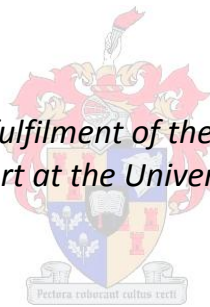


Shape me into your idea of home:
Representations of longing in contemporary
photography and video practice

by
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Master of Visual Art at the University of Stellenbosch*



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Declaration

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Abstract

This study is motivated by an interest in a host of idiosyncratically interrelated phenomena that can be understood, in my view, as symptomatic of a primary interest in representing experiences of affect, loss, alienation and objectification of an “other”, which in turn, necessitates a critical interrogation of the notion of self. These phenomena include notions of the body (animal and human), private and public spaces, voyeurism, transgression, desire, fetishization, sentimentality and most critically, nostalgia as understood through experiences of homesickness and *heimwee*.

My focus is on the affective potential of contemporary lens-based (photographic and video) art. I approach this study by way of three central ideas: the longing for home (the relationship between self/space); the longing for the body (the relationship between body/self); and the longing for the other (the relationship between self/other). I make use of psychoanalytic and feminist theory, as well as theoretical interpretations of photography and screen-based media, in the broader context of visual art and culture, to frame my discussion. As such, this study draws on the theoretical work of Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag to introduce basic concepts such as the relationship between photography and memory, and develops these to include ideas of the gaze, self and alienation from the self read through Judith Butler and Jacques Lacan’s image of the mirror phase; home and homesickness read through Martin Heidegger, Sigmund Freud’s notion of *das unheimlich* (uncanny) and Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection; and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s objectification of the animal-other.

This study is intimately linked with, and critically informed by my personal artistic practice, which focuses specifically on the photographic or filmic representation (projection) of separation, displacement and longing for an absent other (home, partner & domestic animal). I discuss my own work relation to selected examples by artists including Shizuka Yokomizo, Sophie Calle, Penny Siopis and Jo Ractliffe, among others, framing the art object and related processes as cathartic, mnemonic and talismanic; acknowledging the paradoxical aspect of photography as simultaneously distancing and acting as a trace of the real; and analysing the evocative (metaphorical or conceptual) allusions made possible by lens-based processes and their presentation as print and projection, image and screen.

Opsomming

My navorsing is gemotiveer deur 'n belangstelling in 'n menigte idiosinkratiese onderling verbonde verskynsels wat myns insiens beskou kan word as simptome van 'n primêre belangstelling daarin om ervarings van affek, verlies, aliënasië en objektivering van 'n "ander" weer te gee. My fokus sal op die verband tussen kontemporêre kuns en affek wees.

Hierdie onderling verbonde verskynsels sluit in: die self en nosies van "die ander"/aliënasië, identiteit, die liggaam, die verbeelding; veiligheid, die huis, huishoudelike ruimte/plek/ontheemdheid; beheer, grense, oortreding, voyeurisme en geweld; verlange, nostalgie (heimwee), misnoegdheid; verlies, gemis, rou, woede, depressie met inbegrip van melancholie; liefde, romanse, sentimentaliteit, kitsch, besit; begeerte, obsessie, objektivering, tot fetisj maak (met inbegrip van objektivering van die huisdier). Ek benader 'n bespreking van bogenoemde verskynsel deur diskoerse van psigoanalise en feminisme binne die raamwerk van my navorsing.

Ek beoog om, met behulp van psigoanalitiese teoretiese verwysings, in hierdie verhandeling die verlange na die huis (die verband tussen self/ruimte, hoofstuk een), die verlange na die liggaam (die verband tussen liggaam/self, hoofstuk twee) en die verlange na die ander (die verband tussen self/ander, hoofstuk drie) te verken. Ek sal voorbeelde van kontemporêre fotografie en videokuns, asook voorbeelde bespreek om kontekstuele verwysing na 'n bespreking van die uitoefening van my eie kreatiewe kuns te verskaf. Ek sal die uitbeelding (projeksie) van skeiding, ontheemding en verlange na 'n afwesige ander (huis, maat en huisdier) bespreek.

Die veld van my teoretiese ondersoek sal put uit sleutelteorieë van Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze en Felix Guattari, Martin Heidegger en Judith Butler ten einde basiese begrippe in gebruik te kan neem soos die verband tussen fotografie en geheue (die kunsvoorwerp/proses as suiweringsmiddel, mnemoniek en besitter van bonatuurlike, veral beskermende magte), paradokse in fotografie, uitbeelding en verlange/aliënasië, huis en heimwee (die bonatuurlike, ellende), kontemporêre kuns en affek, die starende blik en die objektivering van die dier-ander en die stemmingsvolle (metafories of konseptueel) sinspelings wat deur fotografiese prosesse en aanbieding (druk en projeksie, afbeelding en skerm) moontlik gemaak word.

For Keila



(Thank you Katherine Bull and Kathryn Smith)

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Preface

Mornings are broken like promises of eternal love. Our mornings. Like your father's crystal wine glasses that you never got from his family after he died. This is the month of death and mourning about that which is torn/broken/burning. My heart. Your back. The dog's teddy. (Take from this wine, it is my blood) Everything is a temporary arrangement.

Sliding into routine manipulated life. Digital numbers determine how attached we have become to one another. I have a face you can measure the day by. But you never see.

Wake. Feed the dog. Brush my teeth. Watch you while you sleep. Everything has its time and now is not the time for this. Mourning. I kiss your neck and you pull away.

Dogmatic images of the holy expectations you have of me seeps from your mouth. Seeps from you while you are sleeping. A margin of error does not exist for me. I am (your) Madonna/whore.

We are a match made in purgatory. You punish me for everything that's been done wrong unto you before I came. But Bashert* is Bashert. Or not? Your annunciation of me. I cannot call you Gabriel. You used to make a religion of my body.

Now you only immaculately conceive words like "fuck you" in your mouth.

(Take from this bread, it is my flesh)

*Bashert, (Yiddish: באַשערט), is a Yiddish word that means "destiny". It is often used in the context of one's divinely foreordained spouse or soul mate.

The first memory I have is of when I was three years old. I was in an empty room of a house we had stayed in and keeping me company was our family cat. My mother was busy packing our belongings into boxes. We were in the process of moving to Breedsdoep. I had been locked in the room with the cat to keep both of us from disappearing before the moving-company arrived. The sun made blocks of light on the carpet and the cat was lying on her side flicking her tail with unrest and digesting the tranquiliser tablet that had been shoved down her throat minutes earlier.

This was the first time that I can remember feeling *Heimwee*. At that moment I wasn't sure what it was

that I was feeling. It overwhelmed me as I ran my finger along the indent on the carpet where our furniture had been. - Vestiges of a once inhabited room. The house was suddenly not my home anymore. It was just an empty building.

My memories before Keila (my pet dog) are besieged with collages of inappropriate physical interaction.

I will elaborate:

I used to tell myself that I was part of a twin, separated at birth, in order to make sense of what I was feeling. I used to tell this to other people as well. I was four years old when I came up with

the idea, and what I was feeling at the time was an immense emotional void, an emptiness, a longing to belong. It was only when I was sixteen that a family member informed me that my mother had suffered from "twin embolisation syndrome" when she was pregnant with me. (twin embolisation syndrome or vanishing twin syndrome is a fetus in a multi-gestation pregnancy which dies in utero and is then partially or completely absorbed by the mother or the other twin.)

This longing didn't necessarily make me a weak person, but it did make me susceptible to influence from those around me. I allowed people to shape me into who they thought I should be, and what they wanted

me to represent to them. Not because I wasn't strong enough to establish a sense of self / identity on my own, but because it didn't really inconvenience me that much to shape myself in order to fit other people's expectations and preferences. Perhaps it was a manner by which I tried to persuade a physical presence in order to fill the void.

For most of my childhood I spent the windy seasons inside hiding behind windows. Some days I would sit by the window and just stare at the wind moving through the trees outside. Even though I was at home, I was still longing for home.

My mother called this feeling Heimwee. (Roughly translated into English, this means Homesickness or Longing) She typically characterised the symptoms of having Heimwee with by staring out the window on windy days and longing for something, but not being sure what exactly it is that you are longing for. She used to say "Ek verlang na iemand wat ek nie ken nie".

As a child I would get Heimwee quite often, and it was during these times that my mother kept me close by her side. She would play a record of her favorite music (usually a form of country) and she encouraged me to draw to help the feeling pass. Perhaps my mother's anxiousness to keep me

close came from a fear that I might run off and look/search for the "thing" that I was longing for. Perhaps encouraging me to draw was her way of distracting my attention, away from the longing. As a result I associate my creativity with a longing for an absent object/other. Heilmann equated creative thinking.

At the age of sixteen I allowed boys to touch me in ways that the other girls would not allow. I never initiated any touching because I had once seen a movie where a man said to his girlfriend that she was clingy when she tried to give him a hug. The way in which he looked at her made me

feel like I would hate myself if any man ever looked at me in that way, so I refrained from touching anyone. Being touched, however, gave me a sense of closeness, which I knew I was yearning for but could not yet explain.

When I found my pet dog Keila I was very confused. She demanded touch and physical attention, and I was not used to displaying affection and touching back. I had never learned how. I remember holding her and suddenly being terrified that I was going to suffocate her to death because of what she had awakened in me.

I wake with pressure on my joints. Comfortable rolls over and wags her tail. Open eyes means no more secret sneaky sock adventures. Put it down. Spit it out. Leave it alone. No. I don't like guava juice and you thought it was pear.

Black sheen gulps up liters of water only to dispose of later on my green carpet. I'm leaving it behind when I move out. With its holes where the plastic melted right through when my home caught on fire three years ago. I didn't lose much, except a watch that my father brought from Israel when I was five years old. She steals things with self approval from my jewelry box. Things that hold sentimental value for me. And when I take it back the look on her face makes my heart break. The hair on her back is combed by my love.

Everything in boxes. Moving means categorising things like pieces of paper with phone numbers on. And bottle caps. And stray tampons. And photographs of you. Can't bring myself to throw them away. Can't find space for them. Put them in a shoe box hoping they will disappear. But not completely. This is the last time I will write in this house.

Leave the tear stained carpet behind. Leave my fingerprints and skin flakes. Keila pees on the carpet before I close the door behind me. This house is not our home anymore; it's just an empty building.

Introduction

My study is motivated by an interest in a host of idiosyncratically interrelated phenomena that can be understood, in my view, as symptomatic of a primary interest in representing experiences of affect, loss, alienation and objectification of an 'other'. These interrelated phenomena include: the self and notions of "the other"/alienation, identity, the body, the imagination; safety, the home, domestic space/place/displacement; control, boundaries, transgression, voyeurism & violence; longing, nostalgia (homesickness), dissatisfaction; loss, lack, mourning, anger, depression including melancholia; love, romance, sentimentality, kitsch, possession; desire, obsession, objectification, fetishization, (including objectification of the domestic animal). I am approaching a discussion of the abovementioned phenomenon through discourses of psychoanalysis and feminism in the framework of my study.

I will attempt to engage with my desire to unravel the specific mechanisms that have constructed my idiosyncratic worldview and in turn, my understanding of lack and loss.

"In today's world more and more appeals are being made to our adaptational capacities. The time of living and dying in the place where we were born in is long past. Current educational, professional, and – not in the least – recreational activities take us away far from our home environment and bring us into contact with other places and other cultures for shorter or longer periods. International exchange programs, dispatchment movements, migration, and international tourism make us spend less time in our familiar environment than we ever did before. Being separated from the familiar environment may induce a reaction complex with characteristic accompanying emotional, somatic, and behavioral elements and cognitions that may be labeled as 'homesickness.'" (Vingerhoets, 1996: 1)

I intend to explore, using psychoanalytic theoretical references, the longing for home (the relationship between self/space in Chapter One), the longing for the body (the relationship between body/self in Chapter Two) and the longing for the other (the relationship between self/other in Chapter Three). I will discuss examples of contemporary photography and video art in order to give contextual reference for a discussion of my own creative art practice.

Art has multiple levels of engagement and intersections. It is mostly paradoxical and ambivalent, which can be understood as the locus of its critical potential. It can simultaneously reify and critique aspects of its subjects. As an emotive subject/artist, I have a strong desire to belong, and I recognise this desired belonging in the work of other artists using photographic medium. The main premise of this thesis is to demonstrate how photography can function as a *distancing* device, but also as mnemonic and talismanic device.¹ Thinking about photography in this way inserts it into a history of similar devices, such as *aide memoires*, *memento mori*, relics, idols, charms, amulets and other mnemonic and/or protective objects and by extension, the act of making/recording becomes more ritualistic in function than, say, conceptual or experimental.

My aim is to investigate certain aspects of representations of alienation in my own work as well as those of other artists who use the media of photography and video. I will explore the use of photography as a tool to represent and make sense of the displacement and alienation from the desired belonging mentioned above. The main premise of this thesis is to demonstrate how photography can be seen as a vehicle by which the viewer is simultaneously removed from *and* transported to the content of the photograph. I intend to conclude my arguments by establishing that this vacillation forms the roots of homesickness and longing, which in turn initiates the cycle once again in an attempt to alleviate the homesickness by looking at a photograph, or taking a photograph.

The scope of my theoretical investigation will draw on key theories from Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Sigmund Freud, Jaques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Martin Heidegger and Judith Butler to introduce basic concepts such as the relationship between photography and memory (the art object/process as cathartic, mnemonic and talismanic), paradoxes in photography, representation and longing/alienation, home and homesickness (the uncanny, abjection), contemporary art and affect, the gaze and the objectification of the animal-other and the evocative (metaphorical or conceptual) allusions made possible by photographic processes and presentation (print and projection, image and screen).

Roland Barthes theorised the relationship between death and photography in his publication *Camera Lucida* (1981). He conceptualised *Camera Lucida* whilst pining for his dead mother over a

¹ This is not only true of much photography but of many artworks in other media as well. As I work principally in photo-based media, my use of the term 'photography' presupposes a photo-based artwork in the context of this study.

photograph of her taken before she passed away. The photograph is a signifier of that which once was, bearing witness to an event or person who has passed on. The photograph attempts to divert our attention back to past events and circumstances that cannot be relived, except through the memory that the photograph evokes. We keep photographs to be reminded of those who have died, or those moments which have passed. The snapshot takes the object out of *real* time and places it in a context which is immobile and silent. The combination of immobility and silence is descriptive of death (Metz, 1984), and the act of *taking* a photograph points to the act of freezing the object in a deathlike state within the image.

The snapshot preserves fragments of the past to aid in remembering. Philippe Dubois (1983) explains that in life (and therefore film and video, as they appear to unfold in similar time sequences as life and seem to be free from being captured within silence and immobility) “one piece of time is indefinitely pushed backwards by the next”. He goes on to say that “the fetish, too, means both loss (symbolic castration) and protection against loss” (in Metz, 1984: 84). Instead of remembering that which has passed, that which is dead, Metz suggest that the photograph serves, along with the reminder that the object once was, that the object is now dead and lost.

An inescapable longing and a fear of loss drives my art practice: the knowledge that everything around me will die, and that everything will come to an end, that nothing is fixed. My anticipated longing surrounds my working process. By *anticipated longing* I refer to the longing that is to come when things (people/plants/animals/memories) die. Visually imagined longings of emotional and physical displacements are the foundations of my creative process. I tend to develop a neurotic fear of losing something/someone and I become obsessively engaged with imagining (ad nauseam) the pain and sorrow I will experience if this fear were to be realised. The result is a counter-obsession with the *present* and clinging desperately to the object of this imagined loss. In a culture framed by loss (of identity, of land, of dignity, of nation, of belonging, of home) my work feeds on my immediate surroundings, and my cultural influences and nostalgia. I use photographic and video media to obsessively document every heightened moment of emotion and intimacy, the whole experience of the counter-obsession. Photography and video serve as a reminder of the emotion that I felt at the time, and they are documented evidence of my affective experience, so that when the object is lost I have proof to say that *I feared this day would come*.

Photography and video also serve as a romanticised form of *memory of or remembering* that which has been lost. The fact that I anticipate the loss of the object and engage in creating these

photographic and video works to aid in my remembrance means that I am already shaping the way that I will remember things in the future. I am determining the way in which I will experience homesickness in the future. The act of creatively representing homesickness in photography and video forms the foundation of my capability to remember and to recall memory of the *home* (be it space, self or other) that I am longing for. Photography and video remember for me, but the representations of longing determine how I will remember. I therefore construct my own memory by my representations of homesickness. As a form of art, photography not only serves as a container for my memory/constructed memory, but as a showcase of my experiences. It becomes a manner by which I communicate the emotion experienced at the instance of constructing a memory. The multiple parallel levels of engaging with art makes it possible for the viewer to gain a memory and experience from the work that they can translate into their own, even if this message was not what I had intended to communicate².

The technology of photography and video as a medium also has an impact on our perception of the image made by the camera. The development of digital cameras has made it “easier” for a person with no photographic experience to take decent photographs. Our perception and understanding of the photographic image changes dramatically in the sense that the image is now immediately accessible³ and can be altered to satisfy the photographer’s vision or the subject’s desired self-perception. The image is no longer a precious result of a scientific chemical process, but rather of a disposable, ephemeral action that does not merit intense regard, but rather denotes itself as something that is taken for granted.

In my opinion photographs always want to tell us something. The objective of a photograph is to communicate a story that is composed using a visual form of language. The written text can be

² My work is located in deeply personal experiences, which I attempt to draw out by photographic means, to consider them critically and ‘outside’ myself. I am drawn to photographic representation through its paradox, that is, its ability to act both as a trace of the ‘real’, and simultaneously stress the distance between the maker/viewer and what is represented in the photographic image. But this is a double-bind, and what is personally significant may indeed signify as sentimental or overly romanticised. This is not my intention and it is not what I see when I look at it. However, it pleases me that a viewer may project themselves onto /into the work, bringing to it a different set of influences to mine (social, economical, emotional), which will inevitably frame their understanding of the art object/process.

³ By “immediately accessible” I am referring to the LCD screens that most (if not all) digital cameras possess that make the image that has been taken immediately available for viewing, as opposed to older methods such as film where a waiting period for developing creates a gap in time between the occurrence and the viewing of the photographic documentation of the occurrence. The digital camera also removed the restriction on the number of “exposures” that the photographer was limited to and increased the number of photographs that could be taken.

present in the photograph, but it is not in this case the predominant way of communicating the message. Differently from text or film, the photograph communicates in a mute and suggestive way, creating an ambiance of mystery and poetry. The mute or silent nature of photography represents the focal point of the medium's ethical possibilities and its responsibility to the *truth*. Although we can say that the photograph has an obvious claim to be representing reality (in the sense that at first glance it appears to be a literal copy of reality), its authenticity as an "exact copy" of reality can be questioned. The claim that photography represents reality should rather be understood as meaning that it represents the photographer's interpretation of the *reality* that he may find himself in. This is where artistic representation and elucidation come into play and is something that I would like to focus on in my exploration of examples in the chapters that follow. I believe that it is artistic interpretation that gives meaning to the photograph and sets it apart from merely being an exact copy of reality. I want to focus on this element in the examples that I will discuss. A photograph is not a "natural phenomenon" as generally perceived (because of its apparent likeness to reality), but rather a socially and culturally constructed entity, a vehicle for communicating a message rather than a neutral re-presentation of reality.

Susan Sontag writes that "Through the camera people become customers or tourists of reality" (1978: 110). The words "customers" and "tourists" are indicative of a *secondary* experience of reality. Even though this secondary experience of a represented reality becomes a fictive construction, it does serve a purpose of awakening memory or the consciousness of memory formation within the viewer of the photograph.

I want to return to the practical and technological aspects of photography and how they influence our interpretation of the photograph, as mentioned before. With the development of digital photography and the addition of LCD screens to cameras, the image is immediately available to the photographer or subject for scrutiny after the encounter of *taking the photograph*. In my opinion, the focus has shifted from the actual taking of the photograph, to the result (quick-to-view digital image). I remember my father's advice when handing me my first 35mm camera (before digital cameras were readily available) that one should always take more than one photograph of an encounter just in case the first one does not develop. The result was a counter-obsession with taking numerous photographs of the same thing/encounter/scene just to ensure that the moment was indeed captured. My obsessive photographing is evident in the work *Subspace I II III IV V*, 2010 discussed in Chapter Three, where a sequence of 35mm film is presented and obsessive representation becomes apparent in the same image repeated on the spool of film. This underlines

the ephemeral nature of photography and perhaps gives context to the need for catching a fleeting moment/memory. Unless working with film rolls, digital technology also allows for multiple images to be captured relatively inexpensively, viewed immediately, and edited later. Film photography, on the other hand, calls for more consideration in composing an image as there are only a limited number of exposures on a roll of film and it can become expensive to print the images.

Another thing to consider is the way in which a photograph is presented after the act of capturing the image. There are many ways to interpret a photograph merely because of the way in which the photographer chooses to present it. The technological developments in photography grant us the means to execute obsessions with the lost object with more precision as they allow for multiple unlimited imaging, as mentioned before. Photography humours the mourning for the lost object in that it aids in the obsessive documentation of replacement objects (my obsessive photographing of my pet dog Keila, for example). We take photographs of the things that we love in order not to forget them once they are gone.

Sigmund Freud theorised in his 1917 essay *Mourning and Melancholia* (1955) that longing and mourning for a lost loved one is the self's way of ensuring survival. The object-libido (which is attached to the lost loved one) wants to join him/her in death, but the narcissistic ego-libido "claims the right to live" (in Metz, 1984: 85). I will focus on the affect that longing and the representation of longing within photographic and video media have on a subject, and how this contributes to alienation and homesickness (whilst simultaneously providing an outlet for homesickness to be represented in visual culture).

"The work of mourning, as Freud describes it here, entails a kind of hyperremembering, a process of obsessive recollection during which the survivor resuscitates the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual absence with an imaginary presence" (Clewell, 2002 44). Freud's argument is that remembering is the foundation of overcoming longing. Photography aids in remembering in the sense that it visually remembers for the subject what the subject has already forgotten. It stands as an artefact of the past and therefore is a cog in the wheel of memory.

The *hyperremembering* which Freud speaks of can also be translated into obsessive taking of photographs. This desire to take photographs is driven by the fear of forgetting. And the fear of forgetting in turn creates the *imaginary presence* that Freud is speaking of.

Heimwee is a word that I learned from my mother when I was a young girl. The context in which she used it would be naming an inexplicable feeling of longing and nostalgia, even if there was nothing to long for. *Heimwee* is a word in Afrikaans borrowed from German, also prevalent in Dutch, which expresses a melancholy sadness or grief. The origin of this melancholy, however, is usually unknown, and this is what sets the meaning of the word apart from nostalgia. The literal translation of *heimwee* equates it with the English *homesickness*. I specifically link *heimwee* to nostalgia⁴ in that both terms describes a yearning or longing for that which once were, or that which is no more, or that which has never been.

I link the feeling of *heimwee*/homesickness with the fragmented self; that is to say, a longing to be unified with the represented/reflected other. I will examine to what extent *heimwee* can be interpreted as a driving force behind my creative art practice and compare this with the creative practice of other artists.

In his chapter “The Homesickness Concept: Questions and Doubts” Vingerhoets (1997) mentions the clinical psychologist Bremer, who distinguishes between two types of homesickness, which he calls *the cat-type homesickness and the dog-type homesickness*. He explains that because cats are viewed as generally by nature forming stronger attachments to places and physical environments, the cat-type is associated with the longing for physical home spaces. Dogs, on the other hand, form more of an attachment to their owners and are not so much concerned with being separated from familiar spaces,⁵ as long as they are in close proximity to their owners.⁶

In Chapter One I intend to look at the cat-type of homesickness and how it is presented in contemporary art practice, specifically focusing on photography and video work. I intend to show that homesickness is not only related to literal longing for a space, but rather tied to a more intricate process of establishing identity within a contextual place. I will give a definition of home and contextualise it with a discussion drawing on Martin Heidegger’s essay on “Building, Dwelling,

⁴ From the 17th to the late 19th century, nostalgia was considered to be a medical condition which was believed to lead to illness and, in some cases, death. Nostalgia is provoked by an object or process (art/photography?) reminding the individual of the past, usually in an idealised form.

⁵ Of course, this is a broad generalisation and takes into consideration what is deemed *normal behaviour* to the species as a whole. It does not take into consideration issues around territoriality, etc.

⁶ The owner becomes synonymous for home.

Thinking" (1978). I will also discuss the transgression of boundaries within photography relating specifically to issues around voyeurism, hospitality and photographic representations of the same.

I will consider home as an abstract set of emotions (a feeling of belonging) and home as an important place where most of identity formation takes place. I will also talk about how home can be seen as an extension of our identities using Jacques Lacan's mirror stage (Lacan 1964). I will focus on the space between the body and the reflected body.

I intend then to look at how displacement from the home, and therefore the longing for home, is represented in contemporary art practice by using Julia Kristeva's (1941) notion of abjection as analogy to the displacement from home (the subject suffering from homesickness as being abjected from home). Here I will also discuss issues surrounding *heimwee* and my own work.

The word "uncanny" is directly translated from the German word *unheimlich*, which literally means the "unhomely" (Freud 1919). I will use Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny to examine how home can be both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. I will look at how home, as a supposed site of comfort and safety, can transform into a site of pacifying and aggravating anxiety, encouraging displacement and disconnection. The examples which I will discuss in the light of this theoretical premise is Shizuka Yokomizo's *Dear Stranger*, 1999, Sophie Calle's *L' Hotel*, 1981 and Penny Siopis's *My lovely day*, 2005. My own works that I will discuss are *Show me yours*, 2005 – 2010, *Travelogue*, 2005, *Heimwee*, 2006, *Even the birds (are leaving)*, 2006 and *The curse*, 2006.

In Chapter Two I discuss the body as our most important experience of home, second only to the womb. I focus on the mirror phase and alienation from the body (Lacan 1966), resulting in homesickness for the body. I look at transgression of boundaries in terms of access to the body (sexual violence) and the impact that removing the body from the home space has on the body itself. I look at how this can result in the most traumatic crisis a person can endure, a loss of identity and subjectivity, by using Judith Butler's *Giving an account of oneself* (Butler 2005). I discuss the gaze within photographic practice, and the knowledge you obtain about yourself through others (and the lens). I again use Kristeva's notion of the abject to investigate our abjection from the womb (a condition of perpetual displacement), and then at our bodies as a site of the unhomely, something

that is both familiar and strange to us.⁷ I examine photographic representation of the body, and how it contributes to alienation and longing.

The examples that I discuss in the context of this theoretical framework are Chien-Chi Chang, *The Chain*, 1998; Sophie Calle, *The Sleepers*, 1980; Doreen Southwood, *Slipway*, 2002; Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*, 2002; and Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord*, 1993 – 1995. These works are discussed in relation to a selection of my own work including *All this fucking trouble just to get a response from you*, 2006; *Gilad Hockman*, 2006 and *ToGetHer*, 2006.

In Chapter Three I focus on the relationship between the self and the other, specifically the animal other. I use Lacan's notion of the desire for the "lost object" (Lapsley 2006: 75) to place this relationship in context. I discuss anthropomorphism and look at animal transformation into human and human transformation into animal. I use Freud's notion of the uncanny to elaborate on the affect that this transformation has for the viewer. I then discuss the transgression of boundaries, the disappearance of boundaries and how this affects identity formation and alienation. I focus on issues surrounding ownership, and investigate power relationships between the self and the animal other.

I look at the animal other as a fetishistic object and explore how this *object of desire* is represented as something that needs to be consumed in order for the self to sustain its existence. The work that I discuss in the context of this theoretical premise is *Cremaster 3*, 2002, a film by Matthew Barney, Francis Alÿs's photographic work *Sleepers II*, 2001, Sithembale Komani's photographic work for the Umlilo Photographers' Association exhibition in 2002 *Untitled*, 2002, Jo Ractliffe's *Crossroads*, 1986; *Guess Who Loves You*, 1997 and *Love's Body*, 1999. I also discuss my own photographic and video work *Pelagial Reverence*, 2008/2009/2010, *Travelogue*, 2010, *Hair of the dog (that bit me)*, 2009, *The black dog (that bit me)*, 2009, *If you are not with me tomorrow*, 2010 and *Subspace*, 2010. By using these works as examples I discuss how the animal other is represented in contemporary photography and video practice, and the importance that this representation has when identity formation is taken into consideration.

I will conclude my discussion of longing within contemporary art practice by shedding light on the significance of photography and video as a means to make sense of, and allowing for an outlet for, feelings of longing and homesickness. I will also in turn discuss what role photography and video play

⁷ Here I cross-reference Sigmund Freud's writings on the uncanny.

in evoking these feelings of longing and homesickness (nostalgia), and what effect this has on identity formation and comprehension. I will conclude by positing that photography and video are both a symptom and a cause of homesickness and longing. I will evaluate the effect of the production (symptom) of photography and video art as a result of homesickness (reflecting on my own creative practice), and the viewing of photography and video art ensuing in homesickness and longing (reflecting back on the examples discussed in each chapter in the context of the theoretical overview). The *affect* can be understood as an event of the transference of emotional energy. It is an emotional response to something, in this case a visual representation. If something evokes affect, it means that an emotion has successfully been communicated. It is also the influence that a certain thing has on another thing, for instance, the influence that photography has on the viewer and vice versa.

Artists use the affect to generate emotional response to their work (Bennet, 2002). I will conclude this dissertation by discussing to what extent the visual examples I discussed evoked an affective response. I will look at how the artist took into consideration how the spectator (viewer) is positioned in relation to the visual representations of loss and homesickness. I will review to what extent the discussion of represented homesickness was an alienating experience and what affect this alienating experience has on the artist and the viewer. Jill Bennet states that the alienating experience of remembering loss “is mediated through affective connections between bodies” (Bennet, 2002: 335). I will end my discussion by examining, in the light of the examples discussed, to what extent this statement is true.

My creative process is primarily a highly personal dialogue between myself and another – person/animal, which are intended as the primary audience. Most of my creative practice is intended to be viewed either just by myself, or by the Other represented or implied in the content of the work. My work can be seen as visual responses, recollections and understandings of the emotions evoked by a significant experience or event I have endured. I make sense of emotional trauma, longing or homesickness and emotional displacement by attempting to translate my understanding of the experience into a visual equivalent.

The video and photographic works exhibited in the practical component of this degree represent the method by which I translate abstract thoughts and emotions literally into visual understandings in order to process the information in a more approachable manner. The initial intention was not for this body of work to be viewed by anyone else other than myself and the person about or for which

the video was made. The work can be seen as a direct communication of emotions to a specific person who was part of the significant event or experiences, as I mentioned earlier. The public exhibition of the work shifts the nature of the work from being a private and impervious message to becoming a public spectacle, vulnerable and exposed to unrestricted scrutiny.

The video work that I analyse in this dissertation (mostly my own) I would like to place in the context of Video Poetry, or New Media Poetry/Narrative. I like to explain this as a visual and audio language, presented with the absence of textual language, but still communicating an important message. Eduardo Kac, in his introduction to the book *Media Poetry: An International Anthology* states that media poetry “is a unique sign of the new boundary-blurring condition of language-based media art that many works are equally comfortable in ‘visual art’ or ‘creative writing’ circuits...” (Kac, 2007: 8). Unlike photography, both video (and poetry/narrative) have a sequential flow, a mobility that imitates the movement of time. It is not frozen and mute, but rather audible (literally and visually) and motion-rich. The video work that I intend to discuss (both my own and that of other artists) is intended to be shown as part of an installation and not remain as purely digital objects trapped in cyberspace. I give my video work a corporeality that interjects them into the sensory experiences of the viewer. They are both contemporary *aide memoires* and performances of memory, evoking past memories and constructing new ones.

Chapter 1

The longing for home: Abjection and the uncanny in representations of homesickness in contemporary photography and video practice

Safety, privacy, intimacy and comfort are often associated with the concept of *home*. The longing for home suggests a displacement of these concepts, be it physical or emotional. Studies have shown that a geographical move proves to be an important factor in the onset of depression (Fisher 1989: 8). Displacement from the safety of home has major impact on identity formation and sustenance in that it creates a panic within the subject and brings into question assumptions made around *belonging*. If *home* is an extension of our identities, the longing for home can be viewed as the longing for a unified sense of self.

In this chapter I will be focusing on discussing the impact of displacement on how identification and ultimately representations of home shift from longing for the familiar to the fear of the unfamiliar. Physical displacement does not necessarily always happen involuntarily (eviction, exile, banishment), but can also be as a result of the subject's own choice (travel, relocating, immigration). Emotional displacement, however, is more often than not a result of some form of trauma, shock or unwanted emotional experience and not of the subject's conscious decision or desire to be dislodged from that which he/she holds familiar. Negative experiences within the dwelling place could transfer the association with the physical structure from home to not-home. Of course, in some cases a conscious decision is made that results in emotional displacement (running away from home), but the longing for the abandoned home reminds one of the abject⁸; the house/home has abjected the body/self. I want to link the theory of abjection to displacement and longing for the home. An expulsion from the safe space of home, and in turn the longing for home that develops from the displacement, happens as a result of abjection. I want to look at how the ultimately familiar and comforting can transform into the tormenting unfamiliar as a result of continuous visual representation. It is my opinion that the mere act of *capturing* a representation of home through the photographic or video lens inevitably results in detachment and isolation from those feelings of home and belonging that inspired the need for visual representation in the first place. I draw this

⁸ Julia Kristeva developed the idea of the abject as discarding that which is other to oneself, thereby creating boundaries between the self and the other and aiding in the realisation of the subject. The abject is that which gets radically discarded from the body, but is not banished completely, the abject lingers on the periphery, reminding the subject of its existence. The subject feels an uncanny attraction towards the abject (it was once part of the subject itself, so it is familiar), but at the same time the subject is repulsed by the abject (McAfee 2004).

conclusion from the idea that the act of photographing something immediately places it in the past, something that once was (Roland Barthes 1980). If the understanding of nostalgia hinges on longing for things that one remembers from the past, these visual representations of home can become a paradoxical vehicle aiding in the displacement of home and the mobilisation of homesickness: The artist has a need to document home when the feelings of belonging reach a climax, but in doing so the artist unwillingly displaces the home into the past, resulting in homesickness.

The act of taking a photograph can also be linked to abjection, the subject is abjected from the lens, yet not completely discarded. It causes displacement and alienation as the subject, represented as a whole, is removed from the real, and transported into the imaginary. The photograph can be viewed as a distancing device.

This unintended emotional displacement from the familiar may also speak of violence and horror. Domestic violence within the home can result in both emotional and physical displacement (emotional in the way in which the victim removes herself/himself emotionally from the reality of the event in order to cope with the trauma and physical in the way of abandoning or leaving the site of trauma). However, the longing which springs forth from this displacement is not a nostalgic utopian memory of home in the past, but a more hopeful expectation of what home could be in the future. The idea of displacement can also evoke a fear of the unfamiliar, and sometimes representation serves as a means for the subject to familiarise him/herself with the horrors of the unfamiliar. In this context, the process of taking a photograph, and looking at it afterwards can be viewed as cathartic.

“The establishment of identity depends most importantly on the internalisation of object relations and their assimilation by the ego. Events such as migration (moving), which cause drastic change in a person’s life, can pose threats to the sense of identity. The immigrant in his struggle for self-preservation needs to hold onto various elements of his native environment (familiar objects, music, memories, and dreams representing different aspects of his native land) in order to feel like himself.” (Grindberg & Grindberg 1989: 129)

In order to experience a conscious homesickness, one must first be aware of these concepts of home. In this chapter I intend to develop a theoretical understanding of how homesickness is constructed: I want to look at how homesickness can be understood in relation to self-identification and representations of the self. I want to look specifically at the processes involved (identification

with the self, assimilation of objects, alienation, separation). The importance of understanding homesickness does not necessarily depend on a specific place that is absent; I intend to show that homesickness is not only related to literal longing, but rather tied to a more intricate process of establishing identity within a contextual space. Internalisation or object relations and their assimilation by the ego relates to the photograph in that both actions have a talismanic quality, often evoking nostalgia⁹ when revisited through memory.

As noted above, home is not just a physical condition, but also an emotional and psychological one. For the rest of this argument I will set the parameters within which I will consider the longing for home. I will discuss the psychoanalytic theories of identification with the other and the Other, and then I will look at how all these proposed conception of homesickness and longing (displacement), and the relationship between the self and the O/other are manifested in creative and cultural practice by looking at examples of contemporary art, as well as examples of my own work.

Martin Heidegger, in his essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1978), poses the question how does building belong to dwelling¹⁰? Home is more often than not considered as the place or building within which one dwells. My argument is that the longing for home is reflected in possessions, routines and relationships with other human beings, or domestic animals. The body may be considered to be the primary site in which the concept of home is experienced. Our bodies are a place which we cannot physically escape, and it should thus be considered as a home. For the sake of narrowing the scope of the discussion, I will assume the body as the site of primary home, and the womb as the first external experience of home. I will examine the relationship between home and identity, and the role that home plays in establishing, maintaining and reflecting or representing identity in relation to contemporary photographic and video practice.

⁹ Nostalgia can be understood as a longing for the past, often an idealised version of the past. The word has origin in the Greek *nostos* (returning home) and *algos* (pain or ache). It can also be understood as homesickness, or melancholy felt for events or people passed.

¹⁰ He sees dwelling as a mode of being in the world. To dwell somewhere literarily means to *make one's abode, or live in a specified place or state*. It is to seek refuge, not to do anything specific, with the emphasis rather on *being* somewhere specific, in materialistic or imaginary terms. Although a sufficient understanding of home is not solely dependent on location, place, geography or architecture, Heidegger states that these are important aspects of defining dwelling. Dwellings are produced through buildings, but not all buildings are dwellings (Blunt & Dowling 2006: 4). Home is, however, attached to some form of physical environment, and this environment becomes an extension and expression of bodily routines. The body thus plays a vital role in the conceptualising and identification of home. The physical home is developed around bodily routines and needs, the most basic of which are eating, sleeping and ablutions.

Marion Young, a feminist political theorist, is of the opinion that there are four main aspects that make up the materialistic home: safety, individuation (the individual's choices in interior arrangement, etc.), privacy and preservation¹¹ (Young, 1997: 134). This more personalised and localised expression of home can be seen as a yearning to secure the imagined concept of a unified self in the sense that it perpetuates self-reflection and representation combined with obsessive reviewing and reanalysing of the self. One is thus reflected not only in the mirror, but also in the way in which one's dwelling place is organised and arranged. Home is therefore not only a reflection of identity, but a tool of maintaining and re-identifying with the self. The idea of home can be seen as the nostalgic longing for the lost wholeness of the original mother (Young 1997: 135). The longing for home thus originates from the longing for the first external experience of home, the womb.

The material and imaginary concepts of home are related and mutually interdependent¹². This could be an indication that the understanding and preservation of the self is dependent on physical aspects of the self, or the surroundings that the self is perceived within, the talismanic catalysts. Home, consequently, becomes an encapsulating vessel in which identity is constituted, preserved and remembered. Home and identity are also interdependent; the one cannot be present without the other. It is a continuous circle of signifying, resulting in the effect that the subject is caught between two mirrors rather than one: an infinite inter-reflection, the self within the home within the self.

Home can also be understood as a site of memory; it speaks of documentation of life and one can see this in family photos and trinkets kept in boxes in the *attic* of the house. Alison Blunt (2006) argues that "an antipathy towards nostalgia reflects a more pervasive and long-established 'suppression of home', whereby spaces of home are located in the past rather than the present, in imaginative rather than material terms, and as points of imagined authenticity rather than as lived

¹¹ The material home has as its main function: to provide safety and privacy for the body, whilst creating an opportunity for self-expression and preservation of the self. For Heidegger, therefore, "dwelling and building stand in circular relation, whereby humans attain to dwelling only by means of building. We dwell by making the places and things that structure and house our activities. These places and things establish relations among each other, between themselves and dwellers, and between dwellers and the surrounding environment" (Young, 1997: 136).

¹² Material concepts or geographies of home would be the physical spaces, the buildings in which we dwell, the home space. Imaginary concepts or psycho-geographies of home can be understood as emotions or feelings of ultimate security and comfort. In this category home transcends the house. Here home can be felt in objects, other places, people and animals. It is an emotion brought forth by a trigger, materialistic or imaginary. This said, the material form of home is dependent on what home is imagined to be, and so the imaginary perception of home is in turn shaped by the physical aspects of dwellings.

experience” (Blunt, 2006. Blunt makes use of the term “productive nostalgia” to place an emphasis on nostalgia as the desire for home. She believes that nostalgia possesses the potential to liberate rather than inhibit identity formation. Nostalgia enables us, by means of memory and desire, to establish and preserve our own identity within the space of home.

Apart from home being a site of memory, safety, preservation of the self, as mentioned before, home is also a site of horror. The binary opposite terms *homeliness/unhomeliness* refer to the extent to which something or someone possesses positive or negative qualities of home. It can be seen as a gauge of familiarity and the uncanny.

The longing for home is thus always a longing for the past: a home experienced in the past and therefore the memory of a home. But seeing that memories are constructed in unrealistic terms in the sense that we have authorship over what we omit and what we include within the memory, the longing for home will always be the longing for an imagined ideal that is not congruent with actual experiences. What is deemed as familiar and safe in the memory might not have been experienced as that at the actual time it was experienced as such.

Here Freud’s theory on the uncanny¹³ becomes an important vehicle to understand this ambiguity where a home can be both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

We can relate this to the ideology of home in the sense that home (dwelling) is not always experienced as a *homely* place. The most *unhomely* of experiences (loneliness, sadness, violence) often occur in the home (dwelling) because of the nature of the way in which home is constructed. Home is safe, secure and hidden from the public eye, and it is precisely because of these qualities that home can become a site for the unhomely. You are more likely to be subjected to traumatic events such as rape and murder within your own home than anywhere else, because of the privacy and shelter from the public view. The home created to protect the body, keeping it safe and hidden from the public, becomes the precise grounds for the body to be vulnerable and subjected to violence in the home. This brings me to the relationship between the body, the home and

¹³ The word ‘uncanny’ is directly translated from the German word *unheimlich*, which literally means the ‘unhomely’. According to Freud, the uncanny is related to that which excites fear, but the kind of fear that is referred to here is a “frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud 1919: 220). Unlike our natural deduction that fear stems from the unknown, the uncanny is frightening precisely because it stems from what is familiar to us. The uncanny is that which attracts and repulses at the same time.

representations of the body (or absent body) within the context of home and how this relationship is explored within contemporary photography.

An artist who makes quite literal use of the relationship of the body within the home and the boundaries between inside and outside space is Shizuka Yokomizo; this is most evident in her ongoing series *Dear Stranger* (1998). She chose the subjects for her photographic pieces on the basis of the characteristics of their home spaces. All her subjects live in ground floor apartments that are visually accessible from the outside. She approached these complete strangers by anonymous letters requesting that the residents stand in front of their open windows at a specific time while she photographs them for ten minutes. If they did not wish to take part in the project, they would simply have to keep their curtains drawn. In the letters she emphasises that she has no intention of meeting them, and they will remain strangers after the photographs have been taken. These are a series of nostalgic photographs of strangers in their own home environment, aware of the stranger shooting photographs of them from outside, but not knowing who this person is. The photographs become nostalgic¹⁴ for me because of the way in which they were constructed.

The artist does not know the subjects of the photographs, but becomes very intimate with them in the instant of taking the photograph. The intimacy is also not forgotten; the photograph serves as a reminder of that moment, which activates nostalgia in the viewer. These subjects are well known on one level, but complete strangers on another. The subject was requested to look straight into the camera, confronting Yokomizo, as they were being photographed. This creates an interesting confrontation between inside and outside, between familiar and unfamiliar, public and private.

The fact that Yokomizo chose to include the “barrier” that separates inside from outside (windows panes, curtains and security gates) emphasizes how photography acts as a distancing tool, whilst at the same time drawing focus to the membrane separating public and private. It is in this place that art thrives, feeding on polarities/ binaries/dualities to create multiple parallel levels of engagement and intersections. Here the photograph simultaneously reifies and critiques aspects of its subjects.

¹⁴ I use the term *nostalgia* here to describe the affect that these photographs have on me, the viewer, because they remind me of personal experiences. I used to stare longingly into other people’s houses at night, hoping that they would leave the lights on and the curtains open so that I could see them walking around and just *being at home*. I always longed to be inside their homes, not as a stranger, but as someone who belonged there. Reflecting on this feeling, I realise that it was a general longing to belong on my behalf, and whenever I am presented with photographs of people taken from the outside looking in, I am reminded of this intense longing for feeling at home somewhere that I once had. It also reminds me of the hours I spent looking out of the window whilst experiencing *heimwee*, as I mentioned in my introduction.



Figure 1: Shizuka Yokomizo, *Dear Stranger*, 1999. (International Centre of Photography 2001). Photograph, chromogenic print.

Both the subject and the artist are facing the boundary between these opposites, and it becomes apparent that this boundary is being transcended, both by the artist luring the subject into making their private space public, and by the subject inviting the public into their private space. A provocative contrast is produced by the well-lit rooms and the dark exterior of the home spaces, and as most of us know, it is easier to see into a lit home space from a dark outside, than it is to see what is going on in the street when the lights in your house is turned on. This confirms that the subject might not even be able to see Yokomizo as she takes their photograph, which adds to the sense of voyeurism and mystery of the artist.

Viewing the images from Yokomizo's work *Dear Stranger* (1998), showcased at the ICP5 triennial of photography and video almost becomes like viewing specimens in an aquarium, the windows enclosing the subjects in "tanks" of containment within their own homes, giving the viewer full

freedom to study them in an almost scientific way. In this work I recognise a *heimwee*¹⁵ in the way that the subject is staring out of the window into (seemingly) nothingness. Although the subject's gaze meets that of the viewer and confronts him or her with the subject's own nostalgia, it hints at the viewer looking at his/her own reflection in the mirror. An uncanniness is created by the simultaneous familiarity of the subject (viewers recognise themselves in a part of the photograph, specifically the vulnerability and the comfort of the subject within the home space), and the unfamiliarity of the subject in the photograph (it is a complete stranger the viewer is associating with). The work of Yokomizo is culturally diverse in the sense that it takes place in various big cities (New York, Tokyo, London, Berlin), yet it there is a similarity in that each photograph places the subject within a fixed vantage point: the personal dwelling space, the place of utmost belonging, the home.

The voyeuristic aspect of this work can also be translated into a longing, felt from the outside, to be inside. The artist is longingly looking in from the outside. It is almost as though a sense of familiarity with the home space has been lost and, and there is a strong desire to regain the feeling of home. One does get the feeling that the artist has some sense of what home entails, but in the work a strong displacement is evident and homesickness overwhelms the images of these strangers. The artist could be longing to be at home in the stranger's home, or the artist uses these images to communicate a sense of homesickness she is feeling, a longing to be back at a place she once called home.

The meaning of Susan Sontag's comment that the viewer becomes a tourist to the reality of the subject inside the frame (Sontag, 1978: 110) becomes evident in these photographs. An affect of these photographs is that there is a strong desire to learn more about that which is *not* included in the frame of the photograph. One senses that the story that Yokomizo is trying to narrate visually through these photographs lies beyond that which is represented in the frame. The photographs

¹⁵ *Heimwee* is typically characterised by staring out the window (usually on rainy or particularly windy days) and longing for something, but not being sure what exactly it is that you are longing for. As a child I would experience *heimwee* often, and it was at these times that my mother kept me close to her, put on her favourite album (usually some form of country music, Jim Reeves in particular) and encouraged me to draw. Perhaps her anxiety to keep me in sight sprung from a fear that I might run off and seek the thing that I longed for, and drawing was just a way to distract my attention from my own nostalgia and postpone the loss of me. Perhaps this fear came from her recognition of her own feelings in me and her anticipation that I might react to them in the way she would. Either way, in this way I came to associate my creative process with my longing for something which was not there, my utopia. *Heimwee* comes with the wind in the trees.

serve merely as a clue to the story outside the frame, as theorised in Barthes's *punctum* (Barthes, 1980).

The photograph could also be interpreted as someone taking images of that which they do not have, a visual manifestation of a desire for that which is lacking. The artist is voyeuristically imposing on these strangers' construction of their home space, doing visual research so that she could perhaps recreate these ideas of home in her own dwelling place. If these photographs were taken by a person who is homeless, I suspect that the feeling of voyeurism and the impact of the photograph would have been stronger.

But not only can the photograph be interpreted as an extension of the artist's/photographer's preferences or desires, it also holds clues to various other characteristics of cultural identity. One can tell an enormous amount about the current immediate cultural situation in the time that the photograph was taken. Fashion, clothing, landmarks, architecture – all hold a clue to the hidden message that the photograph holds, the message that reaches beyond the frame (*studium*). One can therefore deduce that Yokomizo's interest in taking the photograph is not only in a voyeuristic desire to view random strangers in the comfort of their own homes, but also in the desire to find an overlapping similarity across cultures that demonstrates our basic human need to create a home space, our longing for home.

One can read the *punctum* (as theorised by Barthes¹⁶) as a means to evoke the uncanny in Yokomizo's photographic series. The artist's personal added sentimental detail is visible in the

¹⁶ In the light of viewing the photograph as an artistic interpretation, the photograph becomes the space of the encounter. Roland Barthes theorised the concepts of *studium* and *punctum*. According to him, *studium* designates the cultural, linguistic and political interpretation of a photograph, while *punctum* signifies the personal sentimental detail of the photograph. With the *punctum* the viewer/photographer establishes a relationship with the person or object within the photograph (Barthes, 1980). In the chapters that follow I will discuss the photographic examples relevant to my own work, as well as my own work in the context of the *studium* and the *punctum* as theorised by Barthes. My main concern, however, is with the personal and sentimental within the photograph, and after placing the photograph in context by evaluating the *studium*, I will focus mainly on the *punctum*. Barthes also noted that the photograph is a conglomerate of connoted and denoted messages. The coexistence of legible and illegible messages within the photograph produces tension, and as a result ethical paradoxes emerge regarding the rhetoric of the image (Barthes, 1977). The legible message refers to what is apparent in the image, and the illegible message refers to what is outside the frame, the messages that are hinted at within the image, but are not apparent and linger on the periphery of the photograph. The *punctum* plays a major role in aiding with our deciphering of the illegible messages of a photograph, as it is only our imagination and interpretation of what lies beyond the photograph that can ever grant any sense of certainty to the message. In essence, two forms of interpretation are taking place where photographs are concerned. First the photographer interprets reality through the lens and the result is the photograph; then the viewer interprets the photograph and the result would be the affect (affective quality of the photograph, the message, the *punctum* and *studium*). When one focuses on the implicit

photograph, and this personal detail can be both familiar (in the sense that the same desires or affinities are shared with the artist) or unfamiliar (the affinities might be similar, yet it is still only belongs to the artist) to the viewer.

Another series of contemporary art works which also deals with the concept of the “artist and viewer as the voyeur” is Sophie Calle’s *L’Hotel* (1981). However, Calle’s approach to voyeurism is much more candid than that of Yokomizo. The series consists of a collection of documentary-style photographs framed with text that accompanies each set of photographs. Calle worked for three months as a chambermaid in a Venetian hotel. She was assigned twelve rooms to clean and maintain, and during her stay she photographed the belongings of the guests who stayed in the rooms. She relentlessly opened suitcases, read their diaries, photographed dirty laundry, and her visual documentation is accompanied by text where she conjured up imagined stories about the strangers, and made assumptions about their identity as well as textually documenting her findings. Calle states that her duties at the hotel came to an end after three months (possibly due to her intrusive habits, but the viewer is left to wonder about that).

Calle’s work differs from that of Yokomizo in that she did not ask her subjects permission to voyeuristically scrutinise their personal space. Calle violates the privacy of the hotel guests without their being aware of it, and the chances are that some of them never suspected any disturbance because there was nothing stolen. However, her approach towards the work does raise questions about right to privacy and the guests’ right to ownership of the images of their personal effects. Yokomizo made a proposition to the subjects of her photographs which gave them a choice as to whether they would invite her visually into their private space or not.

However, considering that hotel rooms are not necessarily “spaces owned” by the occupants, and that housekeeping is fundamental to the hotel’s maintenance, Calle had already found herself in a space where further unauthorised intrusion could be justified as her duty, and seeing that she did not commit an obvious felony (theft or vandalism), her work is viewed with a sense of understanding of the unorthodox method of acquiring the images. Hotel spaces are transient generic spaces that mimic the comforts of home, but lack the profundity of reflecting the dweller’s identity. An uncanny

messages, one becomes more aware of the frame and the intention of the camera operator to show only what he/she chooses to show. A desire to see beyond the frame emerges, and one becomes aware that just because the photograph is a motionless, mute object does not render what is represented in the photograph as motionless or mute.

strangeness is evoked within the viewer; one knows that it is wrong to pry, and one is undoubtedly complicit in the artist's voyeuristic approach, which adds to the awkwardness, yet one cannot help but satisfy one's curiosity by inspecting the images, paying thorough attention to every detail. It almost seems that Calle is brave enough to do what most of us have secretly desired to do, but have been too ashamed to admit to.



Figure 2: Sophie Calle, details from *L'Hotel*, 1981. (Grosenick 2001:74). Photograph, printed on paper.

A tension is created in the instant in which the photograph was taken; an anticipation of the guest catching the artist in the act of snooping and things escalating into unavoidable confrontation in the event. Yet the photographs maintain a sense of serenity and composure about them, and this is echoed in the perfectly made beds and the carefully constructed composition of the images.

They hardly resemble images that were taken in a rush to avoid being caught. The public display of the private lives of these guests is a reminder of the artist's inquisitive approach to strangers, to

people with whom she has no affiliation. Yet she does so in a way that does not render her subjects in a derogatory manner; rather, one gets the feeling that she is trying to associate with them, trying to maintain a sense of identity within herself. It speaks of insecurity of the ego, and assimilation of these alter egos created in the artist's (imagined) writings and visual depictions serve as a means to anchor her nomadic sense of self. The objects that Calle has chosen to include (and so too the objects that she chose to omit) might serve as a reflection of her identity, her interests and her focus. The guests remain anonymous and Calle does not attempt to get to know them any better in person, yet she takes from them a piece of them which she values and adores, and this is reflected in the careful compilation of the work as it is exhibited. Calle takes on the role of viewer of her own photography in literally creating imaginary narratives for these characters that are only present in the photograph through their belongings. She has already imagined what is beyond the frame of the photograph before (or during) the time that she has shot the image. Her need to cultivate mystery and romanticise the stranger shows very strongly in the fact that she is not interested in the actual subject (the inhabitant of the hotel room), but rather in the fragmented clues, unfinished visual narratives, that hold much the same characteristics as a photograph (Roland Barthes's *punctum*). In Calle's work, it is not necessary to really *know* whether her narratives are 'true', because their veracity is not imperative to the success and meaning of the work. It is how the various elements – the documented actions and the formal presentation/mediation of these - present the viewer with desire and ideas of self, that is important to the how Calle's work *works*.

The approach that Sophie Calle took with her work *L'Hotel* (1981) has many similarities to my own work *Show Me Yours* (2005 – 2010). *Show me Yours* is a collective project that I have been working on since 2005. Initially the work focused on photographing intimate spaces/things of unknown neighbours in a neighbourhood I had moved to in 2005. I acquainted myself with the street by introducing myself to my new neighbours and requesting to use their bathroom. I then took a photograph of their bathroom hand basins with a Polaroid camera. The collection and interest in bathrooms that are not my own continued until 2010, when I started a group on Facebook and requested that all members of the group send me a photograph of their own hand basin. The work was inspired by my insatiable curiosity as to the way in which people, mostly strangers, keep and arrange their bathrooms. This fascination has its origins in childhood, as my mother believed that you could judge a person's character from the condition of their bathrooms, specifically their hand basins. The character judgment evolved more into a sense of intrigue and curiosity as I grew older. I would take note of every hand basin I came across as I entered the houses of friends and acquaintances (sometimes strangers too). I felt as though it gave insight to minor preferences (soap,

toothpaste, paraphernalia, as well as hygiene) often overlooked, which can give an opening to decoding aspects of the identity of the owner or frequent user of the hand basin.

The fact that not all my photographs were permitted by the inhabitants¹⁷ mirrors Calle's work in the sense that the tension of being caught lingers on the periphery of the work. It is also a *stolen* image, kept as a trinket, or a frame of reference. The way in which the inquiry is conducted (both in Calle's work and in my own) denotes a search for similarity, a similarity to that of the other. The artist is hoping to find something that could be related to, or assimilated into, her own identity.



Figure 3: Corlia Harmsen, details from *Show Me Yours*, 2005 – 2010. (Courtesy: the artist). Cell phone photography, digital print on archival paper.

The obsessive documentation of a personal space that is not the artist's own may also suggest that the artist is experiencing a sense of longing for home. At the time I started *Show Me Yours* (2005 – 2010) I had recently moved into a new home myself and I was experiencing a sense of displacement from that which I found familiar and homely. The hand basin in the new house still had vestiges of the previous occupants lingering (the object discarded but haunting) in crevices of the enamel. It was not *my own* or *my home* yet and I was longing for something that felt familiar. It is a selfish (and self-preserving) inquiry, however, that dominates both Calle's *L'Hotel* (1981) and my *Show Me Yours* (2005 – 2010) in the sense that the other is exposed, yet Calle never photographed her own hotel room, and I never photographed my own hand basin. The artist has the authority to keep her own

¹⁷ After being turned down by a few suspicious neighbours when I presented them with my intention to photograph the interior of their bathrooms, I realised I had to change my strategy. Most of the neighbourhood were reluctant to invite me into their homes. This indicates that most people do not like their privacy to be violated and do not trust strangers inside their homes. Their response to the idea of publicly exposing the most intimate space within their home was very uncertain, and most of my neighbours were not comfortable with the fact that I was documenting something which they believed belonged only to them, and should remain only within the privacy of the home.

home private, whilst exposing the privacy of the other. The idea of public exposure versus private conservation inevitably raises issues around voyeurism, while at the same time evoking an intimate feeling of nostalgia.

My approach to my own work echoes that of Calle's voyeuristic enthusiasm and the viewer experiences the feeling of being encouraged to adopt the same stance as the artist. In turn I provide the true voyeur with a 'fix' by giving a sense of uncanny satisfaction derived from looking at the subject without the subject being aware of the gaze.

However, in the dual-panel video projection *Travelogue* (2005), I reverse the approach of Calle and that of *Show Me Yours* (2005 – 2010) by turning the camera onto myself. The viewer is still forced into a voyeuristic position; however, this time I am the one who is the subject, and I am placing myself into the role of the other.

Travelogue (2010) is a video/performance depicting the metaphorical approach that I have towards establishing relationships. The phases move from dressing and undressing to running away, to settling and being comfortable. All the videos are filmed from the point of view of the other party (involved in the relationship). The title *Travelogue* refers to the journey of (travelling through) relationships and the notes of the traveller on the experience. I personally view relationships as temporary arrangements and the video emphasises the ephemeral nature of intimacy.

Travelogue (2010) is a reshooting of the video piece *Travelogue* (2005) which I had made during my undergraduate studies. It is not necessary for the two works to be viewed in comparison to one another, but rather that *Travelogue* should be seen as a continuous project to be reshot every five years in order to reflect on how my views on intimacy have evolved. For the sake of this thesis I will discuss both *Travelogue* (2005) and *Travelogue* (2010), but only the latter will be presented in my practical examination.

In *Travelogue* (2005) the video is divided into three "components" and each component consist of two video parts playing on two monitors in synchronisation. The two monitors are placed next to each other in an installation piece, so in effect there were six videos playing two by two. Instead of the video becoming just film, the work remained conceptually charged and the idea was to view the video as a moving image placed in the context of a stationary image (a photograph). This is evident in the way that it is framed (quite literally with recycled frames taken from paintings in my own

house) on a wallpapered sectioned wall. The video, the wall and a set of two arm chairs and a green carpet form part of the whole installation piece. A tension is created in the slice of a home environment of the installation (the armchairs, carpet and wallpaper is taken from my own home) and the title of the video *Travelogue*.

Travelogue can be viewed as a visual poetic response to my experiences of the stages of intimacy. The video bears sequential similarities to the flow of poetry, yet no spoken or written language is present in this narrative. The work can still be read as a poetic narrative of experiences, a story with a beginning, middle and end.

Component 1: *Travelogue*, 2005: *Travel Tips*. Digital video and sound. Duration: 2 mins.

The first component of the trilogy starts out with the character dressing and undressing in the headlights of a car out of a suitcase, seemingly packed in a hurry. The location seems at first to be deserted, but a very subtle, yet not dismissible, flow of traffic (headlights of cars driving by in the distance) frames the character as being in a public space. The duration is less than 2 minutes and the dressing/undressing seem to be taking place anxiously. One feels that the character has fugitive qualities and waits in anticipation for the character to pick up everything and run away, frequently looking back over her shoulder for the “thing” chasing her.

The character seems to be uncomfortable with the dressing/undressing process, and also unaware of the viewer, although one senses that she is aware that the action done in public would inevitably provoke some interest. Instead of running, she stays, uncomfortable, but present. The action is circular and perpetual. There seems to be no definite starting and finishing point. The concept of dressing and undressing stands as a metaphor for the beginning part of a relationship, when establishing intimacy is integral to the progress of the relationship. It speaks of what a person chooses to reveal and conceal about themselves.

The clothing serves as a form of protection, and peeling off the layers exposes the vulnerability of the subject. The fact that the undressing is taking place in a public space suggests that the character feels uncomfortable with the situation in which she is placing in getting to know the person with whom she has started a relationship, and allowing the person to get to know her. She is not at ease with showing her true self and feels that the public (they could be friends, relatives or previous lovers) is scrutinising her while she is becoming intimate with the new partner.



Figure 4: Corlia Harmsen, Video stills from *Travelogue*, 2005: *Travel Tips*. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video with sound, duration: 2 minutes.

Component 2: *Travelogue*, 2005: *Staying Tips*. Digital video and sound. Duration: 2 mins.

The second video component in the trilogy depicts the same character in a space, seemingly a house, running from one room to another in her underwear. The idea behind this is to give a voyeuristic look into the inside workings of being in a relationship. With the progression of the video, the space takes on quite a homely feel, but the character has now started the anticipated running from part one (*Travel Tips*) in the trilogy. The movement of the character is made visible by a torchlight that follows her, which builds on the feeling of intrusion by the viewer.



Figure 5: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *Travelogue*, 2005: *Staying Tips*. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 2 minutes.

In *Staying Tips* I comment on the process of exposing oneself to another. The first thought that comes to mind when imagining a homecoming is usually one of a relaxed sigh, but *Staying Tips* suggest the opposite; being home within a person becomes unhomey, and from this a paradox around *heimwee* (homesickness) is born. Once she has obtained what she thought she was longing for, it becomes the thing from which she runs away. An uncanny strangeness becomes evident here in that the fear springs from what is familiar. The character is both attracted and repulsed by intimate relationships, resulting in the ambiguous behaviour when she is placed in a (supposedly) secure home environment. What is meant to console her and provide security is in fact what frightens her and causes anxiety and restlessness. She once again experiences *heimwee*, and it now becomes clear that her longing does not have a particular desired object; the longing is caused by the unknown, and what she thought would cure it in fact aggravates her nostalgia.

Component 3: *Travelogue, 2005: Fugue Tips*. Digital video and sound. Duration: 2 mins.

The concluding video piece is called *Fugue Tips*. The title refers to the psychological condition called dissociative fugue disorder. Dissociative fugue is usually defined as sudden and unexpected travel from one's home and familiar environment accompanied by memory loss of one's earlier life and identity. It is thus a relocating device: the beginning of establishing a new home and identity with no recollection of the previous. The onset might be neurological damage, or severe stressful or traumatic conditions (American Psychiatric Association, 2000: 519). In this instance I draw on my own experiences of recovering from severe bacterial meningitis, and the implications this had both physically and psychologically on my creative process. In this piece I return to using car headlights as the lighting medium for the video. Once again the location is moved from the private sphere of a *home environment* to the more public setting of an open gravel road.

The scene progresses from the character seemingly 'hitching a ride' and getting into the car (embracing, perhaps, the thing that has been chasing her) and for the first time looking the viewer in the eye. The video is shot from the perspective of the driver (driving in the car and stopping by the side of the road to pick up the hitchhiker), and for the first time one realises that the trilogy was shot from the perspective of the other party in the suggested relationship. In every video piece there was another presence acknowledged by the visible character, which only becomes evident in the concluding part of the trilogy: an invisible character hinting at presence, though one had assumed that he/she was absent. The apparently invisible character has an interchangeable identity and is not

necessarily the same person in all three episodes; however, this character shares a universal quality, which is the desire for the main character in the piece. There is an underlying desire to provide safety and security for the girl emanating from the invisible character from whose viewpoint the work is filmed. The viewer is placed in this position, forced to associate with the character. Awareness is created that the seeming desire to provide security might not rest on a genuine concern, but rather on a solipsistic sexual interest.

The intention is that there should be a moment of disgust when the realisation descends on the viewer that the 'thing' mentioned earlier causing the visible character to be anxious and on edge is the invisible character, ever present but not revealing him/herself.



Figure 6: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *Travelogue*, 2005: *Fugue Tips*. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video with sound, duration: 2 minutes.

Travelogue is my own interpretation of the nature of relationships, and my own sentiments are present; Barthes's *punctum* features very prominently here.

In the video work *Heimwee comes with the wind in the trees* (2006), I was in the process of getting acquainted with a new living space: a new home. Most of my time was spent on the balcony of this new two-bedroom apartment because at that time the walls were recently painted and the smell of newly constructed building was lingering in the air and reminded me that no homely space was recognisable within the apartment. It was just a building to me, not a home, and that made me homesick. I sat and watched the oak tree across the street move in the wind.

But it was not long before the windy season began and blew dust unpleasantly into my eyes on the balcony. I had to relocate my comfortable space to behind a window inside the apartment. These sunny wind-filled afternoons made me think back on times when I was younger and my mother kept me occupied to reduce the effect that the wind had on my emotional state. She would usually become very melancholy herself and this was accompanied by music, and this music I now associate with my mother's (and my own) deep sorrow. Perhaps the reason why I become depressed when the wind blows is because it reminds me of how overwhelmed I felt when I watched my mother sing along to Jim Reeves and stare out of the window crying. The strange thing is that the only thing that can console me at present when the wind blows and brings its *heimwee* is that same music to which my mother always listened.

The fast moving gusts of wind that were blowing when I recorded this video piece is in juxtaposition with the slow-moving branches of the trees in the actual video piece. In my memory of that day everything moves slowly, but on the actual day a gale-force South-Easterly wind was blowing. I positioned my camera on the balcony at dusk, when the wind seemed to be at its fiercest, and went to hide behind the windowpane. I became aware of the sound of passing time for a brief moment and knew I had to imitate that sound using a montage of the music that my mother listened to. The video piece serves as a reconstruction of the memories I have of my childhood, and the blurred image is indicative of the way in which I remember.

Once again a new media narrative is evident in the work's poetic existence. The dialogue between image and sound is very important to comprehend the work as a whole. Both image and sound are a rendition of a memory that I had of when I was growing up. Technical aspects of the video and sound editing aid me in manipulating the image, the memory, into something that more resembles my experience rather than being an exact copy or documentation of reality, which photography/video can mistakenly be interpreted as being.

After I had constructed this work, my mother gave a reinterpretation of this memory. We were living in Bredasdorp at that time, a town very secluded from everything, and my mother was longing for home while being at home. Marianne Hirsch calls this second-generation memory and reinterpretation of childhood memories by a parent a "post-memory" (Hirsch in Siopsis, 2005: 93). This notion was developed with regards to children of Holocaust survivors and she describes it as "second-generation memories of cultural or collective events and experiences" (Hirsch 1997: 23).



Figure 7: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *Heimwee*, 2006. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 1 minute.

Although the Holocaust is not directly relevant to my experiences, I believe that my mother's traumatic experience of being marooned in Bredasdorp and longing for a husband who was rarely ever home shaped and influenced my memory of the incidents that prelude to the work *Heimwee* (2006). And so, after internalising my mother's reinterpretation of my memory and experiences of *heimwee*, I realised that I too was longing for home from within the home, and for the love of another.

This video work *Even the birds (are leaving)* (2006) was filmed over a migrating season (more or less 2 months). Every evening at sunset I filmed birds migrating north, flying in a 'V' shape. *Even the birds* is a collection of 5-second snippets of birds migrating north for the winter months. The birds are leaving home for a new temporary home. The film is silent to emphasise the feeling of the intense silence right after someone has left your home and you close the door behind them. The ideal would be that the film be viewed with earplugs or earmuffs in order to block out all other sound as well. *Even the birds* can be seen as a direct communication with the work *Heimwee*.

In the period of time that I filmed the birds I was very lonely. I spent most of my time alone; most of my friends had left the country to spend time in the UK. The migration of the birds served as a reflection of what was happening in my personal life. Even though the term 'migration' implies that at some point they will return, it felt as though they were leaving me behind indefinitely. This piece communicates with the work *Heimwee* (2006) in that both pieces accentuate the feeling of nostalgia felt at the time of their creation. Even though the videos were filmed from my own home, I still felt homesick. Both videos were filmed from the same location and they are indicative of the anxious awaiting of the winter months when I could not spend time on the balcony gazing out.



Figure 8: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *Even the birds (are leaving)*, 2006. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video, duration: 9 minutes.

Each clip of birds flying on the screen is a performance of my memory of someone leaving. As I spent my days alone on my balcony (with all intimate relationships ended), even the birds were leaving me behind. It is not evident in this work whether the birds *are* actually leaving, but my interpretation of the captured image is that they were. The image is accompanied by silence. There is no auditory poetry for being left behind. The birds struggle to stay in the frame and soon they disappear on the periphery of the frames of the video work.

A realisation occurred that soon I would have to focus my attention on the inside space of my dwelling place and be forced to find home *inside* my home, instead of looking outside the home space. Here Heidegger's enquiry into how a building belongs to a dwelling space becomes evident. Instead of bridging the boundaries between inside and outside, the two video works exaggerate the distance that I felt from the outside when I was inside the home space.

Penny Siopis writes about her work *My Lovely Day* (2005) that she "wanted to explore how memories can be articulated as a series of displacements of past experiences onto the present" (Smith 2005: 96). *My Lovely Day* (2005) is a montage of the artist's childhood family home videos shot mostly by her mother. The visual text is superimposed with subtitles, a story written by Siopis

using her grandmother's words taken from old letters and postcards. The film is narrated by the grandmother, and various images re-matched with text in order to create tension and display ways in which "memory and history, private and public can converge" (Smith 2005: 97).

These are videos shot mostly in home environments to document events (birthdays, important political dates, etc.), but they are also used to document time spent away from home (like the European tour that the artist's mother went on in 1959). In the instant of visually documenting an environment, it creates an experience, which can only be returned to through memory aided by the visual footage. *My Lovely Day* (2005) can therefore be seen as a monumental depiction of the longing for home, a desire to return to that which is rendered familiar through the visual image.



Figure 9: Penny Siopis, stills from *My Lovely Day*, 2005. (Smith 2005). Video and sound.

She uses photography, or in this case video, as an *aide memoire*, a tool to aid in her remembrance of the events filmed, yet she shapes her memory of the events into something relevant to her by superimposing her grandmother's words over her mother's images. She created a collection of

memories shaped by three generations of women; her mother's images, her grandmother's letters and postcards, and her own interpretation and editing of the two.

In the context of my other practical work I proceeded to de-contextualise home environments by introducing aspects of home which are rarely shown to the public. *The Curse* (2006) is my own rendition of the home videos prevalent in Penny Siopis's work discussed in the previous paragraph. I here draw on the same desire that Siopis has to tell a true story, depicting the 'truth about experience' as she puts it (Smith 2005: 96).



Figure 10: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *The Curse*, 2006. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 2 minutes.

In *The Curse* (2006) my intention was to subvert the notion of private into an uncomfortable space of the public, while I explore issues of hidden values and identities. In deliberately not showing, which transgressing from private to public inevitably reveals, I am reinventing ideas of 'what goes on behind closed doors' by posing the question which asks 'which side of the closed door are you on?'. The line between the private and the public becomes transient and porous, and not as stable as it

might be mistakenly appear to be. The sound on the video is clips taken from the 2002 film *Road to Perdition* (Directed by Sam Mendes, Produced by Sam Mendes, Dean Zanuck and Richard D. Zanuck, distributed by DreamWorks/ 20th Century Fox 2002).

Two clips are overlaid depicting two very different relationships between a father and a son. In both clips a father is communicating to a son. The first clip reads: "Goddamn you, I curse the fucking day you were born", the second: "This house is not our home anymore; it's just an empty building". Both the clips posit a displacement, the one an emotional displacement where the son is renounced by the father, and the other a physical displacement, where the father and the son have to leave what they once knew as home. The scene in the film from where the first clip is taken shows the father and the son in the living room of their house, and the second shows the father and the son looking at the house from outside. The visual image of the door in both conveys the awareness of the boundary of inside/outside.

Both inside and outside are depicted as places filled with fear and violence. The sight of home becomes both a place of abjection, but also a place to be abjected. In the second clip the son is holding onto what he knows as home, but the father informs the son that everything has changed and that home is just an empty building. The son not only loses his home, but part of his identity; he identified with home as the place where he belonged, but in truth there is no place of belonging for them anymore. Belonging instead becomes a longing to belong.

The narrated text that I chose to use speaks of violence within the home space and being displaced as a result of that violence. *Goddamn you, I curse the fucking day you were born* is indicative of a character speaking to another to whom he is related. However, the words *Goddamn you* in themselves speak of a situation of domestic violence, and the background thumping can be interpreted as someone being struck as they are spoken to. The second phrase speaks about escape from a violent situation and how the home has to be seen as *just an empty building* in order for the subject to leave it behind. What is similar in both phrases is that all emotional attachment to home and the familiar is being severed as these words are spoken; one from the inside and one from the outside. The one speaker is cutting emotional ties for the other by explaining that the house is not their home anymore and they need to leave it behind, and the other is cutting emotional ties for himself by shunning that which is familiar from the home.

In conclusion, discussing these examples has made it evident that identity formation is partially dependent upon space, particularly home space or dwelling space. It is also accurate to state that this dwelling space becomes a clear extension of the subject's identity, and it plays a large part in reaffirmation and sustaining of identity. Thus when a subject is displaced from home space or the familiar dwelling space, it destabilises identity, creating a volatile nomadic subject whose sense of identity is floating. Representations of home spaces and the body (or absence of the body) within home spaces are key to understanding and reflecting on identity formation. A longing for home can be synonymous with a longing for a unified self, a complete identity, comfort and belonging.

Safety, privacy, intimacy and comfort, which are seen to be synonymous with home, are important characteristics to individuals in that they aid in identity formation by creating a comfortable "nest" for identity to "hatch" in. However, if contemporary art is set on crossing these boundaries and challenging their validity, the subject's identity is in danger of being destabilised and inevitably homesickness underscores the event of becoming a nomadic subject who is not anchored in home space, but open to the contingent negotiation of identity within the changing relationship of space to place/self to space. Attempts to represent home spaces are paradoxical in nature because they cause the very thing which they set out to defy from the start: homesickness.

Trying to secure the imagined self into space and time uproots the self, causing a floating subject with the locus of memory being the displaced body and the site of displacement – the home.

Chapter 2

The longing for the body: Looking at the relationship between the body and the self as a symptom of homesickness in contemporary photography and video practice

In this chapter I specifically want to focus on the relationship between the represented body and identity formation. I choose here to look at the body, our primary conscious experience of home. It is the prime place of existence, of dwelling, “the body that decides willingly to give life to existence and therefore think and rethink itself, bind, multiply itself, belong to itself, bend excite stretch itself and take possession of itself” (Miglietti 2003: 20). The body is our centre point from which we absorb and make sense of the world around us, and then consequently make sense of ourselves. The body forms the fundamental space where the instance of becoming self-aware takes place. I will also look at the alienation that occurs once the body is represented (in photography and video) and how that influences *homesickness* for a unified sense of self.

Jacques Lacan’s theory on “the self as mirror image”¹⁸ helped us to characterise what it is that enables an individual to become aware of him/herself as an autonomous thinking, feeling being, and what helps us maintain this level of self-consciousness (Homer 2005: 21). The theory is based on the supposition that in order to define oneself, one must first be able to distinguish oneself from others as well as one’s direct environment (Homer 2005: 21).

After the initial recognition, the infant then identifies with the image in the mirror. The identification and the unification of fragmented body parts¹⁹ are essential processes in order for the infant to eventually view him/herself as a complete being. This creates slight displacement and confusion, because the perception is that control is achieved over the body, but in a place that is not the body

¹⁸ According to Lacan, the mirror stage occurs when a human being is between the ages of six end eighteen months old. His theory corresponds with Freud’s ideas on primary narcissism – “That is the stage of human development when the subject is in love with the image of themselves and their own bodies and which precedes the love of others” (Homer 2005: 25). During the mirror stage, the child recognises that the image reflected in the mirror is his/her own. Through this recognition awareness his/her own body is created in the infant. The image in the mirror provides a means for the infant’s prior fragmented awareness of his/her body to be integrated and perceived in unity.

¹⁹ Up until this point the infant’s only awareness of his/her own body is fragmented. The infant is aware of the body in separate parts and not as a whole.

(the reflection in the mirror). This confusion and displacement are generally referred to as *alienation* by Lacan and it is at this moment of alienation that the *ego*²⁰ emerges.

So misinterpreting and denying its structural dependence on others constitutes the autonomy of the ego. This representation (the image reflected in the mirror) is perceived as a copy of the original, a sign of the referent, a signifier of the signified (Weber 1991:104). In context of the representations of the body within the home, or the body *as* the only true experience of home, one becomes aware of the displacement from the actual experience as a result of the documentation of the experience. In cases of self-representation and self-portraits, the *alienation* mentioned before largely accumulates as the represented and the representative simultaneously merge into one, and isolated from one another. In the mirror stage, however, this understanding of representation comes into question because the representative (the infant) constructs, in the subconscious mind, the ideological structure of the represented (the recognition of the body as a unity, the ego). This brings us closer to deconstructing the art/artist and provides an explanation or origin of the work and the artist's situation and relation towards the body. It is also important to understanding and acknowledging the significance of alienation in order to construct a unified sense of self. Our imaginings of who we are are projected onto ourselves from a distance in order to aid in understanding the self whilst being removed from the self.

"The imaginary is defined as an order of representation which misrepresents difference as the image of identity. One might say it seeks to impose a ground upon the groundlessness of "reality" of differential articulation. "It is an effort that can never fully succeed, but that in missing the mark engenders powerful effects" (Weber 1991: 105).

So by now we have recognized that the *other*²¹ is essential to establishing the ego. Representation of the body (as well as the acknowledgement/assimilation of the other) is essential for the infant to

²⁰ Lacan argues that the ego is an imaginary concept and does not take priority over the unconscious. It is based on the illusion of control and unity of the body and can therefore be seen as *mis-recognition* of the self. The ego refuses to accept that fragmentation and alienation are present in the constitution of the self. The ego emerges when conflict arises between the infant's own fragmented self, and the imaginary unity of the body viewed in the image reflected in the mirror.

²¹ It is important to distinguish between the lower case 'other' and the upper case 'Other'. The lower case other refers to the other that is used in the mirror stage to help with the recognition of the self. This other is similar to the self and we perceive them as unified egos, and as reflections of ourselves. The upper case Other is *that absolute otherness which we cannot assimilate to our own subjectivity* (Homer 2005: 70). It is everything that is foreign and unfamiliar to us. We associate with the lower case other in order to acquire a coherent sense of unity in the self. The first experience and most noted other is the mother, or primary caregiver.

create a consistent illusory image of the body seen from the outside. This brings us to the notion that the self will always have an undertone of alienation for the subject: I recognise myself in the mirror and acquire an imaginary sense of self in the reflected image, but not in my own body.

As the infant projects an image of a unified self upon others (and on his own reflection in the mirror), so the artist/author projects his image onto the viewer through art (in this case specifically photography).

Judith Butler's approach to the Self and Other relationship is strongly rooted in the writings of the German philosopher Hegel. Hegel suggests that only through having knowledge of (an) Other can the Self fully know itself. There seems always to be a desire for something Other, and this desire is rooted in an actual desire for the Self, the subject. "There are two modes of desiring in phenomenology:²² the desire for the Other, leading to the loss of the Self, and the desire for ourselves (or in other words, self consciousness) which leads to the loss of the world" (Salih 2002: 26). This leads to an understanding that the Other poses a threat to the Self's existence, and therefore the process of achieving self-consciousness will always be a negative process that involves complete annihilation of the Other in order for Self preservation.

I want to connect the notion of the alienation of the subject with the feeling of homesickness. Perhaps the fundamental impulse of all homesickness springs from a perpetual yearning to be united with the image in the mirror,²³ to be that representation of the body, whilst having a coherent sense of identity. It is a common belief that one can only miss home when one is not there, but what if the feeling frequently understood as feeling homesick can in fact be felt when one is in the midst of home? In the same way that the self is constituted through association with the Other (reflection, mother), I believe we make sense of what our home is to us. I am drawing a parallel between the feeling of alienation within how we identify self and the physical body. I do not believe these processes are separate; our possessions and interior spaces of the home and the self give an accurate indication of our self and what the developed ego entails. Within the home space these *things* are viewed in fragments, bits and pieces, and we therefore have a fragmented awareness of the space and what it holds. Once the home space is viewed from the outside, through the eyes of an outsider, through artistic/visual representation, we acquire an imaginary unified awareness of the

²² Phenomenology can be understood as the analysis of structures of consciousness and the acts of consciousness. It is the study of the consciousness and the content of conscious experiences [*from the perspective of the subject?* i.e. not positivist].

²³ Or, to be reunited with the primary experience of home, the mother.

home space and what we have gathered on the inside, yet it remains alienated, and can never be a true reflection as a result of the separation of the reflected image and the body.

The function of the realisation of the self, and in turn the constitution of the ego, is that it provides the infant with the means to place the body in a spatial context. This spatial placement is necessary in order for the ego to be grounded in a context, and to prevent self-awareness from transpiring into the inadvertent nomadic subject. Self-awareness is thus not a roaming itinerant phenomenology, but relative to a spatial context. The space between the self and the reflection in the mirror is just as necessary for the constitution of the subject as the presence of the other. However, this space remains on the periphery, much like the object, and the focus remains on the self and other. If the subject is at home when he/she looks into the mirror, not only does the reflected image provide illusory unity concerning [word missing?], but it also provides a unified sense of the previously fragmented home space.

Julia Kristeva accepts Lacan's notions of the mirror stage and agrees that unity is acquired through the perceived reflected image, but she suggests that even before the mirror stage the infant does start distinguishing between itself and others surrounding it "in order to develop borders between 'I' and other" (McAfee 2004: 46). The process through which the infant develops these borders is referred to by Kristeva as *abjection*, and it is a process through which one discards parts which make up or form part of oneself. "The object is what one spits out, rejects, almost violently excludes from oneself: sour milk, excrement, even a mother's engulfing embrace. What is abjected is radically excluded but never banished altogether" (McAfee 2004: 46). So in other words, when one discards parts of oneself, the object, they do not leave the consciousness completely; they are discarded, but it still lingers, just outside the focal point. The object is that which does not adhere to boundaries, that which is a part of us, but which we cannot leave behind. It haunts in the unconscious and the conscious.

The primary and most important form of abjection is that of the *abject mother*. Before the infant recognises itself in the mirror and becomes a subject, it is still in an imaginary union with the mother. The first thing that the infant has to abject in order for self-recognition is the place of its origin, its mother. "In order to become a subject, the child must renounce its identification with its mother; it must draw a line between itself and her" (McAfee 2004: 48).

This brings on a sense of confusion: the child longs for the mother's body, but needs to relinquish it in order to become a self. The lingering of the abject causes a fear of its return (in this case the mother) and it is this fear (of returning into the mother's body) that threatens the identity of the subject. Freud is of the opinion that this fear of losing one's own identity is "the ultimate source of the feeling of uncanniness" (McAfee 2004: 48). Life feels like it has something more to offer than what is apparent, and through this feeling of loss, and the void that it creates, desire is born – a desire to fill the void, to retrieve what has been lost, and to feel *whole* again.

In her essay "Strangers to ourselves" (1989), Julia Kristeva states that uncanniness occurs when the boundaries between imagination and reality are erased. The uncanny is based on Freud's notion of the unconscious, and on the idea that what is repressed (fear, revolt and/or trauma) will resurface at a later stage, and when it does the strange is strange because it is inadvertently familiar. There is thus an uncanny strangeness about the self, where identification takes place in the conscious, yet the unconscious remains unidentified. It can be argued that we are our own other, we are familiar with who we are, yet a vast landscape of foreign uncharted territory lies within ourselves in the form of the unconscious.

A great amount has been written about the role that the unconscious plays in artistic representation and the artist can never be completely disconnected from his or her art, no matter how depersonalised the artwork has become. Representation is a process by which we construct the world around us, according to Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken (2001: 14). We need to make use of representation in order to make sense of the world around us and construct meaning and personal interpretation of the things we experience. According to Cartwright and Sturken, representation doesn't merely serve as reflection or mimesis of reality, but as a way in which we "organise, construct and mediate our understanding of reality, emotion and imagination" (2001: 12). Rosemary Betterton, a feminist cultural theorist who writes about gendered representation in visual culture, believes that the self is reaffirmed by "the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are" (1996: 173). According to her, we shape our sense of self by remembering our past. Autobiographical representation (an investigation into our own past by means of visual language) aids in making sense of one's present and confirms self-identification. It is important for the self to be defined in networks of memory, place, family and culture, rather than nation and race. Here the home becomes imperative to establishing and maintaining identity, as it is a site that summarises memory, place, family and culture. The site of home, however, is one of evolution and change and

not a fixed space without any spaces for renegotiation, and therefore identity can be seen as a continuous process of renegotiation and not an endpoint to be achieved.

When the other/Other (in this case particularly the animal other) is invited into the home, however, and home space is shared with that other, identity is moulded to accommodate the change, and as identity changes the home space changes.

Most of our immediate world is shaped to accommodate the needs of the body: nourishment, transportation, comfort are just a few categories of the 'basic' needs of the body. Self-awareness and self-realisation append another set of needs for the body which involve bodily modification and adornment (aiding on some level in self-approval and self-love). One cannot ignore these needs when one investigates the self and the body as primary sites of homeliness. An unhomely body orchestrates a new set of boundaries concerning the body.

So, this said, even though the body is our most important device for experiencing, and experiencing the notion of belonging and home (second to the womb), it can also be a site of the unhomely, a horror of the inescapable experience. We cannot escape our bodies and therefore we cannot escape the experiences that the body endures, albeit that sometimes these experiences are administered and influenced by our subconscious, over which we have no conscious control.

The use of photographs to help construct identity is shaped by the meanings attached to the content of the photograph: "Photographs are received rather as an environment. As free and familiar coinage of meaning" (Burgin in Alvarado *et al.* 2001: 66).²⁴ Photographs carry an important currency of meaning which up until the 1960s remained largely unexplored. An investigation into the language of photography links to studies of semiology and the construction of meaning through written and visual communication. However, "Work in semiotics showed that there is no 'language' of photography, no single signifying system upon which photographs depend" (Burgin 1977: 66); photography draws from a diverse set of complex codes. These codes are shaped and predetermined by social structures and originate in determinate modes of human organisation. The question of meaning "therefore is constantly to be referred to the social and psychic formations of the author/reader of the photograph, formations existentially simultaneous and co-extensive but theorised in separate discourses" (Burgin 1977: 67).

²⁴ Victor Burgin is a visual cultural theorist and author of "Looking at Photographs" (1977).

Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins write in their essay “The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes” that a photograph cannot be seen only as a “captured view of the other, but rather a dynamic site at which many gazes or viewpoints intersect” (2003: 354). The fact that gazes or viewpoints intersect within a photograph creates an intricate object and allows for confluence of identities. Viewers of the photograph can “negotiate a number of different identities both for themselves and for those pictured” (Lutz & Collins 2003: 354). The most basic gazes include the gaze of the artist, the gaze of the viewer and the gaze of the subject pictured in the photograph. Most of the time the artist’s gaze overlaps with that of the viewer, as the viewer *sees* through *the eyes* of the photographer.

In 1998 the artist Chien-Chi Chang created an interesting piece of supposed documentary photography that crosses into the domain of contemporary art photography, when he looked at the more than 700 patients residing at the temple that serves as a psychiatric asylum of Lung Fa Tang in southern Taiwan. The patients suffer a wide range of mental illnesses and have been categorised as “incurable” by the Taiwanese medical establishment. At the facility the patients are cared for by the temple’s monks and nuns, and an unorthodox metal chain treatment is administered in which two residents are tied to one another at the waist by a metal chain measuring about two metres in length. Patients are usually matched by their illnesses being considered as *complementary*; for example, a loud and outspoken patient might be paired with one who hardly speaks at all and by doing so the temple administrators believe that a Buddhist type of balance, or Zen, may be achieved. Chang’s documentation of this facility and its treatment is presented in forty eight life-size black and white prints shot from the same frontal view point. He consciously avoids the type of sensationalism that this facility has received in the past through journalists and media representatives, but rather focuses on the subjects themselves and on trying to keep his portraiture as accurate and unbiased as possible.

Within his series *The Chain* (1998), showcased at the first ICP triennial of photography and video entitled *Strangers*, Chang uncovers an interesting relationship, a visual metaphor, of self and other. The fact that the patients are chained together quite literally suggests that the self cannot exist without the other, that they are irrevocably tied to one another. The way in which the patients are paired also confirms the dominant/less dominant interplay that exists within the self and the other relationship. There is the tension of being bound to each other, yet they are still separate.

Once the viewer becomes aware of the method by which subjects are paired, they might start to distinguish visually by means of reading body language and tell-tale characteristics which one is the more dominant and which one the more subservient of the patients. Subtleties of the individual relationship between the subjects also become evident from the uniform similarity of the way in which the photographs were taken. Upon closer inspection some patients stand close together; others hold hands; some keep their chained partner at the full two-metre-length distance resulting in a taut chain; some seem inseparable from their partner and others glance at their partners in abhorrence. One can only imagine the psychological effect and affect²⁵ that this might have on an individual.

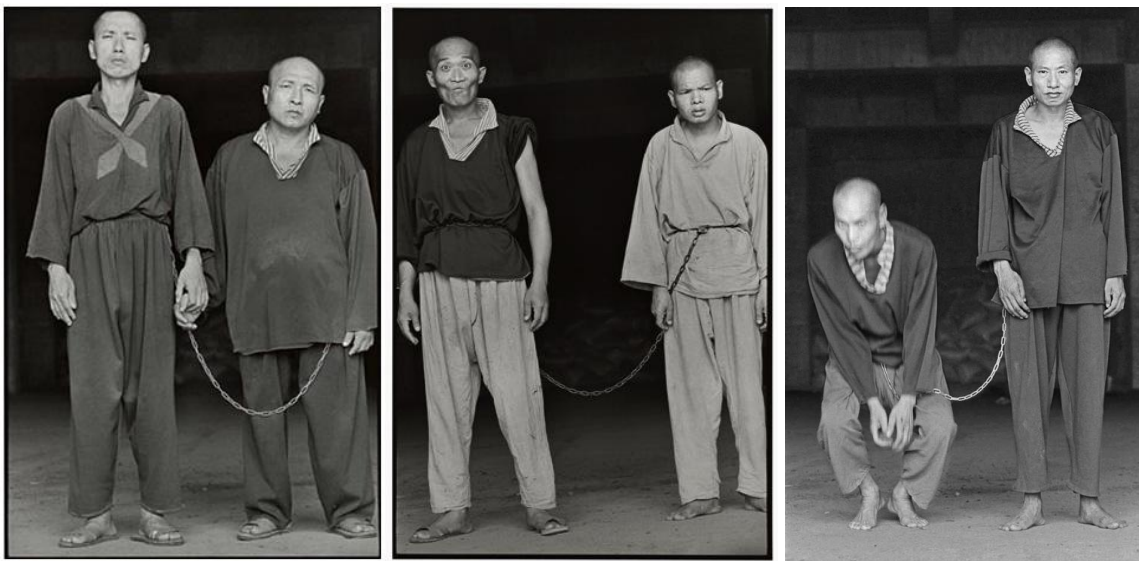


Figure 11: Chien-Chi Chang, detail of *The Chain*, 1998. (International Centre of Photography 2001). Photographic installation consisting of 48 photographs printed in duotone inks as part of one long accordion-pleated sheet.

All sense of privacy is eliminated and one has to constantly share one's "space" with a stranger. As a result of the mystery that lurks behind the personal mechanism of the subjects within each photograph, a peculiar nostalgia emerges. This nostalgia,²⁶ a profound *heimwee*, hints at the viewer's inexplicable need for the patients to get along. One is haunted by possibilities of events that may occur beyond the moment that the lens has captured. The black background against which the

²⁵ I look at both the effect and the affect that a photograph has on the viewer. The effect refers to the consequences it has; for instance, looking at a photograph can result in homesickness. The affect refers to the emotional impact that the photograph triggers within the viewer. I will expand on these aspects in the conclusion. [Just a thought: in the paragraph you are talking about affect and effect with respect to the patients, not the viewers, I think ("an individual"?)]

²⁶ The photographs are evoke a traumatic past. The subjects in the photograph have probably never been photographed before and this event stands as a significant moment in time, one that is to be remembered at all times.

subjects are photographed places them within a context void of meaning and reference to personal identity. They become nomadic universal subjects, who are not fixed within any spatial context, and who become individuals upon closer inspection of small details.

These *floating* subjects add to the disturbing ambiance created by the lack of individuality. The patients' sense of self fades as a result of the style in which the photograph is taken; although the artist intended to give an unbiased representation of the subjects, it becomes an exploitation of their tainted identity: because of their illness the subjects might not be aware of the photographer documenting their existence, hence a sense of a violation of the subjects' values arises within the viewer. This can evoke pity in the viewer for the misfortune of the subject, who envisions a life of horror and discomfort (the facial expressions of some of these patients add to the morbid association). The viewer casts the subject into an imagined life of misery, yet some or even most of the subjects might be completely unaware of their circumstances and feel obliviously happy. This evokes a sense of unauthorized looking within the viewer, an unsettling voyeuristic quality creating guilt in whoever looks at the work. With the *punctum* the viewer establishes a relationship with the subject of the photograph, and therefore feels empathy.

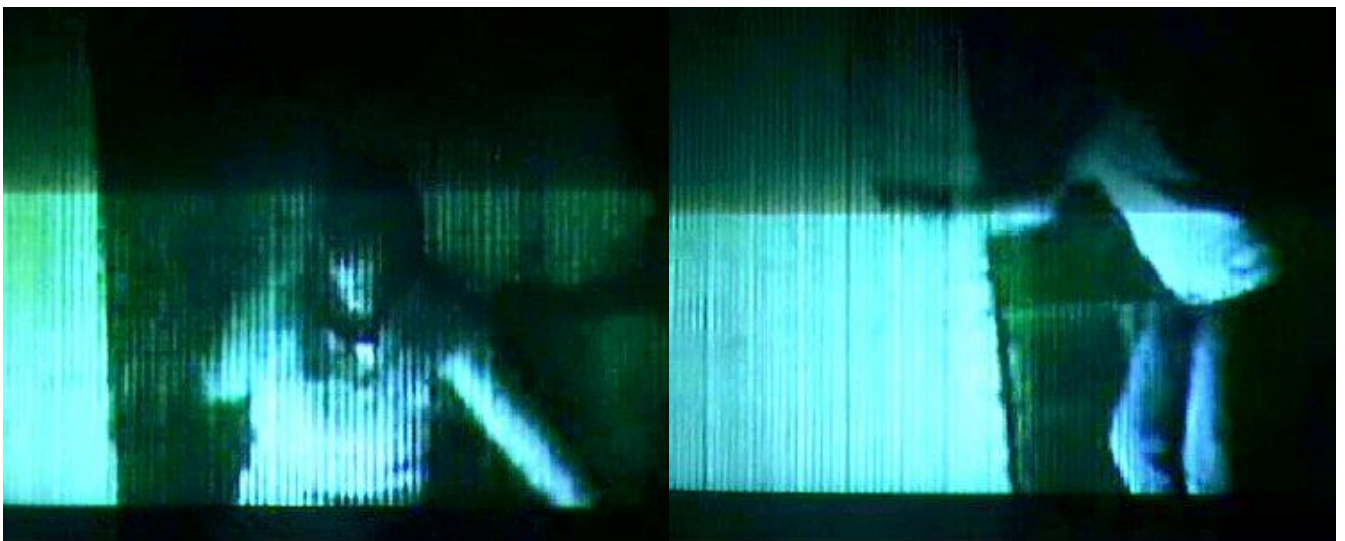


Figure 12: Corlia Harmsen, still from *All this fucking trouble (just to get a response from you)*, 2006. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital Video and sound, duration: 9mins.

The idea of the *floating subject* is emulated in my own work *All this fucking trouble (just to get a response from you)*, 2006. Here the space in which the subject is placed is not void of meaning, even although it is a black space without any reference to identity. The vacant space rather frames the

subject into emptiness, adding to the video's conceptual foundations of alienation and displacement and loss of identity.

This video works in conjunction with a visually similar video piece titled *The Curse*, 2006. The two video pieces are both edited with sound relevant to the moving image. Conceptually and visually they play off each other to create a resonance within the room in which they are installed. *All this fucking trouble (just to get a response from you.)* was filmed inside an empty and abandoned warehouse in which people had occupied the spaces/rooms. The warehouse became their home. The strong industrial undertone echoed through everything – from the dusty windows with x's marked in masking tape, to the raw cement floors and the unfinished walls. Everything smelled like a construction site, and it was impersonal and over exposed with light. The inhabitants of the B2 building²⁷ decided to host an art exhibition/happening in August 2006 called *B2 Collective*, after which the building would be demolished and actual apartment buildings erected. I was invited to participate in the exhibition, and this video piece was created for the event.

It was filmed in one of the rooms and the footage is of me dancing (to Dolly Parton and Kenny Rodgers singing *Islands in the stream.*) While editing the video, I used a technique which I call *removing*,²⁸ I removed the image 10 times. The removal technique is a visual metaphor of how I felt at the time, a faint digital memory, removed from the rest of the world. Events around the time of the exhibition made it clear that most of my frustration was a result of unsatisfying responses from certain people in my life. I was tired of not getting a response, and so I fabricated a lie in order to see what responses I would get.

A week before the exhibition I told everyone that I was moving to another country. The details are no longer important, but the point that I was trying to prove was that people only tend to want to resolve unresolved issues either when you are leaving or dying. I thought that telling everyone I knew that I was dying would just be inappropriate, so I opted for leaving. Supposedly relocating to the UK permanently, I even had a surprise going away party the night before I was suppose to board the airplane, courtesy of my unsuspecting friends. I actually went to the airport and waited for three

²⁷ The B2 Building is a warehouse building in the industrial area of Stellenbosch.

²⁸ Removing: The original digital video is captured on PC and written to DVD. The video piece is then played on DVD player and TV and filmed again. Filming a Television screen creates a blue/green distortion on the video piece. For this specific piece I repeated the method of removing 10 times. In other words, the distorted image would then be written to DVD and recorded with digital video camera off the television to further "remove" the image from the viewer and enhance the distortion of the image.

hours at the hypothetical time that I was supposed to board the airplane, but no-one showed up. I had received my response, and even though it was not the response I was hoping for, it was a response.

After the opening night of the exhibition, the video piece stood as the explanation for the lie that I had fabricated. The work is also a response to the disparaging treatment I received from a person with whom I had established an intimate relationship. I use my own body in the work and this serves as a form of protection from specular dissection because it is rather a first-person intimate representation as a result of negative second-person projection.

By just viewing the video work, one is not aware of the narrative that forms the foundation of the work, and the work falls into a category of being open to interpretation by the viewer. My own experiences shaped the starting point of the work, but the work in itself functions as an autonomous visual poetic product. I took from the experience and translated that experience into a poetic narrative which holds a different meaning for me than what it would for the viewer. The repetitive nature of both the visuals and the audio could be interpreted as feeling “trapped” in a self-destructive loop. The phrase “what have I become” allows emotional access to the work. This *punctum* and sentimental detail of the work grants the viewer an opportunity to form a relationship with the subject of the work.

This type of work that is grounded in documenting performance or staged interventions is echoed in the work of Sophie Calle. In her work *The Sleepers*, 1980 she asked 30 friends, acquaintances and strangers recommended to her to spend eight hours together with her in her bed. She then took photographs of them (with permission) while they slept, and documented conversations she had with them about their sleep patterns, dreams and feelings, and their responses to the sometimes awkward situation of being in bed with her. The result was 176 black and white photographs, each 15x20 cm, and written documentation of the event (Grosenick 2001: 72).

Calle bridges the boundaries of inside and outside by inviting someone, who might never have seen such an intimate space of hers under normal circumstances, into her bed. Watching someone while they are sleeping is also a very intimate act, bordering on the uncanny. The sleeper is not aware of anything that is happening in his/her surroundings, and all power is given to Calle to manipulate and control the situation in whichever way she pleases.

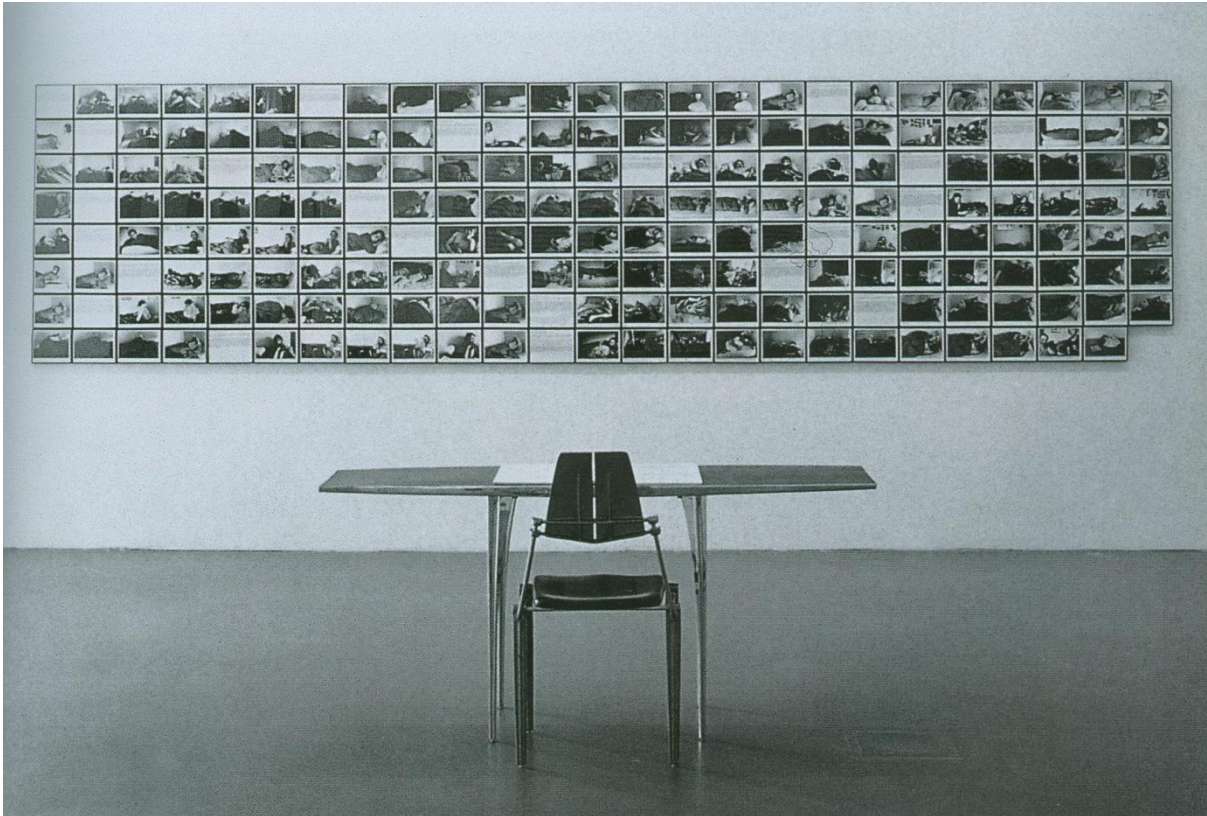


Figure 13: Sophie Calle, detail from *Sleepers*, 1980. (Grosenick 2001:74). Photographic installation.

In Calle's previous work, *L'Hotel*, 1981, her images focus more on the absence of the body within the bed. Calle took photographs of guests' rooms at the hotel in Venice where she worked as a chambermaid. She focused on personal things, specifically unmade beds. Calle always completed the sequence by taking a picture of the bed she had just made as part of her duty.

In *Sleepers*, 1980 the focus is more on the body within the bed. A strong nostalgia for a significant other emerges; sex is not the ulterior motive here, but rather a need to be accompanied in bed, the artist's need to be not-alone in the most intimate spaces one can share with another person. There is a definite longing for the body, the other, in Calle's work, which might be seen as a result of the longing for a unified self. Whether she changed the sheets after every "sleep over" is not clear, and a subtle reminder of the abject (skin, hair, sweat) lingers on the periphery.



Figure 14 Sophie Calle, detail from *L' Hotel*, 1981. (Grosenick 2001:74). Photographic installation.

This longing for the unified self in relation to the experience of its ultimate fragmentation can be read in a more literal way in the work of Matthew Barney in his series *Cremaster 3*, 2002. I refer specifically to the moment in the film where the apprentice reaches level three in a game called *The Order* and Barney meets the double amputee character played by Aimee Mullins. It is noted that Mullins's character, known as Entered Novitiate, is invented to be The Apprentice's (Barney's) alter ego (Spector 2002: 56). Nancy Spector states that "*Cremaster 3* is the narcissistic centre of the cycle; it resonates with references to the project as a whole, and to Barney's position as its author" (Spector 2002: 56).

In Level Three of *The Order*, Mullins's character wears a white gown and crystal-clear prosthetic legs. Barney's character wears a similar gown and the same crystal-like high-heeled shoes. The setting reminds one of a clinical hospital locale, one that hints at the amputation of Mullins's legs. The transparent prosthesis, constructed to resemble crystal, reveals Mullin's fragmented body. When the prosthesis is skin-coloured and the leg is inserted into it, one hardly ever sees the end of the leg, where it was amputated. By the use of transparent material the base of the amputation is visible, making the remembrance of amputation (separation from one's own body, alienation of the appendage) much more vivid.

However, the metaphorical significance of crystal is elegance and preciousness. Her crystal prosthesis therefore suggests sovereignty over the normal human form, turning trauma into

supremacy. On the other hand, the crystal legs carry a longing for a whole body, the shape uncannily resembles that of a human leg, and like the object, it lingers on the periphery to remind the subject of its existence.



Figure 15: Matthew Barney, details from *Cremaster 3*, 2002. (Spector 2002). Contemporary film: *Cremaster Cycle*, 2003.

In Level Three of *The Order*, Entered Novitiate is The Apprentice's *other*, his alter ego. The term alter ego signifies another identity, a second self, something which forms part of one's own identity, but stands free from oneself.²⁹ It becomes apparent that Barney is drawing on the self and other relationship and the longing for the unified self by reuniting himself with his alter ego on Level Three, leading to the culmination of the film.

The use of a second self, an alter ego, in Barney's *Cremaster 3* finds resonance in my own work *Gilad Hockman*, 2006, although my depiction of my second self can be associated with Aimee Mullins's character in Barney's film. In 2006 I filmed myself for one day every Friday of the week. Each time I changed the position of the camera so that it would only observe me when I was in that specific room; then I proceeded with my daily activities (cleaning, listening to music, drinking wine, changing a light bulb), most of the time forgetting that the camera was recording. In this way I was trying to acquire a sense of how I was perceived by others. What were my body posture, mannerisms, silent moments like. It was a narcissistic inquiry, which I had hoped would lead only to better knowledge of my self.

²⁹ Barney's use of the alter ego here echoes the infant's relationship with his reflection in the mirror.

On the particular day that this footage was filmed, I received an email from Gilad Hockman, but at the moment of changing the light bulb I was unaware that this email was sitting in my inbox. An ambiguous interpretation can be made when I read aloud on the video “I do mean it when I say I am busy...”, yet the visuals show I am at home, casually going about my day, seemingly quiescent in activity.



Figure 16: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *Gilad Hockman*, 2006. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 1 minute.

After listening to the text developing into a letter of disappointment (a lover ending an affair by email), it becomes clear that the real author is implying my inability to be autonomous, and suggesting that I have an obsessive need for him which he cannot fulfil. The action of changing a light bulb is metaphorical for establishing independence, and the chronological order in which the events unfold (I was changing the light bulb at the exact time that he sent the email) pays homage to the signified independence. The lover is represented by the chair in the video, which I place underneath the light fixture in the beginning, but never have the need to use it. The narrating voice becomes my alter ego; it is my voice speaking someone else’s words, words that could potentially undermine my own identity, yet it could easily have been my own thoughts directed at the original author.

A South African artist who has also incorporated intimate dialogue into her work is Doreen Southwood. In her installation piece called *Slipway*, 2002 she confronts a *you* with a very intimate dialogue of lovers’ tit for tat. The poem is a series of actions and reactions grouped together in three sets. The installation consisted of resin-cast letters that were mounted on a steel frame at different heights and then submerged in the water on a slipway at the Victoria Waterfront in Cape Town. As

the water levels rose and dropped, so the different lines of the dialogue became more visible or faded into the murky depths.

My reason for choosing to discuss this work, even though it is technically not in photographic or video medium like the other works I discuss, is because it reflects the ephemeral nature of the relationships that form an integral part of my creative practice. The fact that the work is an installation and is temporary, like an encounter, makes it a valuable example to discuss in terms of its preservation within the photograph.

Water has purifying as well as destructive qualities, and the act of submerging the installation within the water so that only the text is visible gives the work an ambiguous property of obliterating the text, but also decontaminating it of previous associations it has with the *you* in the dialogue. It is not clear who Southwood is referring to when she speaks of *you*, but the tactile, suggestive words such as *touch*, *hurt* and *taste* posit an intimate relationship. The last sentence stating the other's escape implies that a loss and longing are born from the experience. It is as though the artist is giving a water burial to her emotions, ridding herself of the suffering caused by her nostalgia.

The dialogue reads:

I TOUCH YOU/

YOU HURT ME

I TASTE YOU/

YOU PLEASE ME

I SEE YOU/

YOU ESCAPE ME.

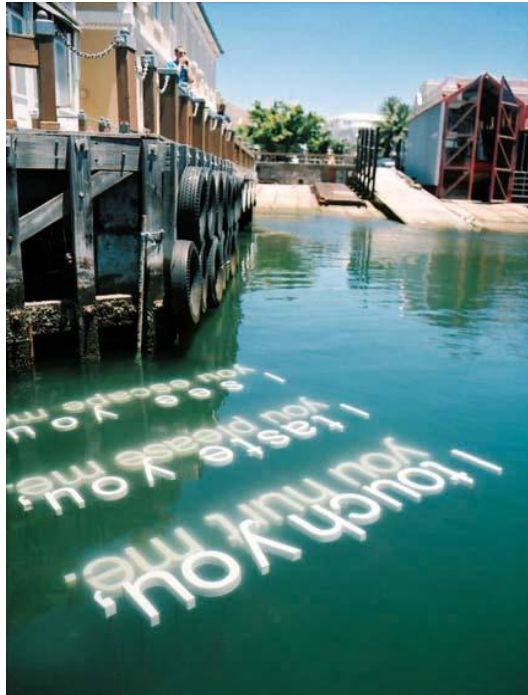


Figure 17: Doreen Southwood, detail from *Slipway*, 2002. (Perryer 2004). Site-specific installation, for the exhibition *Homeport*, Cape Town, 2002.

The location of the installation, the harbour, also signifies departure and temporary dwelling. Metaphorical qualities of the ships in the harbour (such as anchoring, docking, floating, filth, etc.) can also be applied to the relationship between lovers. The buoy-like words serve as a mechanism to keep the relationship afloat, but they fade in the water with the tide, like the foam from a ship's wake as it is leaving.

Southwood's installation speaks of displacement and longing for that which is familiar. Her public interpretation of domestic relationships creates tension between that which is believed to belong inside and that which is believed to belong outside. Her primary experience of home is that of her own self, and she depends upon the *you* in this poem to confirm her contentedness within herself and reassure her. Her *self* and *other* are taken from the secure home space and positioned within the public domain for unrestricted scrutiny. What is usually kept hidden and secret is splayed out on communal grounds, and the viewer experiences an uncanny voyeurism when looking at the work, much in the same sense as if reading someone's diary.

The artist becomes the discarded entity, the subject is abjected by the object of affection (a body as the abject of another body), and like all that is abject, it is not irretrievably lost, but lingers on the periphery to remind one of its existence. The artist has a lost sense of identity as a result of being

discarded by the other, yet there are vestiges of this identity apparent in the work, and this reaffirms the actuality that the identity of the artist can only exist in relation to the presence of the other. This is reaffirmed by the representation of the absence of the other.

Renata Salecl (writing about Jenny Holzer's work *Lustmord*, 1998) is of the opinion that "the most horrible violence that can happen to a subject is usually not physical pain, but violence that destroys the subject's identity, his or her self-perception" (Salecl in Jenny Holzer, Phaidon, 1998: 80). As noted before, identity establishment can be understood as a fantasy, a constant imagining and projection (upon oneself) of who we are, or who we think we are, or think we should be. If something is to tamper with this process in a way that all imaginings are erased and the subject's identity no longer makes sense to themselves, this can be perceived as the "most horrible violence" (Salecl 1998: 80) which leads to the subject's self-perception as a meaningless empty vessel.

The representation of horror (such as mentioned above) and the *heimwee* for the self in contemporary art can be seen in the work of Jenny Holzer, *Lustmord*, 1998. This work was made in response to Bosnian war crimes (specifically the widespread raping of women and children in Serbian "rape camps"), and how this has resulted in public "toleration" of *Lustmord*, or sexual murder involving rape. The work consists of photographs of text written on skin. The text is divided into three categories, or positions of observation: the perpetrator, the victim and the observer. The viewer isn't told which is which, and a confusion of the positions occurs where perpetrator, victim and observer merge into one another. One simultaneously relates to and dissociates from the text written on the skin. The texts are similar in that they are mostly observations or documentations of a sexual event. Emotions, assumptions, reactions, projections and experiences are contextualised into *Lustmord* incidents and written on skin.

The skin adds to the intimacy, though one isn't always sure which part of the body the patch of skin belongs to. The skin remains silent, implicit and impartial, perhaps a metaphor for the trauma of rape that remains unspoken, despite the many textual attempts to do so. The act of writing these texts on the skin becomes in a way more significant than the texts in themselves. Questions around "who wrote on whom" are raised, and one wonders whether the owner of the skin wrote on his own skin, or whether someone had written the texts on skin that was not theirs. This evokes a dialogue around "doing something to someone" or "having something done to you", and the act of observing or witnessing the debacle or its effect.



Figure 18: Jenny Holzer, details from *Lustmord*, 1998. (Jenny Holzer, Phaidon, 1998). Detail from photographic installation.

Holzer's *Lustmord* was first publicly shown on the cover of the German magazine *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* (19 November 1993). They reproduced one of the text-on-skin photographs and printed it in red ink with a little bit of blood mixed into the ink. The blood was provided by women volunteers who had been involved in the project. Writing in blood hints at bloodshed and spilled blood, but also devotion and bondage to a cause. "The blood-writing added a further dimension, making it seem as if an inner element of the body had come to the surface in order to symbolize the trauma that had disrupted it" (Salecl in Holzer 1998: 81). One senses that the *She* referred to in the text (most probably written from the perpetrator' and the observer's position) has suffered a loss of identity as result of the trauma experienced. I refer back to Salecl, who stated that the most horrible trauma is not physical pain, but destruction of identity and self-perception. Holzer emphasizes this notion by not visually depicting any violence; rather the violence is implicit in the text, and it is a more abstract kind of violence, not one that breaks bodies, but one that breaks the self.

A video work that I produced in 2006 draws a parallel to the understanding of trauma in Holzer's representation of trauma in her work. *ToGetHer (TO GET HER)*, 2006 was created in response to a situation of domestic violence. The video consists of two images superimposed upon one another. The one video was taken by me and the other video by the person whom I was intimately involved with at the time of the incident and who was responsible for the assault (referred to from here on as the offender). The two videos serve as a representation of me before and after the assault, and the

sound as a means of transition between the two.

The first image is a depiction of me dancing in ballet Pointe shoes and is filmed by the offender. The Pointe shoe is a reference to pain and endurance, but also to beauty and femininity. In ballet the term *breaking in* refers to a new Pointe shoe being beaten, burned and deformed in order to fit the dancer's feet and increase comfort and minimise pain. The Pointe shoe also makes reference to the sexual fetish shoe type called the ballet boot, or Viennese fetish boot, which in turn speaks of bondage and submission. All these references serve as a metaphor of the nature of the relationship between me and the offender.

The second video shows how I remove a broken key from the security gate at my front door. I had all the locks to my front door and security gates changed after the assault. The broken key is an indication of the offender's attempt to force his way into my house. The sound is a recording of the offender's voice and of my own singing of a lullaby. The recordings were made on the same day, but 12 hours apart.

The work is a direct metaphor for how I am perceived by the offender and how I am perceived by myself, and how my identity is formed as a result of an amalgamation of the two perceptions.



Figure 19: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *ToGetHer*, 2006. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 1minute.

In conclusion, discussing these examples has made it evident that a sense of alienation is a driving force behind continual self-representation. It fuels our inquiry into what a unified self would look and feel like. In turn, however, using self-representation contributes to alienation in the sense that it captures (or aims to capture) the essence of the self, the identity away from the site body, in another place, therefore strengthening the longing or homesickness felt for the body that initiated

the representation in the first place.

In the same sense, we can use photographic representation to escape our own bodies, or to let someone in. In the work of Jenny Holzer, she emphasises the penetrative gaze of the uninformed viewer by writing on the body in ink and creating a mystery that draws the viewer closer to the art work. The proximity of the viewer to the body in the photograph is closer than what the viewer would ever move to such a body in reality, and one realises that it is also the photographic representation that restricts the viewer from entering the represented body.

The represented body in photography and video forms a fundamental space where self-awareness takes place. It is also interesting to note the spaces between subject and camera, camera and viewer, and viewer and subject. The viewer is in most instances forced to see from the viewpoint of the artist, as noted in Chien-Chi Chang's work *The Chain*.

From my discussions around the representation of loss and longing in this chapter we can conclude that the subject attempts to reclaim a part of the self by resuscitating the other into memory by use of photography and video. This part is the part that is projected onto the other and is necessary to ensure the formation of a coherent sense of identity. Loss and longing threaten to destabilise the subject's imaginary unified sense of self, and this threat explains why the subject finds it difficult to come to terms with loss, because acknowledging loss would mean acknowledging that one's identity is doomed to be forever fragmented. Contemporary photography and video are tools by which we hold onto the lost other, in order to prolong the realisation of loss and keep the memory of that which is dead and gone alive within the psyche.

Chapter 3

The longing for the Other (domestic animal): Looking at the relationship between the self and the other (specifically domestic animals) in contemporary photography and video practice

It is through subjectivity, conceptual language, reason and consciousness that we identify with *another*, writes Akira Mizuta Lippit, author of “...From wild technology to Electric Animal” (2002). According to Lippit, using these criteria we approach the other animal as an “incomplete subject. Since the animal possesses no discernable subjectivity, the human subject cannot rediscover itself in the place of this other. While the human can project anthropomorphic characteristics onto the animal, or experience emotions (such as pathos or sympathy) in response to its being, an impenetrable screen – language – divides the loci of animal and human” (2002: 120).

Language sets us apart from animals and, although they do not participate in our language, it is undeniable that they engage in a language system of their own. Representations and understandings of dogs seem to be either that of epitome or recluse. The dog is either represented as an embodiment of some form of evil, or as an outsider. “In symbolic terms, the domestic dog exists precariously in the no-man’s land between the human and the non-human worlds. It is an interstitial neither person nor beast, forever oscillating uncomfortably between the roles of high-status animal and low-status person” (Serpell 1995: 254).

In this chapter I intend to inquire into the relationship between the self and the Other (specifically the animal as other; domestic³⁰ animals) and how this (ethical) relationship and our approach to animals is portrayed in contemporary photographic and video practice. I want to investigate to what extent the relationship with the animal as other contributes to satisfactory identity formation and to what extent we restrict our relationship with animal others because of the impenetrable language barrier we envisage as autonomous subjects. I want to make use of the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on *becoming animal*, and the relationship between human identity and animal others (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). I wish to use their approach on becomings as having the nature of *affinity* rather than *identity*. In other words, becoming animal is a result of attraction or natural liking, rather than exact likeness or sameness in nature (Williams 2007: 95)

³⁰ It is interesting to note that the etymological origin of the word *domestication* derives from the Latin *domus*, which means house (Gallant 2002: 37).

I want to look at the different gazes that are present within contemporary photography dealing with animal others by examining my own work, as well as the work of selected contemporary artists: Matthew Barney, Francis Alÿs, Jo Ractliffe and Sithembele Komani. My final conclusion will be similar to that of Lori Brown, whose views on the magnitude of the animal's impact on human identity formation and consciousness I support. I too want to "counter the assumption that the difference is too great between us and other animals to enable robust forms of ethical interaction" (Brown 2007: 261) in the context of creative photographic and video practice.

The image of the domestic animal, specifically my pet dog Keila, functions as an emblem of longing. It is in her that I recognised my missing twin, and by internalising what she represents a possibility of a unified self becomes evident. When becoming a subject, there is inevitably the feeling that something has been lost. Desire is a result of the feeling of lack and "From the moment of its constitution in the symbolic order, the subject is in search of what is lacking" (Lapsley & Westlake 2006: 75). This imagined missing object, according to Lacan,³¹ can never be found. The missing object is not something which we once had and have lost, but more a general feeling that there is something missing from our lives (Homer, 2005). The lack within the self emerges when the subject realises that the reflection or representation of themselves is whole, and that their self-awareness can only be considered whole as a result of this reflection or representation, as discussed in Chapters One and Two. A unified sense of self can only be achieved in a place that is not the self (the mirror or the lens) and the subject immediately desires to be united with the represented/reflected other. Desire has no specificity, but is rather a condition of being in that the formation of identity (through the mirror phase) leaves us feeling incomplete and fragmented. There is as a result a constant longing for a missing object (the infant's longing for the mother, the self's longing to be united with the reflected image).

The fact that this object is imagined and does not actually exist means that the subject is likely to fantasise about the imagined object and pretend that it does exist in society and that the imagined object is attainable. We often see an example of this in the romanticising of relationships with others. The subject therefore imagines, or fantasises, that love – romantic, maternal, paternal or platonic – is the object that is missing, and that the relationship with the lover/mother/father/child will fill the void.

³¹ Lacan designates this algebraically as *Objet petit a* (or object a) (Homer, 2005: 87).

These fantasies or imaginaries can be read as the desire for unity of identity. In some cases the owners of domestic animals (my focus here is on dogs³² in particular) see their animals as a substitute for the presence of a romantic other or a child. Human qualities are often given to dogs in order for the subject to identify with, and assimilate the dog into their lives, and therefore to perpetuate the idea that the dog is the ever-elusive missing object. A peculiar feature of viewing the dog (and the relationship with the dog) as the imagined missing object is that it differs from the relationship with the lover (and relationships with human beings). When we idealise the lover as the missing object, the fantasy can sustain itself for as long as the lack (and difference) in the other is not discovered. The ideal of the lover is shattered when separate free will enters into the equation and irreconcilable differences arise.

When we form an idealised relationship with a dog and imagine the dog to be the missing object, the reaction from the dog towards this relationship can be quite different from that of a person. Dogs tend to be perpetually loyal and eager to please, and this stimulates the ego in that the relationship with the dog becomes the (temporary) symbolic obtaining of *object a*. Lacan is of the opinion that everything that the subject imagines might embody or produce the lost object will ultimately be disappointing (Homer, 2005: 78). However, for some people (I specifically refer to myself) the dog hardly ever disappoints and when it does disappoint it is reprimanded and manipulated (without objection) back into the role of the imagined lost object. Only when the dog dies is the object lost again. So for the duration of the dog's life the subject can sustain the illusion that the lost object has been found, a perception that often lasts for a substantial period of time. The domestic animal reflects our complex identification with home as security, comfort as well as separation and alienation.

This raises the question of the relationship that domestic animals have with both the building and the dweller. We keep our dogs where we call home; does the space the dog inhabits not distinguish inside home from outside world? Surely a fence could do this too, but some dogs do not acknowledge the existence of fences. They climb over or crawl under or break through all fences surrounding home property, yet they dwell there and they do not run away. It is where they belong and where they assume that the *I* belongs; it is the den. Then does this not confirm that they are partial designators of home?

³² "*Canis Lupus Familiaris*," that is the term for "the wolf in its 'familiarised' or domesticated form" (Gallant 2002: 4)

The history of the domestication of the dog specifically originates from a need and longing for security. Dogs stem from a line of banished wolves that were tolerated around the homestead as early as 4000 BC. These wolves (or feral dogs) were domesticated and bred amongst each other, and were tolerated by humans because they provided a much needed form of protection from other wild animals threatening the homestead. In return for protection they were allowed to feed on scraps after meals. A relationship developed which, today, is valued in society. We speak of dog as “a man’s best friend”; we keep dogs where we dwell, not solely for protection of the dwelling and the body, but also for companionship. We seek a relationship with a dog, sometimes to fill the absence of a partner or a child as mentioned before.

This anthropomorphism of the dog can, however, lead to an activation of uncanny strangeness, particularly when the relationship between dog and owner is viewed from the outside. It is an old adage that dogs and owners often tend to look alike, and dog-trainers see the behaviour of pets as an extension of the owner’s identity and mannerisms. Dogs pick up on their owner’s fears and pleasures and reactions, and quickly adapt their own behaviour in order to fit with that of their owners. The self identifies with the dog because a part of the subject is recognised in the Other. We project our identities upon our animals, and it is in this intense familiarity of self, the imagined sameness of self and other, that the uncanny is triggered. It may occur when unexpected dog behaviour penetrates the farce of the ‘human’ qualities projected onto the dog by the subject. For instance, it is a well-known fact that dogs lick their anuses and genitals, yet knowing this and perceiving such an incident, the subject is filled with humiliation on the dog’s behalf. Perhaps the fact that the public sexual behaviour of dogs (and other dog behaviour deemed ‘inappropriate’ by humans) is experienced as uncannily strange is because it reminds us, subconsciously, of our own lack of shame lived through during our infant stages. Even though we find the act improper, and even revolting, there is familiarity in the dog’s desire for it.

As mentioned before, and despite the obvious animalistic behaviour cited in the previous paragraph, dog lovers have a tendency to view dogs as their kin. Yet, at the very same time, we claim *ownership* of our dogs, bringing into this equation a very powerful dualism of self and other. We are the dogs’ masters and the power of the duality is irrevocably slanted in our favour, but as with all dualisms, the stronger is dependent upon the weaker to affirm its existence, and it is here that the dominance is undermined.

Deleuze and Guattari's notion on becoming animal is that it places the subject in such proximity with the animal that the identities and boundaries that were created by the subject are now dissolving and falling away. The human moves from the position of dominance which enabled him/her to establish the human/animal binary in the first place. This destabilisation of identity will lead to loss and longing, but the longing will be for the other (animal) to help reinstate the subject's sense of self. Deleuze and Guattari state that becoming animal does not involve *resemblance, identification or imitation*; becoming focuses on proximity and the allegiance between human subject and animal other which in turn plays an important role in the destabilisation of identities and hierarchies in terms of binary opposites. In this way, identities constantly "construct and dismantle themselves in the course of their communications as they cross over each other" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 33). Lise van Robbroeck, in her essay "Speaking Dogs: Undoing the human in art" (2006), confirms this by saying that "in an era characterised by radical interrogation of the human, the boundaries between human and non-human are deliberately unsettled". She goes further to say that even though dogs serve a vital role in the establishment of personal identity throughout modern art (Hunting dogs as status symbols), "they serve to undo the human in postmodern art" (Robbroeck 2006: 50). The depiction of dogs within contemporary art today serves a different, if not overturned, role to the one it had in history of art.

So, in all, the longing for the unified self, the body, can be viewed to be the longing for the Other, the dog. This invokes nostalgia and a longing for that which is familiar, the longing for home. The relationship here between the body, the dog and the home is interdependent and provides for a multitude of artistic representations, be it in order to affirm, renounce, explore or question the relationship.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a becoming is mobilised by a desire. "Desire to become another animal for Deleuze and Guattari is a longing for proximity and sharing. When they say that a person desires the swarm of the wolf, this is not a matter of her wanting to become 'like' a wolf. The desire is actually to enter into a molecular engagement with the other; to be 'copresent' with the other in a zone of closeness. This proximity yields a shared transformation" (Brown 2007: 265).

This is quite an influential aspect of how self/other relationships are represented within contemporary art today (specifically focusing on photography and video practice). One can quite literally see the intensity of the proximity between subject and other by looking at the position of the camera and the position of the Other within the photograph. However, the nature of the gaze

plays an important role here: who is looking at whom, from which viewpoint is the camera positioned, etc.

In *Becoming Animal*, Christoph Cox states that contemporary art which intends to blur the boundaries between human and animal presents a paradox. Art and culture in general are understood to play a vital role in the defining of boundaries in the first place (Cox 2005: 18). However, from within this paradox an unmistakable truth emerges, namely that the previously apparent divide (cultural/scientific/biological) between human and animal is systematically become more blurred.

The slow disappearance of the boundaries between animal and human suggests, according to Cox, that we must “rethink our relationship (biological, ethical, political, aesthetic, and affective) to animals and, hence, reconsider who and what we are” (Cox 2005: 18). In contemporary art practice a growing re-evaluation of the relationship between humans and animals has become evident.

Luce Irigaray sees becoming as “a means of fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being” (1993: 61). This reflects back on the Lacanian belief that we are fragmented partial identities destined to search eternally for the *missing object* to complete us. Yet Irigaray counters Lacan’s theory by positing that we could circumvent the feeling of an incomplete identity by *becoming*. The emphasis is not on what one aims ultimately to become, but rather on the act of becoming, of appropriating in itself.

In Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster 3*, the character *Entered Novitiate* (discussed in Chapter Two as Barney’s alter ego) mutates into a hybrid Egyptian warrior with cheetah-like features on the lower half of her body. It is my interpretation that Barney represents the human becoming the animal, foregrounding the ever dissolving divide.

It is interesting to note that it is her amputated legs that make it possible for her to absorb the form of a cheetah foot (which, incidentally also forms the premise of the mechanics on which her athletic carbon fibre prosthetic legs are based). In this case one could say that in order to become animal, one must sacrifice a part of one’s own body. This ties in with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion on the merging binary opposites and that an implied loss or absence in the identity will lead to a becoming of animal.

This sacrificial reduction from what we hold as truly ours (our body, our identity), can serve as a metaphor for reconsidering who and what we are, as Cox suggests. We sacrifice what we are familiar with in order to obtain knowledge about, or in this case, in order to become, the unfamiliar.

Simon Critchley notes that there is something “charming about the animal become human, but when the human becomes animal, then the effect is disgusting” (Critchley in Cox 2005: 19). This ties in with the idea that the existing vague boundaries between human self and animal other can result in the uncanny, as discussed in Chapter Two. It is easy for the self to associate with an animal bearing (familiar) human characteristics, but for a human to bear (unfamiliar) animal characteristics requires the self to be assimilated with the Other, threatening and destabilising the existence of the self.



Figure 20: Matthew Barney, *Entered Novitiate* (Spector 2002). Stills from the film *Cremaster Cycle*, 2002.

It is my interpretation, however, that Matthew Barney tries to eliminate negative connotations with human/animal hybrids by crafting them as majestic almost “superhuman” characters in his *Cremaster* series. The character *Entered Novitiate* is presented as an elegant powerful being, despite the fact that she already possesses a somewhat uncanny quality as a result of her amputated legs (a familiar body with an unfamiliar absence that speaks of the trauma of amputation and cause of pain). Barney transforms the idea of the spectacle and the disgusting into something exuberant, suggesting that the fusion between human and animal creates a deity, rather than monster.

In my own work becoming animal is welcomed, if not desired, in order for the subject (myself) to strive for deistic status. In *Travelogue*, 2010, a digital video which is an extension and re-evaluation of *Travelogue*, 2005, I am depicted in the same setting as the *Travel Tips*, 2005 version, except that

my undressing exposes a body covered in dog hair. I made a flesh-coloured suit onto which I embroidered tufts of my pet dog Keila's hair in order to convert my body into something that resembles hers. I take off my clothes in order to expose my transformed body, an unveiling. The sound is an edited version of *Travel Tips, 2005* where I added a recording of Keila's howling as I leave the premises (the home space) for work every morning without her. The combination of the howling (because of my absence) and the presence of my body in an unfamiliar lonely setting (a deserted farm road leading to the National Road) echoes the longing or nostalgia felt (by me and projected onto Keila) when I am physically separated from the dog.



Figure 21: Corlia Harmsen, stills from *Travelogue*, 2010. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 5minutes.

The way in which I resolve this is by embracing a becoming of her and absorbing the existence of her into my own identity. This transformation takes place in a public setting rather than in the privacy of the home space, which suggests that the instability of the self is increased when it is removed from its natural and familiar environment. The adaptation of the dog hair onto my own skin should be viewed not as my intention to draw a physical likeness to the dog by creating my own fur coat, but as an amplification of the proximity that is needed for a successful becoming. I try (even when I am not physically close to her) to bring our bodies closer in order for us to merge and the boundaries between human and dog to disintegrate.

Another artist who focuses on the subject in the unhomely space of the public arena is Francis Alÿs. His work focuses more on a nomadic vantage point rather than a fixed one. In his work *Sleepers II* (2001) he walked through Mexico City, taking photographs of people (and their dogs) sleeping in public places. The subjects are seemingly homeless and have nowhere else to sleep except for the public places in which they are (unknowingly) photographed. Some of the subjects are accompanied

by their dogs asleep at their sides, and some images show homeless dogs sleeping on the side of the road. This bears an uncanny quality because the viewer cannot be certain whether the dogs are sleeping or casualties hit by vehicles. A sleeping dog would evoke a pathos/sympathy in the sense that it is “peaceful” and should not be disturbed (as the familiar idiom states *Let sleeping dogs lie*³³), whereas a dead or injured dog would evoke a feeling of panic and distress, or a morbid curiosity.

A relationship is drawn between the sleeping and the dead, bringing into consideration the lack of emotion and concern felt by the majority of the general public towards the homeless sleeping on the street. When the realisation occurs that the ‘sleeping’ subjects might be corpses covered in blankets, left for the government authorities to deal with, a mundane activity such as sleeping suddenly has greater implications for the viewer. Once again an interesting interplay between public and private emerges where a private activity is executed in a public domain out of pure necessity, or desperation. Also a very literal comparison is drawn here to Barthes theories on the relationship between photography and death.

“Photography is linked to death in many different ways”, says Christian Metz in his essay “Photography and Fetish” (Wells 2003). The most obvious way in which photography can be linked to death is the way in which photographs are kept in memory of “loving beings who are no longer alive” (Metz in Wells 2003: 140). In this way the photograph can be seen to reject the image’s living characteristics and rather preserve the image as a past presence, a moment that was once present but is now dead and gone. “With each photograph, a tiny piece of time brutally escapes its ordinary fate, and thus is protected against its own loss” (Metz in Wells, 2003: 140). With this an ambiguous feeling is evoked where one tries to mourn the lost object and accept its death, but simultaneously long for it to be alive again.

³³ When someone is told to *Let sleeping dogs lie* it means that one should not evoke a potentially difficult situation when it is better left alone (Oxford Dictionary at <http://www.askoxford.com>).



Figure 22: Francis Alys, details from *Sleepers II*, 2001. (International Centre of Photography 2001). Photographic installation

An interesting fact is that wherever the owner of the dog makes his bed, there the dog will guard its sleeping master. Dogs' boundaries of home stretch only to the place where they reside for that particular moment. Their needs are far less extreme than those of humans, and a sidewalk will be sufficient as a resting place, provided that they are not disturbed, and that their master is close by (proximity of self and other springs to mind here). The owner, not the dwelling place, gives them the reason for their existence. And perhaps the same could be said for the owner of the dog: the fact that their dog is close gives them a comfort that far exceeds that from having a physical abode. The artist addresses a sense of homelessness, whilst at the same time focuses on the fact that comfort and (perhaps a false sense of security) can be obtained outside of the general understanding of a dwelling place. It is uncertain whether these subjects are sleeping on the streets by choice, or because they have nowhere else to go. This emphasises the growing feeling of nostalgia of homely places found within public spaces. Whenever I look at these photographs I feel a strong desire for proximity, the molecular closeness of the other (animal).

Whether it is intentional or not, an underlying longing for home and safety underscores each photograph, and one cannot help but wonder what the future holds for the subjects in the photographs.

Sithembele Komani's work is parallel to that of Alys. Komani is a South African artist who took part in an exhibition held by the Umlilo Photographers' Association in 2002 depicting life within the townships. The exhibition formed part of the Cape Town Month of Photography event held during 2002, and was entitled *Ekasie/Location*, making reference to the exclusion and relocation of people in terms of the Group Areas Acts during the apartheid era.

Komani's sepia photograph *Untitled* (2002) is an image of a dog sleeping on a discarded mattress amongst a pile of rubbish behind what seems to be a demolished house. The dog is curled up with its hind legs stretched past its face, a sign of ultimate comfort. Yet it is quite a contradiction that the ultimate comfort could be found in such chaos of debris and misery: a home that is no more. The discarded mattress that is broken in half echoes the relocation and eviction of the people and the demolition of their houses in terms of the Group Areas Act represented in this exhibition. It was once someone's mattress, it was once newly bought with the intention of providing someone with the experience of sleeping comfortably and now it is broken and discarded (abjected in a sense).



Figure 23: Sithembele Komani, *Untitled*, 2002. (Grundlingh 2002). Photographic print.

A broken mattress also suggests, very subtly, an event of violence or force (be it domestic or public). One cannot help but wonder how the mattress came to be broken. A mattress is not something fragile that would break easily; on the contrary, it would have taken some force for it to end up torn in half. It could suggest years of being in use and exposure to the elements. Nevertheless, the dog in the image found comfort and security on the mattress. Not many of the dogs in the townships have the luxury of ever knowing what it is like to sleep on a mattress. The dog seems to be sleeping with its guard down. It is unaware of Komani taking the photograph. It also seems to be a big dog from Doberman or Rottweiler decent, which makes it quite a fierce guard dog, in a calm foetal position, adding to the contradiction mentioned earlier. The dog outside the demolished house suggests that

it once belonged to the residents of the house before it was demolished, and that it is sleeping on the mattress, patiently awaiting the return of his owners.

Yet there is no human presence in the photograph, and the area around the dog seems somewhat abandoned, a post-apocalyptic scene where the dog is the only survivor of the tragic event that caused the chaos and destruction in the image. The dog is alone and a tension grows around the anticipation of the awakening of the dog and the realisation of its fate. The idiom *Let sleeping dogs lie* can also be considered here. Should disagreements (and dislocations) in South Africa be left in the past? Surely these are not things that one can just forget; it is inevitable to always remember (and as a result have longing). Yet the work does point towards the idiom, perhaps as critique on current government housing developments and the stigma of fraud and inefficiency attached to the process. A melancholic nostalgia overwhelms the viewer on the realisation of the homelessness of the dog (and the previous residents of the demolished house). The dog becomes a representative of human loss in that it seems to be lost itself.

Jo Ractliffe uses the dog and the relationship of the body and the dog as diverse sites of interpretation and modes of representation. To her, the dog, domestic or feral, is loaded with cultural and individual significance and metaphor. In her earlier work entitled *Crossroads*, 1986, Ractliffe echoes the melancholic depiction of homelessness and harsh living conditions in some parts of South Africa by producing a series of three prints all taken on 30 May 1986. The images show an ill-constructed shack with its roof coming undone next to a severely polluted river/marsh; two miserable-looking dogs (one a pregnant bitch, the other an adolescent pup) scavenging on a rubbish pile for scraps to eat; and the third image shows a landscape of the remains of shacks bulldozed to the ground.



Figure 24: Jo Ractliff, details *Crossroads*, 1986. (Enwezor 2009). Photographic print.

Her most moving representation of the relationship between human and animal is that of her series *Guess who loves you*, 1997 and then later *Love's body*, 1999.³⁴ In *Guess who loves you* Ractliffe photographed her dog Gus's toys, which he would bring to her compulsively on her return home. The chewed and disassembled toys were carefully displayed on a white background and photographed in great detail (and in a clinical, almost scientific manner) to reveal the precarious teeth marks that Gus inflicted on the objects.

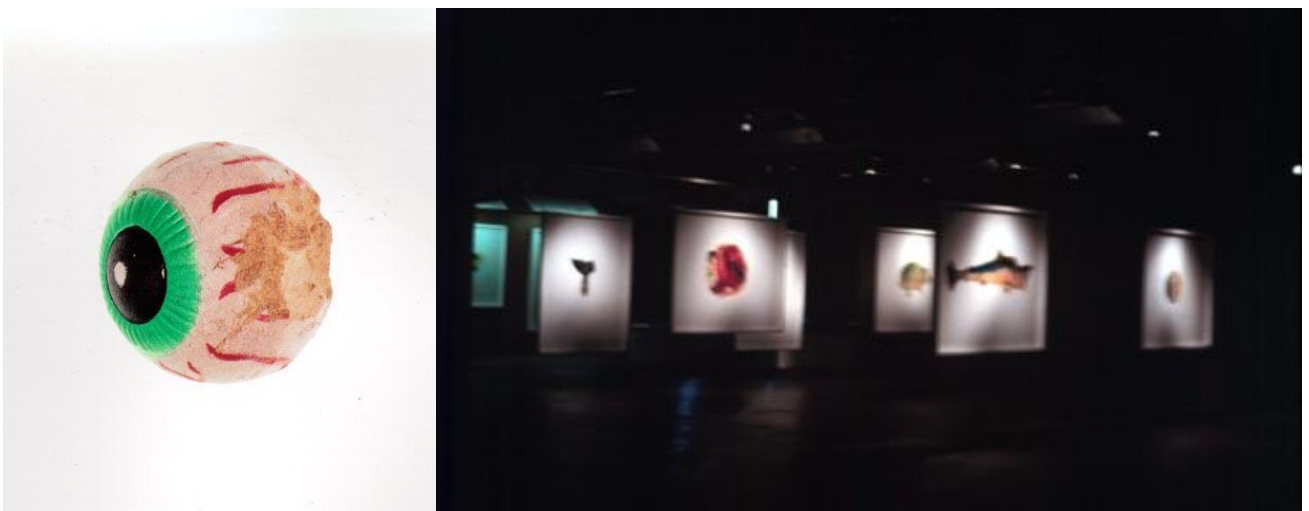


Figure 25: Jo Ractliff, details from *Guess who loves you*, 1997. (Atkinson 2000). Photographic installation.

³⁴ *Guess who loves you* can be viewed as a prelude to her work *Love's Body*, 1999.

It is generally considered a sign of endearment from a dog when toys are brought to the owner upon their arrival. The manner in which these objects were photographed stands in contradiction with the sentiment of the event, and therefore what the toy itself represents. The toys are displayed under a light resembling florescent light, which hints at the science lab and the dissecting of animals; the fact that these toys are also in the shape of eyeballs and animals themselves lends them an uncanny undertone when one views the photographs for the first time. The damage that the teeth marks create seem violent and out of context.

On closer inspection, however, one realises that these are rubber toys with dog tooth marks, and that the objects are not dissected animals in cold scientific light, but actually a dear pet's beloved toys. Ractliffe tries to create a distance from sentiment to supposed objective documentation, however, as mentioned earlier, the photograph in itself is linked to melancholic remembrance, and somewhere within this series of works the artist's attachments to these objects, and then more importantly, the animal to which they *belong* becomes evident. There is something heart-warming when a being (human or animal) wants to give you the *thing* that they hold most dear. Ractliffe also echoes the way in which dogs or pets can become obsessive about one or more toys in particular. Not only do the objects become a fetish, but the artist displays subtle fetish-like admiration for her pet. There is also the pathos of loss in their destruction and dismemberment. It is possible, it would seem, to "love something to death".³⁵

In the photographic work *Love's Body* the image shows a dog partially wrapped in a blanket and covered with soil. At first glance the dog appears to be sleeping, but on closer examination one sees that the dog is partially covered in soil and it becomes evident that the dog is in a grave and is no longer alive. It is not clear whether the photograph was taken as a *last goodbye* or whether the burial site was revisited and opened again to obtain *just another look* at the animal. Either way, the photograph speaks of a troubled separation, where the artist is struggling to let go of her beloved companion. The title *Love's Body* is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be interpreted that the word *Love* is a pet name used by the artist to refer to her pet dog. The title would therefore be indicative of the body of the artist's loved one. On the other hand, it can be interpreted that the word *Love* refers to the action of loving, the abstract emotion, and that the phrase *Love's Body* indicates that all love is dead because the dog is dead. The dog's death is a metaphor for all love to be dead and lost. The word *Body* can also be interpreted in more than one way. A body can refer to a corpse, which in this case would be the literal interpretation. But the word *Body* can also refer to

³⁵ It is sad to learn that Gus died on the day that the exhibition *Guess who loves you* opened at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg.

an anthology of things, more often than not abstract (e.g. a body of work; a governing body). In this sense the title can be interpreted as the assembly of love contained in the corpse of the dog. The dog or the body of the dog contains all that the artist understands about love, and because the dog is dead, so is her knowledge of love.

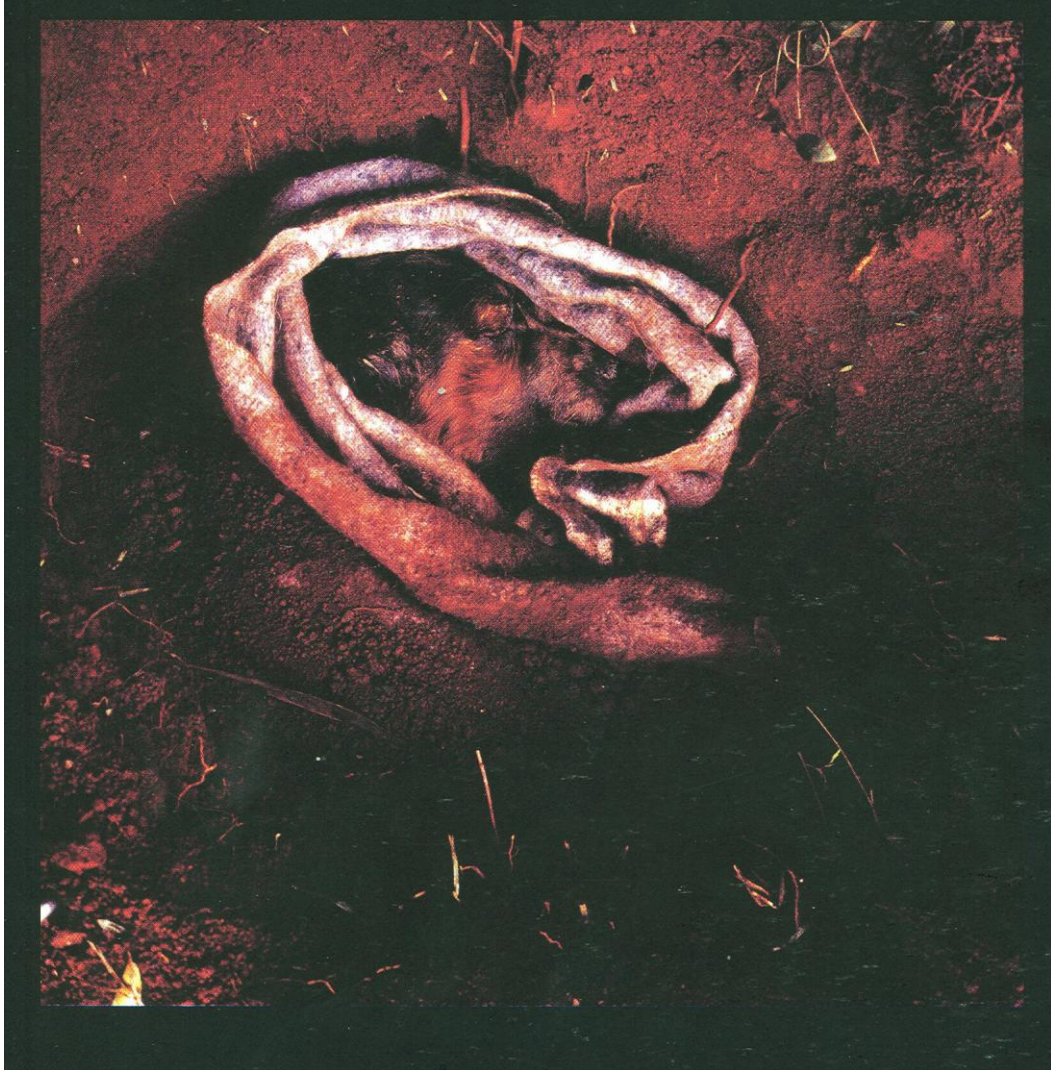


Figure 26: Jo Ractliffe, details from *Love's Body*. 1999. (Atkinson 2000). Photographic installation.

In the artworks that I produce concerning (my pet dog) Keila, I am driven by an inescapable fear of death, not so much in the sense of my own death, but the knowledge that everything around me will die. The result is a counter-obsession with the *present* and clinging desperately to the object in this imagined loss.

My photographic work *Pelagial Reverence*, 2008/2009/2010 is an ongoing project, which is underscored by the inevitable certainty of passing time and death, much like that of Jo Ractliffe's work discussed above. The title refers to pelage (adj. pelagial), which is the hair, fur, wool, or other soft covering of a mammal,³⁶ and reverence, a feeling or attitude of deep respect tinged with awe; veneration.³⁷



Figure 27: Corlia Harmsen, *Pelagial Reverence*, 2007 / 2008 / 2009. (Courtesy: the artist). Cell phone photographs, digital prints on paper.

This work was strongly influenced by the 1992 film *Of mice and Men*, based on John Steinbeck novel (1937), directed and produced in 1992 by Gary Sinise and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. I watched this film more than twenty three times when I was younger, perhaps because I associated with John Malkovich's character Lennie Small. In the film Lennie is a mentally challenged farm worker who has a love for *stroking soft things*. This *love* lands Lennie in trouble when he accidentally kills a woman while stroking her hair. I remember being touched by this film because I understood this misunderstood character. I understood what it is like to have a love for *stroking soft things*, and loving something so much that you run the risk of smothering it to death.

I make use of hair, and the symbolism behind collecting hair in the photographic and mixed-media work *Hair of the Dog*, 2009. A medieval belief was that owning a lock of hair of someone gives you power over that individual (Cirlot 2002). The origin of the phrase *Hair of the dog (that bit you)* is literal and springs from a false "cure" for a bite wound from a rabid dog. The phrase implies that hair should be taken off the rabid dog's back and placed in the bite wound to prevent rabies infection. In

³⁶ ED Sykes, J. B. 1983. *The pocket Oxford Dictionary of current English*. Oxford University Press: London

³⁷ ED Sykes, J. B. 1983. *The pocket Oxford Dictionary of current English*. Oxford University Press: London

colloquial English it has become an expression used to refer to a *cure* for a hangover, whereby alcohol should be ingested the next morning in order to ease the symptoms. In both instances the phrase suggests that the *cure is in the cause* (Cirlot 2002).



Figure 28: Corlia Harmsen, details from *Hair of the dog (that bit me)*, 2009. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital prints on archival paper.

In the work *Hair of the dog (that bit me)* 2009, I make reference to both the literal and the figurative meaning of the phrase. The work consists of three photographic images of my dog, Keila, with whom I have a very powerful and profound relationship. The images were taken with a manual camera, after which I scanned the black and white negatives into *Photoshop*, converted them to positives and printed them digitally onto Fabriano paper. The hair is collected from both combing her (a daily routine) and from various corners of the house where it gathers when I do not vacuum regularly. I associate the rabid infection of a dog bite with falling in love with (and being lovesick for) Keila. The images serve as a documentation of instances where I am overwhelmed by that love to an extent that it becomes a disease.

In this work the *removal process*³⁸ that I use technically in my work underlines the alienation evident in the photograph. Faded images and pixilated photographs speak of digital and 35mm film degeneration. Once again, it is an anticipated longing for something not yet lost. A fading memory and self induced trauma and sadness for a dog who has not died yet.

This personal anthropomorphism becomes problematic in the image (Figure 27), where the dog seems to be licking her anus, behaviour that is associated with animals. It is uncanny when the self assimilates the dog, but is not able to control or eliminate behaviour that is animalistic. Dogs can assimilate human behaviour and characteristics, but it is unachievable to eliminate all dog behaviour in order for the dog to fully reflect the self.



Figure 29: Corlia Harmsen, details from *Hair of the Dog (That Bit Me)*, 2009. (Courtesy: the artist).

When one pays closer attention to the image, a finger print is visible over the body of the dog. This suggests an obsessive adoration of the dog in the photograph; it has been touched,³⁹ which reveals

³⁸ Explained in Chapter One. The “removal process” is a technique that I use whereby I use digital equipment such as a scanner and printer to *remove* the image from the original negative, and in turn the moment that the photograph was taken. The more the image is digitally worked, the further it becomes removed from its actuality and the fainter and more pixilated the image becomes.

³⁹ In many examples of popular culture (specifically cinema) a character has been shown touching a photograph. This is indicative of the character’s adoration of the object depicted in the photograph, and also suggests a displacement from that object of affection. The act of

the longing for the animal body. This obsessive adoration can transpire into a desire for assimilation of the object. She develops into my alter ego (as discussed in Matthew Barney's work *Cremaster 3* in Chapter Two); she reflects everything that I am and desire to be. The longing is thus not just a longing to be reunited with the dog, but also a longing to be reunited with the self.

The digital video *The black dog (that bit me)* 2009 is an extension of the work *Hair of the dog (that bit me)* 2009. The video shows my dog, Keila, walking on the wall that enclosed the premises of my previous home. Keila would sit on the wall and wait for people to walk past just to jump off and chase them down the road with the intention of biting them. The only way I could coax Keila off the wall was by offering her a bowl of milk. The sound is a recording of her lapping up the milk.



Figure 30: Corlia Harmsen, details from *The black dog (that bit me)*, 2009. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 1 minute.

The work speaks of boundaries and enclosures, and my dog's ability to protect *inside* from *outside*, *private* from *public*, perpetuating those boundaries in the sense that her presence forms a divide between the two, yet shows the mutability of that boundary through her transgression. The work *The black dog (that bit me)* 2009 also makes reference to the expression *black dog*, which is used to signify a melancholy, or depression. The fact that Keila is hovering on the perimeters of inside and outside suggests that she might leave, which, given my intense emotional attachment to her, evokes a fierce separation anxiety. A tension is created because the clip only shows the dog on the wall, and any further action is omitted, which leaves the viewer wondering whether she chose to leave or stay. However, boundaries are neither clear nor fixed; they are constantly negotiated, and thus one asks the question whether the dog is sheltering the home space from the public domain, or whether it is merely me that she tries to keep from the outside.

touching the image could be read as the desire for the image to serve as a time machine and transport the subject back to the instance that the photograph was taken, to be reunited with the object of affection.

In both works there is a suggestion that being bitten by a beast (dog) casts a spell and makes one a slave to it. This can also be associated with the belief that if one is bitten by a werewolf, one becomes a werewolf oneself. Apart from the anxiety I feel towards the imagined departure of Keila, I am also reminded that she is temporary, and she will probably die before I do. This leaves me with the knowledge that I will have to mourn her death, and the video serves as a means to capture her in a timeless depiction where death is non-existent yet a constant reminder of the passing of time, which invokes the nostalgia and longing.

Another one of my works which speak of the premature mourning and anticipation (and fear of) of loss and longing is a video installation entitled *If you are not with me tomorrow*, 2010. The extended title of the work is *If you are not with me tomorrow, that will be the worst*. The video shows Keila engaging in a sexually dimorphic act of mounting a pillow. This behaviour, however, is not necessarily just a sexual act, but also refers to dominance or the act of dominating.⁴⁰ The fact that spayed females engage in such activities is an indication of excess testosterone in the system and that she is likely to be assertive about her dominance (Miklósi, 2007). The video is accompanied by a clichéd romantic soundtrack in the form of Barry White's number one Pop and R&B hit, *Can't get enough of your love babe* (the first single on White's album *Can't get enough*, 1974). The song evokes images of the contrived 1970s disco era, which not only suggests dancing, as the 'humping' dog looks as if it is dancing to the music, but is also a theme of the work.

Later in the video the humour in the tone of Barry White's husky voice is abruptly juxtaposed with the soft and melancholic voice of Will Oldham, singer of *Bonnie Prince Billy*, singing *If you are not with me tomorrow, that will be the worst*⁴¹. On the one hand, the video documents a beast's attempt to overrule its master, and on the other hand, it represents unconditional love and a morbid pseudo-sexual obsession with the animal (much like Keila's obsession with the pillow). The person behind the camera catalogues this inappropriate behaviour (in terms of being human⁴²) as a memorable event.

⁴⁰ This stems from the fact that only the dominant dogs in the pack have the privilege of procreating, and the act of procreation is itself an act of establishing dominance. This instinct, although obsolete, still surfaces in mimicking and role play of feral behaviour within the domestic pack.

⁴¹ Lyrics from the song *Nomadic Revery* by Bonnie prince Billy, off the album *I see a darkness*, 1999 Palace records

⁴² Imagine the embarrassment when faced with public masturbation.



Figure 31: Corlia Harmsen, details from *If you are not with me tomorrow*, 2010. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital video and sound, duration: 2 minutes.

This, in combination with the lyrics of the songs used, not only creates a response of *I love you even if you hump my pillows*, but also a more sinister *I love you even if you dominate me*. In fact, one wonders what the power relationship between this animal and artist actually is, seeing as dogs generally acts in this extreme manner when they are unsure of their position in the pack, and they try and establish their position once more. One can deduce that a masochistic/narcissistic pleasure is derived from the dog's acts of domination whereby the artist may feel satisfied because she is being deemed significant enough to dominate, even though it is not such a congenial concept.

Issues around power-play between human and animal brings the focus to the next work I want to discuss, *Subspace*, 2010, a photographic series by me. *Subspace* is a term generally used to describe a moderate to deep trancelike condition experienced by the persons in the submissive position of a BDSM⁴³ relationship or interaction. The submissive party is often said to separate their minds from

⁴³ *BDSM* refers to the form of consensual sexual role play where power relationships are used to create sexual tension. The acronym is derived from the terms bondage/discipline (B&D), dominance/submission (D&s) and sadism/masochism (S&M). *Subspace* is a reaction of the submissive party to the role play and can be characterised by a state of recession and incoherence.

their bodies in order to “float” and heighten their levels of pain endurance. In this work I draw a parallel between the BDSM dominance and submissive relationship and “dog ownership”.

All of the images presented in this series show a dog in a passive state, a trancelike condition. Two types of D/s (Dominant/submissive) relationships become evident here: the more obvious *human dominant over animal* and then the lesser noticeable *animal dominant over human*. It is not clear, however, whether it is the dog or me, the artist, who is experiencing subspace. The images are intended to depict my own state of subspace as I think about the loss of, and separation from, the animal in the photographs.



Figure 32: Corlia Harmsen, details from *Subspace*, 2010. (Courtesy: the artist). Digital prints on archival paper.

In conclusion to this chapter, one can see that it has become quite evident what an important role the animal Other plays in identity formation in that it aids as a sounding board against which one can establish what *one is not*. It is important to note, however, that the longing felt for proximity to the animal Other does not necessarily mean that setting apart *what you are is what I am not* is a negative action. It evokes a desire to become *what I am not*, to become the Other, to become animal: a becoming that is characterised by proximity, a molecular engagement, which in turn blurs the boundaries between human subject and animal object. This uncertainty regarding boundaries sets in motion an inversion of power relationships: the dominant self becomes the subverted other, and the oppressed animal that is seen to possess no discernable subjectivity monopolises the power relationship by using our own ammunition: language.

Conclusion

When setting out to complete this dissertation, I was hoping that, through conducting an extensive investigation into the nature and origin of longing and homesickness through psychoanalytically-orientated theory and a critical interrogation of these phenomena in selected examples of works by other artists, I could somehow understand the *heimwee* that I have experienced since being a child. I thought I could *cure* homesickness and that the secret to the cure should lie in the very core of our self-awareness, identity formation. I realize now, however, that the identity is formed with an inevitable necessary component, which is best articulated as lack (linked to loss and longing). These aspects are important for identity formation, just as it threatens our very existence. Homesickness is an unavoidable human condition and, as Luce Irigaray suggests, only by becoming “as a means of fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being” (Irigaray 1993) can we alleviate this homesickness temporarily.

The title of this thesis (*Shape Me into Your Idea of Home*) points to the value that I place on home in the abstract or corporeal form. If a personal significance is present in order to support self-realisation, it can be said that home is crucial to my understanding of identity formation. The affect that representations of home in contemporary photography and video practice⁴⁴ have on the viewer is loaded with self-reflection and re-evaluation in that it evokes memories of our own snapshots and home videos.

A method of becoming is translating what we understand around this act into a visual equivalent of our understanding. I believe that my photographic and video representations (of the home, the self and the other) assisted in my comprehension of the longing for these objects. I also see the act of taking a photograph as a method of attempting to reduce the gap between the self and the o/Other in order to gain proximity and stimulate a becoming.

In Chapter One I discussed representations of the longing for home, or homesickness, specifically focusing on the relationship between the self and the home space. I can now conclude that the home or dwelling space plays a significant role in subject formation. The home space is important to frame the body in a corporeal contextual space, granting privacy and security as well as physical reflections and extensions of the identity. The home is the most important space for identity to form

⁴⁴ The snapshot and home video transformed into art, as in with the work of Penny Siopis I discuss in Chapter One, *My Lovely Day*, 2005.

and sustain itself, and to ensure that traumatic events such as the loss of identity through emotional trauma and displacement from the self do not occur. The representation of the home space, the body within the home or the lack of home space is important for strengthening the subject's sense of self. The home, like the identification of self as a separation, also becomes a space of alienation.

As home is important for a subject's understanding of the self, representations of home, or visual photographic depictions of home become necessary for us to evaluate and compare our understandings of home, and in turn our understandings of ourselves. Taking photographs can transform home into a spectacle, something to scrutinise and watch in the silence and immobility of the photograph with a certain emotional detachment. This emotional detachment can be better understood as a false sense of objectivity and reality that the photograph provides. The photograph helps frame a space into context, making the viewer aware of the importance of the encounter with the home space. One can go as far as to say that certain things would not be noticed if it were not for the presence of the photograph in everyday life. The corporeality of home needs to be translated into a mute and inactive framed image for the viewer to be able to absorb the overwhelming nature of the home as a concept. The paradox is that after taking a photograph and viewing it, there is the possibility that nostalgia for that specific encounter (the one that needed the camera to reduce the overwhelming nature of being able to grasp reality). This nostalgia is accompanied by a desire to return to the instant that the photograph was taken. Photography therefore becomes a vehicle by which the viewer is simultaneously transported towards (like a time machine) and carried away (by creating an optical distance from the corporeality of the encounter). Photographs operate in much the same way in my own art practice in the sense that the photographs I take are a kind of *insurance* for the future, a way in which I preserve the memory for future experience. However, by obsessively preserving the present for the future (by the method of taking a photograph of the present) one inevitably transforms it into the past, thereby rendering the moment lost, and partially experienced (through looking at it through the lens and not in its corporeality. The camera separates the artist/viewer from that which need *not* to be forgotten, creating distance from, instead of intimacy with, the subject matter.

In the work by Sophie Calle, *L' Hotel*, 1981, I pointed out that her obsession with strangers' belongings and temporary home spaces is the artist's way of comparing her *self* with an Other in a space that resembles home. However, just internalising this information was not enough for her; Calle felt the need to *take* it with her by *taking* photographs. Easy ethical access is possible to temporary home spaces (such as through being a housekeeper in a hotel as featured in Calle's work)

and here she can play out her voyeuristic desires without risking strict legal action. The voyeur looks at something without that thing having knowledge that it is being looked at. The voyeur is completely preoccupied with the act of seeing that he/she loses all self consciousness (Kaja Silverman 1996). Calle communicates that very well in her series *L' Hotel*, 1981. There is, however, a very relaxed quality about the photographs in the series because they are captured in a split second, so the risk of being caught by the *unseen other* (as Lacan suggests happens to the voyeur (Silverman, 1996)) is slight. The act of looking is preserved in a silent and immobile state (death and the photograph) in order to ensure that the moment is conserved for future viewing and that the act of looking is perpetuated.

Her art can be seen as the self's method to pledge survival by posing an ethical (yet self-serving in the sense that probing a strangers' belongings without their permission, in the role of a trusted housekeeper, is morally questionable) opposition with the Other and the details of the Other's existence within the pseudo home space. In the second series of Calle that I discuss in Chapter Two entitled *Sleepers*, 1980,⁴⁵ the artist invited random strangers to spend a night with her in bed. Once again the personal space (the artist's bed this time) is an important vehicle to aid in identity stabilisation. Here she takes the stranger (Other) from their home space and places them in her own space. This is evidence of the lack that is a consequence of identity formation (Lacan 1964), and the desire that is born from this lack to be a complete subject. Her actions of inviting the Other into her home space can be seen as an attempt to fill the void visually.



Image from practical component *Shape Me into Your Idea of Home*, April 2010

⁴⁵ Even though I discuss this work in Chapter Two, I do think it is relevant to my conclusion in Chapter One.

The contextual reference given to my own creative practice is one that speaks of intense alienation and longing. In Chapter One I discuss my experiences of *heimwee* and how it becomes an alienating device by which I seal myself behind closed doors. My way with equating feeling at home or home with the other provides the context for my discussions in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two I discussed representations of the longing for home, or homesickness, specifically focusing on the relationship between the body and the self, the self and the (lower case) other within these representations. I look at how the fragmented sense of self and the reflection of the self in the mirror (or the self represented in photography or video) result in alienation. I discuss alienation as a symptom and a cause of photographic representation. In my video work *ToGetHer* (2006) I make reference to two selves, one before a traumatic event and one after a traumatic event. The video serve as an act of documenting the loss of identity and this documentation aids in self-awareness and knowledge of that which is lacking.

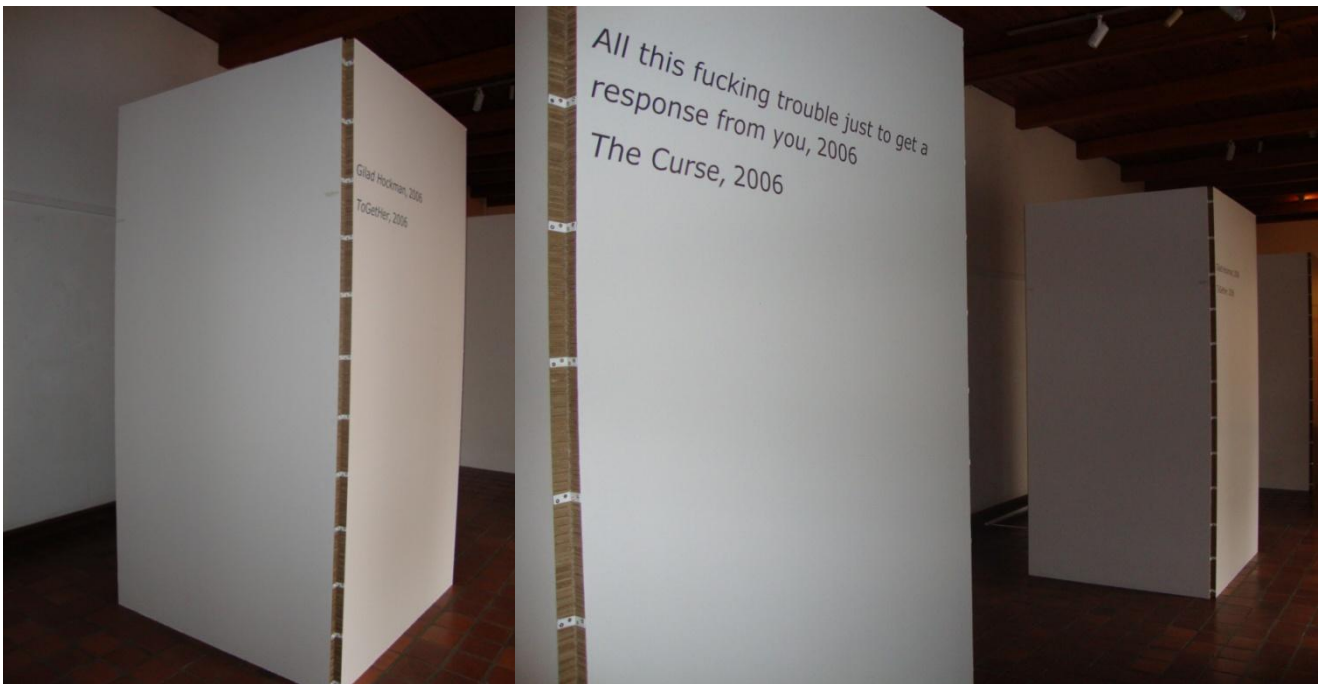
The way in which the video works are exhibited in the practical component of this dissertation emphasizes a corporeal alienation from identity. As the voyeur is engrossed in the act of looking to the extent of losing self-awareness, so this video was exhibited to create a private viewing space where the viewer is shielded from the unseen Other.

The cubicles presented an isolated environment for the viewer to look at the video pieces. They also offered a false sense of security for watching the videos. They were reminiscent of packing containers, hinting at temporality.⁴⁶ So, not only were the videos lonely memoirs of a longing subject, the manner of their presentation (isolated in separate cubicles in a dark otherwise empty space) emphasized the longing that these videos were created to present/evoke.

In Chapter Three I discuss representations of longing for home, or homesickness, specifically focusing on the relationship between the self and the Other within these representations. I looked at how the Other becomes a fetishistic object to temporarily relieve the fragmented sense of self and create the illusion of a unified identity. I explored how the domestic animal becomes the ever-elusive missing object which Lacan theorised in his writing on the mirror stage. I focused on the idea

⁴⁶ One could imagine that all the belongings of the home were packed into them, and that the dwelling place itself stood vacant.

that becoming Other/animal is more centred on the importance of proximity rather than affinity, as theorised by Deleuze and Guattari.



Images from practical component *Shape Me into Your Idea of Home*, April 2010.

Perhaps the proximity of animal others offers comfort for the subject's fragmented identity? It provides a security in the sense that even though the subject is lacking, it is not alone whilst longing for a unified sense of self. The affective quality of animal representations in contemporary art evokes a longing to be merged with an entity that is less complex and seemingly without lack. But as mentioned in Chapter Three, the dog is an undefined identity vacillating between 'almost human' and 'not quite animal'. Molecular engagement with the animal and the act of becoming in themselves give hope that longing could be overcome and that it is just a catalyst to advocate the necessity to engage in a becoming. Lacan's imagined object is attainable through a becoming of animal, and rather than separating ourselves from the Other/animal we should reduce the gap and increase proximity between self and Other in order to eliminate loss and longing.

The paradox here is that an artistic approach to this would be to engage in representation of the Other, or self-representation, which sets us apart from the represented object, causing displacement and distance from molecular engagement.



Image from practical component *Shape Me into Your Idea of Home*, April 2010.

In the practical exhibition one can witness my conviction that there is a possibility that becoming animal could alleviate homesickness in the sentence *I feel like I have returned after years of travelling, and your mouth is my red front door welcoming me home* (Shape me into your idea of home, practical exhibition, April 2010). The image to which this sentence is juxtaposed, however, is a depiction of the dog on the boundary of the home space, facing away from the camera. It suggests an increase in the distance between self and animal other, rather than increasing the proximity as intended. The more the other is represented, the less the chances are of molecular engagement and physical closeness, as the act of taking a photograph removes the subject from the content and frames it in the light of silence and immobility, death.

In conclusion, the longing for home, the self and the other (as discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three) are abstract concepts as well as physical "things" that are desired. It is easy to translate this longing into an obvious corporeal representation (of the home, the self and the other) in order to better understand the nature of the longing and the object that is longed for. However, when home, self and other are considered as abstract concepts, it becomes difficult to communicate the nature of these concepts and the nature of the longing for these ideas by using the written and spoken language only. Photography and video become an integral cog in communicative workings to convey the way in which the individual (specifically myself) understands home/self/other, and in turn experiences the longing for these. Photography is both a way in which I make sense of

(communicate to myself) the longing I experienced as a result of alienation/separation from home/self or other, as well as a way for me to communicate this longing and desire for home/self and other to an imagined audience. It is also a way of projecting the *punctum*, as theorised by Barthes and discussed above, onto the object of the photograph. In discussing the examples of contemporary video and photography practice in relation to the longing for home, self and other, one can deduce that each individual shapes both physical aspects and abstract concepts of home, self and other in order to suit their understanding and longing for it. By using photography and video as a means to gain a better understanding of these concepts, the artists not only shapes himself/herself into the desired or longed for home, but also creates a space where the viewer can be shaped by the work into *home*. The title of my thesis can therefore be understood as my imploration of the photograph to shape me into my longing for home. By using photography and video to communicate my longing, I no longer just give a visual manifestation of my longing, but I become my longing and that which is longed for.

Therefore, I *am* home.

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