempowered object. Hence, I am simultaneously empowering and disempowering myself.



Like Morimura, I have 'superimposed' myself onto ready-made roles. These roles, the shoemaker and the butcher, for instance, have been a part of society since trade began and are filled by individuals, who come and go, using the role mainly as a means, for example, to make a living, and by extension, their identity develops around the role they play in society. By imitating the person within the role, I block any attempt a viewer might make to interpret an individual. Instead I draw attention to the indices that indicate certain roles and working environments. At the same time I am also blocked, even in my mimicry, from capturing individuality, for no matter how hard I tried to take on the poses and gestures of the subject, I could not get away from myself. In many of the images there is an obvious sense of discomfort, indicating that I do not fit into the roles I am imitating. There is too much of myself involved in the process – my skin, my size and my mannerisms, which make it impossible to authentically mimic the person. By attempting to imitate them, I am in fact imitating myself imitating them.

Because of the lack of authentic subject, the presence of an outside individual is therefore eradicated, undermining the idea of 'presence' in the portrait. The characters portrayed in the final images are, like Sherman's characters, fictional, because the combination of the 'other' and myself does not exist except in the space of representation. The 'presence' in the images is of hybrid characters indicating the transitional space where the individual intersects with the type, where the subject becomes the object, foregrounding the performativity of my role as artist and photographer.

This space is associated with masquerade and performativity, which ‘stage’ a liminal space (to be explored further in Chapter Three. In the next chapter I explore masquerade further, focusing on the role of clothes in signifying a function. To further this exploration I will specifically look at images by Pieter Hugo of Botswanan judges, whose robes masquerade judicial power.

Chapter Two: ROBES

Female masqueraders in turn metamorphosed into hussars, sailors, cardinals, or Mozartian boys ... Women strutted in jack-boots and breeches, while men primed in fur-belowes and flounces (Castle 1995:82).

Masquerade, in the sense of a masked ball, is a dissembling process that temporarily allows for shifts in character but not for an *actual* transformation of 'self'. Popular masquerade disguises in eighteenth century English society – where masquerade, artifice, self-alienation and phantasmagoria were practiced – included occupational costumes such as shepherds, milkmaids, nurses, etc. (Castle 1995:82). The costumes and masks created an in-between, fictional and hybrid state that allowed the participant, once masked, to perform in ways that he/she would otherwise not do.

During masquerade, the person involved is temporarily liberated from cultural boundaries and is 'allowed' an escape from the 'self', crossing the lines of social rank and privilege. Wearing costumes and masks, the participant is permitted anonymity and behavior is therefore unrestrained and released from ordinary, normal social controls. The participant is therefore permitted an escape from the 'self', creating a 'simulacrum of autonomy', hence multiplying his/her identity and making it unstable and reversible (Castle 1995:93). This simulation of autonomy through masquerade plays a predominant role in the creation of a polymorphous subject – perverse by definition, the sexually ambidextrous – and allows for the exploration of a potentially unlimited range of desires.

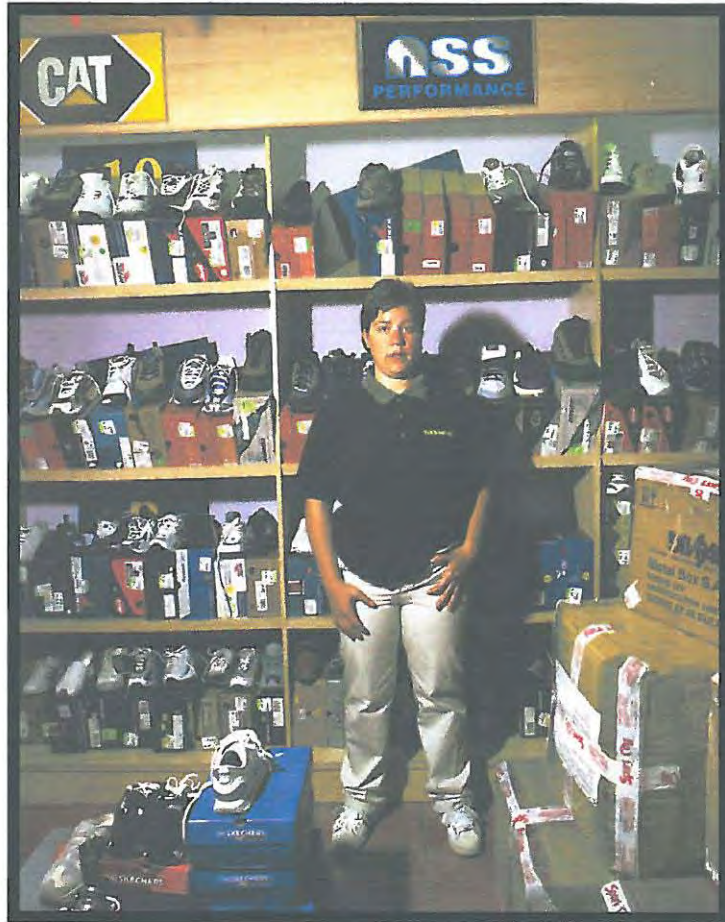


Figure 3

Monique Pelsler *Shoesalesman* (2006), South Africa,
Photograph, 50 x 60cm hand colour print

Masked as the sitter (dressed up in his/her role) I was permitted to, through a visual masquerade, explore the realm of the 'other' and enter into a space that I would define as liminal, which allowed me to simulate a fantasy of equality and reversibility between myself and the sitter. The masquerade and the temporarily transformed environment provided autonomy for my conscious effort to let go of my own social constraints, allowing me to play with the normal power relations involved in portraiture.

Engaging in such an intimate¹⁰ yet superficial process¹¹, sharing our roles with one another, the difference between us was simultaneously suspended and reinstated. Through imitation and simulation I was at once the 'same' as the other person but also fundamentally different and it was, as mentioned previously, impossible to get away from being myself. There were moments when I was dressed in the clothes of the other person that I felt naked. I did not have my usual visual persona to hide behind, and the parts of me that I usually hide were exposed. In addition to posing as the other person would, I was drawing attention to these exposed areas of myself. These moments of awkwardness emphasized my inability to take on the other person's demeanor.

Some of the outfits I dressed into were very tight on me and I could not do up the zip or button the shirt. In the case of a shoe salesman (Figure 3), the man I was dressing up as was much smaller than me. I went into the change rooms and squeezed into his jeans. It was a standard retail changing room and I was overwhelmed by the connotations of trying on clothes to purchase, and here I was bulging out of a pair of clothes I would not

¹⁰ Dressing into each other's clothes and often changing in front of one another.

¹¹ We did not know each other before or after the process.



Figure 4

Monique Pelsler *Fireman* (2006), South Africa,
Photograph, 50 x 60cm hand colour print

choose to buy. It took a while for me to eventually venture out into the shop. I had to overcome my extreme sense of discomfort, embarrassment and the desire to take the clothes off, call off the project, and retreat to my own comfort zone.

Eventually, and relying on the support of my assistant, I posed for the photograph and the subject-photographer directed me to stand in a certain way. Once the shoot was complete and I was interviewing the salesman, he stated that he had found the role-reversal process very interesting but uncomfortable. The discomfort was reciprocal, because not only did I not fit into his clothes and his role; he found it equally as uncomfortable assuming my role. The reciprocal discomfort points to a fundamental difference between our two roles and characters, and reveals the extent to which identities cannot be exchanged even in a temporary situation allowing and providing a platform for exchange. The assumption of character through codes like dress can therefore only ever produce mimicry and masquerade.

In other situations, the uniforms or clothes I wore were very over-sized. When I posed as a firefighter (Figure 4) for instance, the fireproof suit was huge on me and extremely hot. The chief firefighter was pleased that I could relate to how heavy and hot the suit was, and pointed out to me that we were nowhere near to a fire. He explained to me that firefighters, within a minute and a half of fire fighting, become dehydrated, because they lose so much fluid through perspiration.

In his uniform I felt quite empowered and serious. The 'power' of a uniform is traditionally associated with the 'male protector' and authority, and by taking on this symbol of 'male power', I felt empowered by the associations of heroism and valour,

which is ironic, because the suit was huge on me and it made me look like MC Hammer. While I felt empowered and serious hidden behind the outfit, in the photograph I appear laughable – directly the opposite of how I felt.

This opposition between how I felt and how I looked draws attention to the gap between perception and image, or experience and representation. The gap is the liminal space (as in a masquerade) where constructed conceptions such as individuality and insight intersect and are simultaneously suspended and reinstated. The impression that an oversized firefighter's uniform can empower me is a ridiculous notion. What the oversized uniform does is hide my own body, highlights my inability to fit into the role, and 'documents' the discrepancy in the visual association of the stereotype of firefighter. At the same time it would appear that it takes the camera to record this disempowering position, hence suggesting that the status of being the object of a camera's 'gaze', by its very mechanics, transforms the one photographed into a kind of hare in the headlights.

My inability to convincingly imitate the gestures and postures and to fit into the role in order to re-present the 'other' can be understood in the light of how even those with specific social identities themselves appear distanced from their roles when they are photographed in their socially-coded garments. To elaborate on this point I will look at Pieter Hugo's portraits of Judges in Botswana¹².

¹² For the purpose of this dissertation, I have selected the images cropped from head to waist as opposed to the head and shoulder crops of the same sitters. I have done this because of the subtle body language, which provides extra detail appropriate to my argument concerning the politics of representation.



Figure 5

Pieter Hugo *Honorable Justice Julia Sakardie-Mensah* (2005), Botswana,
Photograph, 100 x 100cm, Lambda Print, edition of 5
Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town



Figure 6

Pieter Hugo *Honorable Justice Unity Dow* (2005), Botswana,
Photograph, 100 x 100cm, Lambda Print, edition of 5
Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town



Figure 7

Pieter Hugo *Honorable Justice Moathodi Marumo* (2005), Botswana,
Photograph, 100 x 100cm, Lambda Print, edition of 5
Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

The photographs are larger-than-life-size prints of the *Honorable Justice Julia Sakardie-Mensah* (2005) (Figure 5), a middle aged woman wearing spectacles, holding onto the armrests of her chair; the *Honorable Justice Unity Dow* (2005) (Figure 6), an androgynous¹³ young woman turned slightly to the right with hands clasped holding a pair of white gloves; and the *Honorable Justice Moatlhodi Marumo* (2005) (Figure 7), an older man wearing a stern expression with his hands on his lap. All three sitters are seated in a high-backed judicial chair wearing red judicial robes with wig and white ruff.

Mieke Bal (1999:3), in expanding her theory of preposterous history in her book *Quoting Caravaggio*, interrogates the notion of who illuminates whom when all representation is engaged with what came before it. She (1999:3) notes that:

Like any form of representation, art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that ... engagement is an active reworking. It specifies what and how our gaze sees. Hence the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead.

The reworking of traditional methods of portraiture, as a means of confirming status and stature, is evident in Hugo's somehow anachronistic portraits of the judges enfolded in their conservative judicial robes and wigs. The images are a subtle yet poignant visual statement about the cultural binds of present authorities to a previous order. The contemporary judges are literally representing themselves – whether consciously or not – as traditional western judges through their mode of dress, which is based on British

¹³ When I first saw the photograph of Judge Unity Dow I automatically assumed she was a young man until a Botswanan national informed me that she is in fact female. It is interesting to note then, in the light of this dissertation, the androgynising effect of the 'male trappings' of uniforms of authority.

judicial garments dating at least as far back as the 18th Century. Law-Viljoen (2006a: 76-77) writes about this series that:

Each portrait presents an exquisite balance between the dignity and vulnerability, between the *office* of judge and the individuality of the person occupying that office... [T]he faces framed by long gray wigs above white ruffs, become *metaphors of office*, recalling portraits of kings and prime ministers, and [serve] as reminders of the legal system that is the colonial 'parent' to Botswana.

Law-Viljoen's text shows that these images are icons of power but they are also pictures of individual human beings and, by extension, are as open as anyone else to denigration by a viewer's look.

There is an uncertainty about the division of the past and the present authorities in the images, and the judges dressed in these garments have a multicultural and, by extension, a hybrid identity. This hybrid quality of the judges dressed in their ostentatious robes, wigs, and ruffs, which cover their entire bodies, exposing only their hands and faces, brings to mind Bal's (1999:3) reference to the Baroque art period's icon of drapery as creating a "hallucinatory relationship between past and present". Bal (1999:3) states that the quality of the Baroque drapery, which I would like to associate with the grandiose garments and accessories of the judges, "deprives perception of its object".

With the individual hidden behind iconic typing, I am visually guided away from a subjective engagement with an individual, and my judgment and interpretation of the image is shaped by what I know, or think I know, about judges. The photograph of Justice Moatlhodi Marumo doesn't make him relevant to me as a person or individual.

The robes guide the eye away from the individual and towards the stereotype of a judge – a person who wields legal power and authority in society. The removal of the individual reduces the person to a cipher – a sign for something else, namely, a ready-made role – and hence the judges become allegories for justice and not human beings.

I am therefore guided towards a universally iconic image and my attention is drawn to the judges' exaggerated sense of role-play. Žižek (1992) describes how if one tries to appear dignified or arouse respect, the effect is often to act like an impersonator. He (1992:77) notes that:

If I try consciously to appear dignified or to arouse respect, the result is ridiculous; the impression I make, instead, is that of a miserable impersonator. The basic paradox of these states is that although they are what matters most, they elude us as soon as we make them the immediate aim of our activity.

A judge should not have to feign dignity; it should be in the nature of a judge to be dignified. Dignity is therefore associated with a concept of essence. Žižek argues that a king or monarch is not a king because of what he does, but because of what he is. To be a king is to be the center of a network of significations organized around a 'Thing' which is beyond signification, and whose authority is invested not in positive aspects of a character but in the *performance* of authority, while "all others must 'invent' themselves, elaborate the content of their being by their activity" (Žižek 1991:84). That is, while 'others' must show identity through activity, a power figure like a judge need not show it, as an innate content, it should issue from him or her.

The performance of authority signified by the kind of dress a judge wears is an essential component of the symbolic ritual that turns a person into an authority (as in Hugo's works), and attempts to show dignity as an internal quality and not an external effect. The paradox, however, is that the symbols of office, such as dress, draw attention to the assumption of absolute objectivity and the power to absolve and condemn, but clothe an ordinary fallible person, hence creating a disjuncture between the signs of power and the assumed essence of an individual beneath the clothes and insignia. It is the exaggerated sense of role-play that hints at the lack of power in the essentiality of these beings and locates its centralization in the systems of law, order and instructions, creating the sense that the law as being Other is nothing but masquerade.

In other words, the extent to which the law speaks its authority through outward signs reveals that what its power rests on is not some kind of divine essence, but rather a network of signifiers that cohere and control only so long as those subject to it fail to look beyond the signifiers. Robes thus become a kind of prosthetic skin that veil the viewer's perception of individuals endowed with power or that obscure the fallibility of an ordinary person. In the third chapter I will explore notions of skin and prosthetic skin and the relationship to the liminal space 'opened' between subject and object, or viewer and image.

Chapter Three: SKIN

But since what I want to have captured is a delicate moral texture and not a mimicry, and since Photography is anything but subtle in the hands of the very greatest portraitists, I don't know how to work upon my skin from within (Barthes 1980:11).

If one returns to Hugo's image of the *Honorable Judge Unity Dow* (Figure 6), one might note that she holds a pair of white gloves in her hands. Symbolically, white gloves indicate prestige, loyalty, purity, modesty and protection against impure things. In the context of this image they have an ambiguous dual nature. They are in stark contrast with Judge Dow's hands, suggesting a difference between the individual and the judicial community. Her skin becomes indicative of her individuality and the gloves are symbolic of her distance and authority as a paragon of the community.

On one hand the gloves stand alone as judge; their value is ready-made with or without the presence of the individual. They function as a prosthetic skin she needs to wear to cover up her individuality in order to play out the role expected of her as judge. They mask her subjectivity so that she can appear as an objective arbitrator or censor. Žižek (1991:249) notes that:

Authority bases its charismatic power on symbolic ritual, on the form of the institution as such. The king, the judge, the president, and so on, can be personally dishonest, rotten, but when they adopt the insignia of Authority, they experience a kind of mystic transubstantiation: the judge no longer speaks as a person, it is Law itself which speaks through him.

The gloves thus mark the point at which the person is obscured by Law and his/her unique character is overlaid by type (of social role). On the other hand, however, the gloves are not being worn, and are flaccid in the hands of the law. The fact that the gloves have been removed creates an entry point into our perception of the gloves as items of masquerade. The judge's skin is exposed, arguably indicating her individuality and therefore her subjectivity. Thus, at one and the same time, Hugo points to the judge's symbolic function and to her humanity and fragility by way of signifiers involving actual skin and prosthetic skin.

Gercke (2005:8) describes the skin as the most important organ of communication, embodying "identity and estrangement, past and present, reality and recollection, experience ... wounds and healing". It is the osmotic seam between inside and outside, and between 'self' and 'other'. While the skin contains and hides one's inner physical structure, it is also very intimate and vulnerable. Gercke (2005:9) goes on to state that it is impossible to change the skin of the body; although attempts are made to save it through transplants and cosmetic preservation, the structure of the skin in the fingerprints and the lines of the hands determine biological identity. Mundi (2005:21) compares the structure of the skin to the source of history, a tablet on which all experience is inscribed.

Skin also falls prey to representation's inability to break from ready-known codes and connotations, for it has also been stereotyped and classed into 'black', 'white' and 'coloured', classifications which invoke certain preconceptions. Skin, in relation to types and roles, is therefore incapable of functioning as a marker for individuality. Hence the

gloves act as one stereotype overlaid by another and it could be argued that in Hugo's portraits the individuality of the judges is subordinate to the indices and tokens that their clothes and their skin convey. These indices generate a paradox and draw attention to the hybrid nature of the portraits, where individuality becomes an in-between – a floating or hidden signified not attached to any specific signifier.

Identity is therefore caught up in a liminal state. The term liminality is derived from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold (Key 2004:14). The term, most popularly used in psychology, refers to the limit between the conscious and the subliminal. Turner (1967:93) defines liminality as a marginal period or state, which he has applied to rituals characterized by Arnold van Gennep as "*rites de passage*" – rites found in all societies – which involve change and/or transitions between states. Van Gennep proposes that transitions are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*), and aggregation.

The liminal period is an ambiguous state, devoid of the status symbols of the old and not yet acquired as new. It is a level below where an awareness of something or a sensation of something ceases to be perceptible. Neither here nor there, a liminal state could manifest in situations that suspend an identity of one form or another until a new identity status emerges (Turner 1967:94), at which point it is no longer liminal. The space between the viewer and portrait¹⁴ is an ambiguous state where object meets subject and a discourse is entered into; it is the creation of a liminal zone within which transformations occur and where meaning is re-figured (Turner 1967:94).

¹⁴ This liminal status can further more be attributed to the spaces between photographer and camera and sitter, sitter and finished portrait



**Fikelephi Dlamini,
Durban
2005**



**Jaconius Mdletshe,
Durban
2004**



**Leon Nel,
Worchester
2005**



**Ntombizonke Madwayi,
Queenstown
2005**



**Justus Wilhelm Reitz,
Carnarvon
2005**



**Philani Vilakazi,
Claremont
2005**



**Pieter Hugo
Cape Town
2004**



**Owen Knibbs,
Observatory
2005**



**Comrade Morumo Molusi
Soweto
2006**

Figure 8

Pieter Hugo *Pieter Hugo* (2004), Cape Town, South Africa
Photograph, 100 x 50cm, Pigment ink on cotton-rag paper, edition of 3

Liminality involves hybridity, in-betweenness and lack of stability; but it also involves change, transformation, and can hence be associated with the shift from Apartheid to the post-Apartheid era. Virginia Mackenny (2003:14) refers to South Africa's post-apartheid era as utopian. Tentatively this era marks and represents the making of an ideal nation with a "relatively bloodless transition to democracy, which has set South Africa up as an exemplar to the world" (Mackenny 2003:14). But the utopian ideal can too easily become a mask obscuring the reality of the hybrid nature of South African society. Hugo's ongoing series *Looking Aside* (2003 – to date) (Figure 8) uncovers this masking by blatantly representing 'hybrid' and 'marginalized' types in society.

Homi Bhabha (1994:112) in his book *The Location of Culture* elaborates on notions of hybridity by stating that:

Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory – or, in my mixed metaphor, a negative transparency.

Hybridity is created by replication through mimicry and indicates a “trace of difference” (Bhabha 1994:115). Hugo’s series deals with notions of liminality and hybridity through the indicator of skin as what lies between the body’s interior and exterior environment. *Looking Aside* is a series of frontal portraits of people afflicted with albinism, old age, blindness or skin disorders. The sitters are set against a white backdrop, are under the glare of even lighting, and are facing the camera with a relative lack of expression¹⁵, and this presentation entices or insists that the viewer look directly at the sitters’ faces (look them ‘in the eye’). The images are intended to be a direct record of the information constituted by the facial features of a person and are not aimed to be indicative of their nature or individuality¹⁶.

Hugo’s approach therefore appears to be clear; he is looking at people with adversities with an open penetrative gaze. He is not looking at or for their nature or personality but rather their physical conditions, and he openly invites the viewer to face this ‘other’ directly. He has exhibited these photographs and the portrayed people have given their consent to be photographed by posing and facing directly into the lens. I as viewer am therefore given the license to examine this ‘type’ of person for as long a period and as closely as I deem necessary. I am also invited to look at these images in a controlled and neutral environment – a gallery, book or website – and at a safe distance from the portrayed people. I can view them privately in a public space.

¹⁵ The way in which these images are photographed elicits a comparison to passport photos.

¹⁶ Hugo’s approach is reminiscent of colonialist recordative photography, the sort that set out to record types of ‘tribes’ as a means of anthropologically mapping out the configurations of Africa (Coombes, 1994:96). They were used in an ethnographic context as a device to demonstrate physiognomic characteristics amongst different ‘tribal’ affiliations (Coombes, 1994:136).

Hugo is drawing attention to the power of the gaze and by extension, through standardizing the composition by maintaining the same distance from the sitters in all the photographs, is evoking the presence and the gaze of the photographer. Usually the photographer's role is visually silent or absent but in this series Hugo has inserted a self-portrait (Figure 8). He has no overt physical adversities; he has piercing eyes and a determined expression. By placing himself in the line of a loaded gaze he is acknowledging the power and the contradictions that beset the photographer in the process of representation.

Hugo is receptive to the ambiguities and the tensions between the attraction and aversion of photographic portraits, and by including himself into the body of work he has become both the object and the subject of the gaze – of his own gaze as photographer and of the viewer's gaze. Krog (2003:1) in an email to Hugo writes about this entangled gaze and the issue of seeing the photographer as both object and subject:

And who is this?
 He who sees with both sharp eyes?
 To whom does he look so calculatingly?
 Who was standing in for him that he could look at himself?
 Did he focus on an empty spot, set the photograph in motion and then run to stand in front? Did he ask someone that he knows very well to take the photo? Or did he ask any stranger in the street?

How does the photographer become the photo?
 But because I look at him, as he has looked out at himself and as he wants to be looked at by me, the discomfort is gone.

We are in a game.

The camera is gone. The photographer has become harmless.

Harmless, but not innocent.

There are not instructions, only lots of action.

I could turn into the voyeur if one managed to discard the notion that he is actually still doing all the looking work.

Although I am looking at him and he is not aware of it, his eyes have the expression of the one who knows, that a second ago he was looking at the looked-at-one to be looked at.

The only agency left is to turn the page.

Antjie Krog *What are you looking at?*

Krog's line, "We are in a game", refers to the kind of discourse between the viewer and the image that I have previously indicated with Elkins' notions of an entangled gaze – the dialectical nature of looking – and hints at the word 'play', which allows for a lack of inhibition or definition, and creates the ability to enter into a play of definitions. Hence what is suggested is a type of masquerade, where looking is a game, and not a vocation or something unilateral – both are involved as players – viewer and viewed.

By including himself in his series Hugo inverts the gaze and tampers with the usual power relations involved with photography. In my own practice in *Roles* I literalize the inverted gaze and the photographer/sitter relations by operating bodily between the two positions. The space I occupy and the 'game' I enter into in produces a liminal, in-between space, one that can be likened to the liminality of identity in masquerade. I do not become the person I photograph and the subject-photographer does not become me. By staying in control of the shot, even though I hand over the activity of taking it to someone else, I still do "all the looking work", hence we cannot actually reverse roles. The only thing we can do is engage in a visual relationship along the axis, so to speak, of the gaze.

This inversion of the gaze evokes Barthes' (1980:14) statement that when he looks at a photograph of himself, he realizes that, "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming object". The split that Barthes refers to, between the object and the subject, confronts us with the anxieties involved in the dialectics of seeing and interpreting a portrait and points to the dialectical nature and liminal status of the 'self' and 'other', and of the artist and model.

Roles highlights the already carnivalesque character of looking by making identity unsteady and polymorphous, and foregrounds the instability and hybridity associated with masquerade. The viewer's identity, as viewer, is therefore challenged in a way similar to Krog's response to Hugo's self-portrait involving the question: "am I viewer or am I viewed?" As the 'chief' masker, what I am really doing is holding out a mask to the viewer and making the offering that if you want to look at me, you'll need this – a role – the viewer's role.

I would therefore compare the photographic print – a sheath of light-sensitive paper exposed to light, which burns a mark onto the surface, leaving behind a trace of occurrence – to skin. The photograph for that reason acts as a kind of prosthetic skin, a mask, that the viewer adorns when looking into the face of a portrait. This portrait-mask, shielding the viewers' individuality, allows the viewer to enter into a hypothetical state of parody and simulation while entering into a liminal zone where he/ she can come to grips with the heterogeneous and hybrid nature of the 'other'. Bhabha (1994:116) notes that:

The paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside. In the productivity of power, the boundaries of authority – its reality effects – are always besieged by ‘the other scene’ of fixations and phantoms.

He is referring to the threat of the ‘other’, which challenges the identity of the ‘self’. ‘Wearing’ the portrait-mask, the viewer enters into a masquerade-state of simulating a utopia of equality between him-/herself and the image of the ‘other’. The viewer thus becomes another masker, protected from a direct, unmediated encounter with what is being seen.

What I have shown in *Roles* is that the interrogation of identity ends up manufacturing more roles, masks and skins – more surfaces within which one may lose any stable image of ‘self’. What remains in the end is the mask, the stereotypical butcher, baker; the stereotypical photographer, the stereotypical viewer, all captured, ultimately, on the prosthetic surface or skin of the photograph – a limen between physical reality and the field of representation.

Conclusion

In my own process, in *Roles*, of self-reflexively entering the liminal space that both separates and intertwines the 'self' and the 'other' and the photographer and the sitter, I have attempted, through performance and imitation, to explore, push and attempt to (re)define the power relations involved in photography, and by extension the power relations in identity construction. The portrait as sign – of an individual transformed into a type and/or icon through representation – poses the question of what constitutes the individual, other than the dress that supposedly reveals who he or she is. For example, once turned into a representation – especially an iconic one – is an 'actual' judge any more of a judge than I would be masquerading in judge's clothes?

Pieter Hugo's images serve as an example of how concepts of identity are often ready-made and how, through the role-play of identity, hybrid images are produced. If so much of signification is ready-made, then portraits, especially of 'stereotypical' individuals, are absorbed by society as classed, raced, sexed and gendered representations of subjects. The viewer, caught up within the complex and fraught operations of representation, becomes entangled in a subjective space full of projection, identification and classification. In order to come to terms with being confronted by this other, the viewer enters into a hypothetical state of role-play akin to a masquerade. The process of looking at portraits therefore becomes an inversion of 'order', and the viewer temporarily overturns the authority of his/her subjective gaze – which involves a degree of

dissembling through the adoption of 'masks' – as a means of coming to terms with what he/she is confronted with.

Attempting to invert various roles in society and literalize the dialectics between photographer, sitter and viewer, in *Roles*, I have highlighted the open-endedness of interpretation – which is more of a process than the act of reaching a final goal – and have indicated the hybridity of contemporary human identity.

At the same time I must emphasize that, although an attempt was made to cross the boundaries of the stereotype, and to challenge the authority of identity construction - just as in a masquerade – my own identity, and the identity of the other person was reinstated. As soon as we began the reversal process, we entered a topsy-turvy world of cross-dressing and once we had changed back to 'ourselves', there was no proof of change except the trace of the photograph. What was emphasized was the performativity of identity and signification, but at no point did we, in any literal sense, swap identities. The performance was more about difference than sameness, and about how the exchange of identities can only occur in a space 'aside' or 'between' – in a temporary and transitional space that is liminal and hybrid, productive and transformative, but ultimately no more than a kind of extended handshake.

My inability to 'transform' myself into the role of the 'other' indicates the inability of representation to effect actual transformation of the 'self' into the 'other' – a feat we only usually associate with magic and science fiction – which in turn emphasizes the

incapacity of the process to dissolve or reverse the standard power dynamics in photography. In other words I have performed the 'other's' role theatrically in order to reveal how that role is not essentially what or who the 'other' *is* – just as I am not the stereotype, so too is the 'other' not that stereotype. With this inability to record and represent individuality it can therefore be concluded that the portrait, made up of codes, signs and symbols is a cipher, the 'cathode ghost', so to speak, of the original sitter.

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