

**“A Dark Revolt of Being:” Abjection, sacrifice and the Real in performance art,
with reference to the works of Peter van Heerden and Steven Cohen.**

A half-thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN DRAMA

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

CHRISTINE BALT
603B0493

Supervisor
DR. A. KRUEGER

June 2009

Contents

Abstract	iii
Chapter One	
Introduction	
1.1. The Live, the Real, and the Spectator/Witness	1
1.2. Writing on Performance	8
1.3. Performance Art in the South African Context	10
Chapter Two	
Representation Revised: Performance Art and the Drive to the Live	
2.1. Introduction	13
2.2. The Pursuit of the Real	15
2.3. The Politics of Performance Art	21
2.4. Abject Rebellion	28
2.5. The Body in Crisis	34
2.6. Distorted Perceptions and Unmediated Experience	46
2.7. Performance Art and Ritual	49
2.8. Conclusion	53
Chapter Three	
A Bloody Reckoning: Sacrificial Ritual and the Scapegoat in Performance Art	
3.1. Introduction	54
3.2. Ritual, Taboo and the Maintenance of the Law	55
3.3. Sacrifice and the Scapegoat	63
3.4. The Abject in Sacrificial Ritual	69
3.5. Conclusion	73
Chapter Four	
A Politics of the Monstrous: The Abject Body in the Performances of Steven Cohen and Peter van Heerden	
4.1. Introduction	74
4.2. Steven Cohen's "Queer-As-Monster"	75
4.3. Monstrous Masculinities	79
4.4. The Monster as <i>Pharmakon</i>	86
4.5. Conclusion	87

Chapter Five
Revolt and Redemption: The Performances of Peter van Heerden as Contemporary Ritual

5.1. Introduction	88
5.2. Interrogating History: <i>so is 'n os gemaak</i> (2005) and <i>Bok</i> (2006)	90
5.3. Disgusting Celebrations	97
5.4. A Contemporary Crisis	101
5.5. Van Heerden the Scapegoat	104
5.6. The Scene of the Crime	108
5.7. Conclusion	111

Chapter Six Conclusion	114
---	-----

Bibliography	116
---------------------	-----

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of some of the defining characteristics of performance art, and an investigation of how such characteristics relate to ritual. It highlights some key notions, such as that of the “Real” and the live, which are introduced in the first chapter. This chapter explores the theories of Peggy Phelan, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan in its attempts to conceptualize the Real. It assesses how performance art as ritual attempts to revise traditional apparatuses of representation. It argues that, through a transgression of representation, performance art has the potential to challenge and revise established discourses on identity, culture and violence.

The second chapter of this study is an attempt to provide a history and subsequent conceptualization of performance art, based on its exposition of the live. I have taken into consideration certain strategies that performance artists employ to evoke the live, referring specifically to the manipulation of the body. It is through abject encounters with the unsymbolizable “Real” that the performance artist reaches the borders of his/her subjective constitution, and performs a transformation of his/her identity that transcends the mechanisms of representation.

The third chapter of this study attempts to find the connections that exist between performance art and sacrificial ritual. I will refer specifically to the theories of Rene Girard. Girard’s notion of the “violent sacred” and its significance within sacrifice as an antidote to community crises will be explored in relation to collective transformation within the performance event. I choose to focus specifically on the role

of the performer as surrogate victim/*pharmakon*, and the spectators/witnesses as part of the community.

The fourth chapter explores how two South African performance artists, Steven Cohen (1961) and Peter van Heerden (1973), perform the abject body as the monster. Kristeva's notion of the abject will be examined in terms of the transformation of the individual performer as subject within performance art, and how, through the assumption of an "othered," monstrous identity, the performer becomes the surrogate victim.

The fifth chapter will entail an examination of Peter van Heerden's *6 Minutes*. I will attempt to draw parallels between performance art and ritual through using this performance piece as a case study. I will focus on the strategies that Van Heerden implements to resist theatrical representation. *6 Minutes* will be observed in terms of its link to sacrificial ritual, and its presentation of the live, and the Real.

In light of these discoveries, I aim to locate performance art within politically-driven modes of art-making, and how such an endeavour relates to South African modes of theatre and performance.

Chapter 1

1.1 The Live, the Real and the Spectator/Witness.

I am standing at the end of a dirt road at midnight, waiting for the performance to begin. Suddenly a car pulls up; a man and woman are inside. I identify the man as South African performance artist Peter van Heerden. I initially think that the woman in the car with him is his girlfriend, giving him a kiss. I am wrong. He steps out of the car and pulls the woman out on the other side. She screams as he pins her to the bonnet of the car and rips of her skirt and rapes her. He runs away. At this point the audience becomes silent. I cease to think. In the dark, I confusedly follow the crowd and the path of the rapist to a nearby tree. Suspended from the tree is the performer, submerged in a bag that contains red liquid and other strange, fleshy objects that float around his body. The bag breaks, and the first thing that I notice is the strong smell of blood and raw meat. I'm also assaulted by the barking of a nearby dog, which is aroused by the sudden availability of the intestinal flood. The performer is grabbed by an older man, who immediately begins to violently whip him with a thick leather strap. The sound of the whip to the flesh is raw and piercing. At this point I feel nauseous. The raped woman then reappears, wearing a billowing white skirt, under which the performance artist crawls. At this point I start to panic, afraid of what might happen next within this moment, and attempt to run away. But I am also transfixed. The events that follow, for me, are a blur, until I see the performer reemerge, on all fours, back arched, groaning above a plastic baby doll. He is then pummeled with tomato sauce, and bags of white flour. The smells of the tomato sauce and raw meat are sickening. He is dragged to another tree further off from the performance site, and hung upside down by the older man and the woman. He stays there for many minutes, after which the performance ends. We are invited to join the performers for sherry. I am incapable of staying at the site. I am invited by friends at the performance to stay, but I get into my car and drive home. I cannot speak to anyone until the following day.

The description above is a personal account of my experience of 6 Minutes (2007), a performance work by South African artist Peter van Heerden. It is from this account that my investigation into performance art begins, relating to its fundamental difference to theatre. Performance art, as exemplified by 6 Minutes, is immediate, and is characterized by the exposition of a visceral “liveness.” “Liveness” resides within a deliberate critical agenda of the performance artist, who is preoccupied with the exposition of the experiential over the objective. According to Adrian Heathfield, the “drive to the live” is embedded in the employment of performance as a “generative force” (Heathfield 2004: 7). This “generative” element of performance art is derived

from various aims that seek to “shock, to destroy pretence, to break apart traditions of representation, to foreground the experiential, to open different kinds of engagement with meaning, [and] to activate audiences” (Heathfield 2004: 7). Through these attempts to activate the audience, performance art eschews passivity in favour of participation. It aims to incite action within the viewer through the enactment of particularly shocking, visceral events. It is hoped that through such experiences, the viewer will construct alternative and critical views on the ideologies that the performance event seeks to confront and potentially act on such views in the broader socio-political sphere. The “generative” force of performance art, then, is located within politically-driven artistic agendas, which resist the aesthetic and aim for the critical. In the case of the performance described above, Peter van Heerden seeks to implement live acts in order to comment on the scourge of sexual violence in South Africa. But he replaces didacticism with the experiential; removes the exposition of sexual violence from the newspapers, and injects it into the realm of performance, in the hope that audience members actively find solutions to the issues that are so violently addressed. Van Heerden seeks to expose the “Real” as a means by which generative performance art disturbs, disorients, and ultimately moves audiences to act.

The Real is a phenomenon that will be unpacked in greater detail later in this thesis. It refers to the exposition of pure presence, which operates beyond the mechanisms of language and signification, and which, according to Lacan, “resists symbolization absolutely” (Lacan 1988: 66). The notion of the Real is significant in the practice of performance art, as it seeks to access the visceral, unnamable components of the live through the exposition of violent, immediate acts. It is within the Real that a momentary absence of the merging between signifier and signified takes place, and a reality (that exists beyond the grasp of signification) is potentially encountered.

Audience members enter a liminal space in which they become spectators/witnesses.¹

It is also within the Real that, I would argue, performance art correlates with ritual.

The similarities between performance art and ritual, in relation to the Real, form the basis of this study. I will also refer to how both phenomena operate according to a dichotomy of “destruction” and “creation.” “Destruction” and “creation” reside in performance art’s simultaneous interrogation of discursive norms – through its repudiation of the traditional theatrical styles that characterize representation – and its subsequent formation of new modes of perception. Such traditional styles are located within plot, narrative, characterization, design and all the components that belong to the realm of theatre. These components restrict audience members to roles of passivity. They generally view a theatre performance from the comfort of auditorium seats, through the frame of the proscenium arch. These components of signification mask the Real. Performance art seeks to “destroy” or “disrupt” the traditional theatre experience, and “create” gaps in theatre representation to form new roles for audience members and performers in a re-investigation of matters of perception and participation. It is within ritual, I would argue, that performance art begins these interrogations.

My investigation into the relationship between performance art and ritual begins with the theories of Antonin Artaud, who articulates the most emphatic need for a theatre of ritual. He identifies theatre as a “plague” that should unmask “the world’s lies, aimlessness, meanness, and even two-facedness so as to transform humanity” (Artaud 1970: 22). It is within this notion that the destructive and creative components of

¹ The term “spectator/witness” is my own and will be used throughout this thesis in reference to the audience members of the performance art event.

performance art and ritual function. By destroying the apparatuses of representation and demystifying the discursive norms that determine certain ideologies, the performance act/ritual creates opportunities for transformation: for new cultural or political dispensations to be discovered. Artaud states that like the plague, “theatre action” should have effects that are “on a par with a true epidemic” (Artaud 1970: 16):

Just as it not impossible that the unconsumed despair of the lunatic screaming in the asylum can cause the plague, so by a kind of reversibility of feelings and imagery...political conflicts, natural disasters, revolutionary order and wartime chaos, when they occur on a theatrical level, are released into the audience’s sensitivity with the strength of an epidemic (16-17).

Through comparing theatre to “war,” “natural disaster” and revolution, Artaud is proposing that in order for performance to be truly effective, it must be an assault on the senses, an “epidemic” that penetrates the spectator’s consciousness and becomes the catalyst for widespread social change. He states that a “real stage play upsets our sensual tranquility, releases our repressed subconscious, drives us to a kind of potential rebellion...calling for a heroic attitude on the part of the assembled groups” (Artaud 1970: 19). This quote links to the notion of performance art as “generative” in its aims to encourage critical thought and action. Although Artaud’s essay is dedicated exclusively to practices of theatre in the West, it is impossible to ignore the strong parallels that exist between it and some of the defining characteristics of performance art.² The “theatre of the plague” that Artaud deems necessary for Western performance requires the same sense of “liveness” that performance art attempts to invoke (Artaud 1970: 7). Performance artists seek to expose unmediated

² These defining characteristics will be explored in greater detail in the second chapter of this study.

presence, unbound by discourse, through destructive acts that not only have the potential to interrogate the discursive norms that define the subject (and subsequently, an entire community), but which could incite the spectator/witness to transformative acts of his/her own. Linking this notion to ritual, it is evident that both performance art and Artaud's theatre aim to encourage change within a community through the exposition of that which cannot be named, something "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable," which is ultimately where the Real resides (Kristeva 1982: 1). Artaud links the Real to ritual in his essay on the Balinese dancers, in which he states, "in the Balinese theatre one senses a state prior to language" (Artaud 1970: 44). Like performance art, Artaud's study of the Balinese theatre links the "unnamable" in performance to the experience of the body in extreme states. He provides the following description:

Those howls, those rolling eyes...those sounds of branches, of chopping and log-rolling, all in a vast expanse of sounds flowing out from several outlets at once...A great shudder, something like a prodigious magnetic vertigo overcomes them, and we feel inhuman or mineral meteorites hurtling down on them (49).

In this description, Artaud relates the experience of the body in crisis to a kind of transcendence, or even the divine.³ He notes that within the Balinese performance, a connection was made between the physical presence of the dancers, and the divine presence of other unsymbolizable phenomena. This connection could constitute the experience of the Real.

³ I am aware that link between the body in crisis (which, in the case of performance art, often refers to acts of self-inflicted violence) and the divine may be a rather controversial notion. Performed and ritualized forms of violence (some examples of which will be studied in the third chapter of this half-thesis), have particular contentious ethical implications. In writing on the relationship between violence and transcendence, I am in no way advocating the use of violence as a fundamental curative practice. Rather, I seek to use certain theories on the performance of violence to tease out some of the reasons why performance artists adopt it as a primary element in their works.

Artaud's argument for transcendence in theatre and performance (and its subsequent correlation with the notion of the Real) links to the theories of Julia Kristeva, which I will refer to throughout this study. Artaud's notions of transcendence and the divine associate with Kristeva's "*jouissance*"⁴, a pre-Oedipal state of being in which, through the experience of certain taboos and transgressions of the Symbolic order, the subject dissolves in a simultaneous experience of "oblivion" and revelation." The Symbolic order, according to Jacques Lacan, is "reality" that is socially constructed; "inculcated through the operation of language." (Lacan in Quick 1996: 15). He notes that "our experience of the world, what we are, what we see, is prescribed by language and its structures," determined by the Symbolic order (Lacan in Quick 1996: 15). The Real emerges from the gaps within this Symbolic order, through Kristeva's notion of *jouissance*. In examining the notion of *jouissance*, certain contradictions that exist within the Real are revealed, in which the divine (characterised by revelation or transcendence, especially in the Artaudian sense) and horror (Kristevan notions of abjection,⁵ anarchy and violence) operate within the resistance of the Symbolic.

These elements of the divine, and of horror, are potentially significant in the performance of ritual, as well as in violent performance art events. In light of this, certain other links between performance art and ritual may be established. Like

⁴ "*Jouissance*," refers to "enjoyment" with the sexual connotation of "*jouir*"- "to come" (Tang 2005: 4). In the context of psychoanalysis, "*jouissance* goes beyond the law of constancy, associated with the pleasure principle" (Benevuto and Kennedy 186: 179). This *jouissance* refers to a "discharge of unbound excitatory processes" beyond the limits of signification. For Lacan, "*jouissance*, like death, represents something whose limits cannot be overcome" (Benevuto and Kennedy 1986: 179). It is the pursuit of non-being that links this notion to that of the death drive. In terms of Kristeva, *jouissance* is what the subject experiences when the laws that constitute its totality dissolve, defined by "a state of indifferenciation between the psyche and the soma, and a fusion of the Ego and the Id" (O Connor 1990: 4).

⁵ The notion of "abjection" will be explored later in this half-thesis.

performance art, ritual “honours the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value that leaves no visible trace afterward” (Phelan 1993: 149). This statement by Phelan alludes to the role of “pure effect” in performance art, which purports to reveal gaps within conventional modes of meaning-making as defined by the Symbolic. In Acty Tang’s study of ritual and performance, he states that “ritual transcends language and rationality” and “purports to provide a spiritual or psychic communion that transcends the barrier of conceptual representation” which is “characteristic of discourse” (Tang 2005: 85). Moreover, he notes that it is within ritual that the boundary between art and life dissolves (Tang 2005: 88). The gaps in representation that performance art purports to reveal therefore reside in the dissolution of the divide between the Real and the fictive. Acts of live violence (in performance art and ritual) attempt to access these gaps, in order to challenge traditional modes of perception and possibly generate critical modes of thinking/action on the part of their spectators/witnesses.

The immediacy and violence of the performance events that will be examined in this thesis relate to “scapegoat rituals” in which the performer, through various live violent acts (e.g. self-mutilation) “suffers in place of the spectators” (Fischer- Lichte 1997: 242). These performances thrust the spectator/witness into the violence of the materiality of the performer’s agonized body. To return to the notion of the Real, it is within such rituals that the identities of the performer and the spectators are “dislodged” from their conventional roles. In deliberately dismantling the discursive norms that prohibit such forms of violence, both performer and spectator/witness experience an encounter with “oblivion,” or *jouissance*, as espoused by the Real.

1.2. Writing on Performance

It is through writing on performance and ritual that a fundamental challenge is encountered. Peggy Phelan illustrates this challenge in the following quote:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance (Phelan 1993: 147).

Phelan states that performance may only exist within the realm of pure presence, marked by the experience of the unmediated Real. Through documentation, the performance itself is irrevocably altered. It is removed from the presence that it seeks to expose, and is assigned a Symbolic relevance. This is where the true irony of this thesis resides. How do I, as a writer, preserve the integrity of a performance work that changes through the act of writing? Moreover, because the true impact of performance art resides in the immediacy of the event, it is ultimately *undermined* by any attempts made to preserve it and appropriate it as knowledge. In my writing of the links between performance art and ritual, I am aware that I am removing both from the realm of the unsymbolizable Real, and by doing so, locating them within the realm of representation that they both seek to resist.

Peggy Phelan's study on representation serves to interrogate the ideologies that seek to define, and therefore claim, "othered" identities based on gender and sexuality. Phelan locates her theories within the realms of feminism and queer theory,⁶ both of which seek to subvert dominant, patriarchal ideologies. In Phelan's case, these ideologies refer to patriarchy and capitalism, both of which, according to *Unmarked*:

⁶ The theoretical fields of queer theory and feminism are integral to studies pertaining to representation. Both studies challenge the validity of heteronormative, patriarchal discourses. They both address the significance of discourse in the construction of sexual identity. Detailed applications of feminism and queer theory to my study of representation and the Real are unfortunately beyond this half-thesis.

The politics of performance, aim to “mark” (or render “visible”) the other (marginalized) individual, and in doing so, claiming her and making her subject to the hegemonic order. She states that through “framing” the “under-represented [racial or sexual] other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix the image of that other” (Phelan 1993: 2). Phelan suggests that through “disappearing,” or through avoiding the mechanisms of representation which form part of these ideologies, the marginalized subject gains some sort of autonomy which is removed from a (potentially) oppressive dominant discourse. Performance art, Phelan suggests, is one such way in which such ideologies may be critiqued. She notes that performance art’s power resides in its ability to “disappear,” to expose a “maniacally charged present” and then leave “no left-overs” (Phelan 1993: 148). In this instance, by possibly avoiding absorption by discourse, and therefore, by residing in the gaps of signification, the “present” exposed by performance art can function as a mode of resistance against certain ideologies.

In my exploration and analysis of the works that I have included in this thesis, I have referred either to personal memory (as in the case of my description of *6 Minutes* at the beginning of this chapter) or to other written descriptions or to pictures (some of which are included in the subsequent chapters). I do not aim to reproduce these works exactly as they occur in the live (especially the photographs included herein which have already been “filtered” and “framed” by the lens of the camera), but to provide the reader with an impression of how these works function within the frameworks of ritual and the Real. Ultimately, I am aware that I am writing within discourse, and am therefore operating within the Symbolic.

1.3. Performance Art and the South African Context.

It is important to alert the reader of the works that are being explored in this study. I am aware of the fact that my analysis of performance art consists of a mix of European, American and South African performance artists. In my first chapter, in which I investigate some of the early manifestations of performance art, the practitioners that are referred to are all exclusively American and European. I am aware that the study of these artists, in juxtaposition with the more detailed study of two South African artists (Peter van Heerden and Steven Cohen) is potentially problematic. For instance, it is particularly implausible to compare the cultural and political contexts of Europe in the 1960's and 1970's (as in the case of performance artists like Marina Abramovic) with those of contemporary South Africa. Comparisons between South African and international performance artists are beyond the scope of this half-thesis. However, I believe that it is important for these earlier forms of performance art to be examined in order identify a tradition within which to locate later works. These components, such as liveness, the Real and ritual, are highly relatable to performance art irrespective of time and geography. Moreover, the dialectic of creation and destruction resounds throughout ritual and performance. I seek to utilize early European and American forms of performance art as examples by which I may tease out these significant characteristics. These characteristics would then be discussed in relation to the strategies that Peter van Heerden and Steven Cohen adopt in their performance practices, and how these strategies function within the creation/destruction dichotomy.

Significant instances of performance art have often correlated with important (or unstable) political periods. For instance, the chaotic works of the Dadaists in Europe

in the years between 1916 and 1922 were responses to the events of World War I and the values that inspired it. Violent rejections of traditional forms of painting, dance and theatre were performed (some of which will be discussed in the following chapter) in order to challenge the political frameworks that determined the ways in which art and performance were created and presented. This example highlights the fraught relationship that exists between politics and culture. In South Africa, this affiliation is particularly significant. It is important to note, however, that while Dada was allowed to flourish as a resistant art form in early twentieth century Europe, South African resistant art was recognized as a criminal offense by the apartheid legislature. Apartheid in South Africa imposed many barriers on the development of the arts, such as the Publications Appeal Board (1974) which prohibited the publication and distribution of certain materials that were deemed “undesirable” or contrary to the “Christian” ethos of apartheid South Africa at the time (Gordimer 1983: 660). Such strategies maintained the dominance of “elitist concerns” of a white minority at the expense of “oppositional aesthetics,” which sought to challenge the ruling status quo (Steadman 1990: 11). Politically conservative art events flourished while an “adversary” forms of theatre practice suffered under “repressive legislation [namely, censorship] and hegemonic co-option” (Steadman 1990: 12). In such a cultural climate, it is plausible that the violence and confrontation of performance art could not find a legal base on which to present itself in apartheid South Africa. The dismantlement of apartheid solved the legal issues that artists encountered in the distribution of their works, but this resulted in a new “crisis of identity” concerning the formation of a post-apartheid point of reference for artists and theatre practitioners (Gunner 1990: 3). I would argue that performance art is one such practice by which these issues concerning identity and culture may be examined and reconstituted.

The role of apartheid legislation is a reason by which performance art of this nature (characterised by the works of Steven Cohen and Peter van Heerden) has only emerged in recent times (in comparison to the much earlier forms of performance art in Europe and the United States). Censorship legislation would have certainly prevented the performances of such violent and provocative works. In the 1960's and 1970's (when performance art flourished in Europe and America) South African forms of art and literature were still prohibited for elements of "death, nudity, controversial or international politics...and scenes of intermingling between Europeans and non-Europeans" (Merrett 1994: 11). It is understandable, therefore, that certain confrontational performance works only emerged after 1994. Cohen's site-specific performance works only surfaced in 1997, whilst Van Heerden's performative interrogations began in 2005.

It is within the reciprocal relationship between legislature and performance that the fundamental concerns of performance art play out. Performance art removes art from the aesthetic, to the interrogative. It functions as an "autopsy" of not only culture and art-making, but of the political and social structures that determine the formation of identity. In the words of Steven Cohen, performance art is "internal and intrusive – it is like surgery without anaesthetic" (Cohen in Krut 2003: 14). This statement forms the basis of my investigation into performance art. This statement locates performance art within the political, and may then serve as an apt introduction to the investigation that is to follow.

Chapter Two

Representation Revised: Performance Art and the Drive to the Live.

2.1. Introduction

Nick Kaye notes that the art practice labeled “performance art” is difficult to conceptualize (Kaye 1994: 87). He isolates certain key words that link strongly to its practice, such as “integration,” “intersection” and “hybridization” which do more to broaden the subject of performance art than to narrow it down to a series of specific characteristics (Kaye 1994: 87). He does note, however, that performance art in Europe and the United States in the 1960’s was united by a drive to interrogate the “object” in the fields of painting and sculpture. This critique took place in the movement of art production from the static to the temporal. In such instances, arts practices became immersed in the production of phenomena; events unfolding within time and space. Paul Schimmel discusses American artist Jackson Pollock as an example to illustrate this shift in art making and art presentation. Pollock’s drip paintings were characterized by ritualized, “uncontrolled, brutally direct, and explosive... creative activity” (Schimmel 1998: 18). The processes he employed in the creation of his artworks were as significant as the artworks themselves, and it is therefore possible to call these processes “performances.” Pollock’s works were “destructive” in that they demystified the product in art-making. Action and temporality were given equal significance to the static object. Pollock’s “action paintings,” as they are called, dissolved the “boundaries between the object and the activity of its making” (Schimmel 1998: 19). Pollock’s acts, therefore, challenged or “destroyed” the traditionally “static” act of painting through spontaneous movement. In the “destruction” of conventional painting techniques (characterised the aesthetic

distance of the artist to the object being painted) Pollock inadvertently “created” a relationship between performance and object making.

I would like to introduce another, more contemporary example to illustrate “performance” in art and art-making. Adrian Heathfield refers to a work by British artist, Damien Hirst:

I’m standing in front of Damien Hirst’s *The Pursuit of Oblivion* (2004), trying to look at the unyielding eyes of a live fish as it glides with remarkable indifference over the sharp edge of a carving knife. A shiver runs through me. Facing this artwork, time slides and I’m gripped by an uncanny feeling. The sculpture is performing; the object is alive (Heathfield 2004: 7).

Hirst’s work is concerned with the “presentation of some phenomena, rather than the representation of some *thing*” (Heathfield 2007: 7). This relates to Jackson Pollock’s action paintings, in which the temporal process of object making became as important as the completed object itself. The actions that constitute performance and live art are often “spontaneous, aleatory, transitory and accidental” (Quick 1996: 12). They thrust the viewer from the relative safety of the world of static objects, and challenge his/her conventional modes of perceiving art. Heathfield’s disturbing sense of the “uncanny” is an example of how the safety of the static is replaced with the “unease” of the phenomenal. Moving or “live” artworks, as described in the examples of Pollock and Hirst, interrogate the aesthetic distance that, traditionally, exists between the viewer and the artwork. By introducing the “live” to their artworks, Pollock and Hirst bridge this distance in the exposition of the phenomenal, or experiential.

In terms of theatre, performance art also interrogates the script, the stage and the curtain to create more immediate, unpredictable events. Spectators are no longer passive viewers who “frame” an artwork/performance based on the mechanisms of intellectual detachment (which are formed by the discourses that define the work on display), but are active participants/witnesses in a real event. Not only do these deliberate “destructions” of form and representation revise the role of the viewer, but also potentially shift of the “role of art and of the artist in society” (Goldberg 1980: 371). Traditionally, this role would situate art and the artist within the realm of aesthetics only. By shattering the frameworks that determine aesthetic distance in art and theatre, I would argue that performance artists are attempting create new modes of art that are political in their constitution. In the next section of this chapter, I will argue how performance art attempts to realize this political function, through exploring, in more detail, the notion of the Real and how it relates to the (de)construction of representation, and subsequently, of certain sexual, cultural and social discourses.

2.2. The Pursuit of the Real

In the introduction to this study I proposed that performance artists attempt to access what is known as the Real in their events. To reiterate, with reference to Jacques Lacan, the Real constitutes the realm of experience that cannot be framed/claimed by the Symbolic order. The Real designates the gaps that exist within the “putative” real; or “reality” as is governed by discourse – that which is framed by the mainstream media (as well as by traditional modes of performance such as theatre and art). Performance art, through inverting the “laws” of discursive paradigms, aims to operate beyond the putative real and encounter what is close to the “Real-real”

(Phelan 1993: 3). For the performance to avoid being claimed by the dominant discourse (and to therefore “disappear,” according to Peggy Phelan’s theory), it is required that the “present be present; for it to exist in the suspended animation between past and future” (Phelan 1993: 3). This “present presence,” then, detracts from signification (and language) and possibly transcends the boundaries of acknowledged reality. This “acknowledged reality” is constructed by the frameworks of the Symbolic, and therefore, of language. In order to function as an effective tool for cultural and political critique, performance art needs to access those ruptures in the “network” of language that forms “a net over the entirety of things, over the totality of the [R]eal” (Lacan in Quick 1996: 15).

This Real exists “prior to or beyond the systems(s) and its ‘network’” (Lacan in Quick 1996: 15). Peggy Phelan expands on this by stating that “the Real is full Being itself...forever impossible to realize (make real) within the frame of the Symbolic” (Phelan 1993: 3). In this sense, the Real could refer to a state prior to the laws of symbolization that determine the socialization of the subject (Phelan 1993: 4). She states that invisible gaps within discourse (which designate the Real according to Lacan’s definition) could have the potential to interrogate certain ideological constructions of subjectivity:

I am attempting to revalue a belief in subjectivity and identity that is not visually representable...that which cannot be surveyed within the boundaries of the putative real (Phelan 1993: 1).

To restate her argument as introduced in the previous chapter, Phelan suggests that true independence from rhetorical authority does not reside in being “visible,” as it is this “visibility” that leaves the artist vulnerable to the “markings” of the discourses

that eventually claim and commodify the performance event. Instead, she opts for a politics of “disappearance” characterized by temporality and mutability. Commodification cannot occur to that which “by definition disappears once the performance is over” (Rush 1998: 2).⁷ In this sense, the performance artist potentially breaks the link that exists between “the image” and “the word;” the product (which may be an art object, a photograph or a play) and the discourse that engulfs it (Phelan 1993: 2). He/she challenges discursive paradigms by attempting to “disappear” (Phelan 1993: 2). Disappearance, in this sense, is not literal. It occurs in the immediacy of the act, in which the events that unfold are so visceral and so disturbing that the spectator struggles to filter the event through conscious, intellectual means. Visceral performance events often utilize the body as their primary medium, and I would argue that it is on the body that the Symbolic and the Real simultaneously converge and collide.

Judith Butler and Michel Foucault locate the experiences of the Real and of Phelan’s notions of “visibility” and “invisibility” within the body and its acquisition of gender.⁸ For Foucault, the body is an “unsexed” entity prior to “its determination within a discourse, through which it becomes invested with an ‘idea’ of natural or essential sex” (Foucault 1978: 154). Butler extends on Foucault’s link between gender appropriation and discourse by noting that sex and identity are assumed within “a context of power relations” and that “sexuality is an historically specific organization

⁷ Commodification, in this instance, refers to the mechanisms of capitalism. According to Phelan, capitalism “objectifies” the identity on display. The *visible* other invites the “ownership” of capitalism, provoking “voyeurism, fetishism [and] the colonial/imperial appetite for possession” (Phelan 1993: 6).

⁸ It is important to note that the theories of both Foucault and Butler concerning the body and subjectivity are firmly based within studies of gender appropriation and sexual identity. Although a more detailed investigation into such theories is beyond the scope of this half-thesis, they are particularly valuable in highlighting the connections that exists between the body, subjectivity, and ideology, and are therefore significant in my analysis of body-based performance art which is to follow.

of power, discourse, bodies, and affectivity” (Butler 1999: 117). These ideas render evident the links that exist between the sexual identity of the subject, and the ideologies or discourses into which it is born. When the body of the performance artist is violated within the act, it is possible that the laws that determine the behaviour of that body and its “appropriate bodily contours” are also violated to some extent (Butler 1993: 72). Through (literally) probing the body, the performance artist may also probe the laws of symbolization that determine the “integrity of [that] body” (Butler 1993: 72). Judith Butler states the following:

For Lacan, names [and thus the citational power of language], which emblemize and institute...paternal law, sustain the integrity of the body (72).

This quote illustrates how the identity of the body as determined by discourse is bound to language. “Names,” which designate the appropriate roles/functions of the body, form part of the paternal law (or Lacan’s Law of the Father, which will be unpacked later in this chapter), and therefore situate the body and the subject within the ideological constraints of a certain discourse. It is as if the body is “etched” with the discursive laws provided by the hegemonic order, and such “etchings” are revealed in the identity and behaviour adopted by the subject. If language and citation are so crucial to the development of the “contours” of the body within discourse, then surely a disruption of such contours would entail a critique of the citational powers that frame it? This is where body-based performance art enacts its interrogation of discursive bodies. For example, Marina Abramovic (through self-mutilation) ruptures this integral body and the very Symbolic structures that determine its totality. She attempts to evoke the Real in instantaneous acts of self-inflicted violence and expose the “gaps” in the network of Symbolic reality, to challenge the citational power of language in the formation of bodily identity.

Josette Feral also offers an interpretation of body-based performance art. She associates the violation of the body with “the dissolution of the subject, not in explosion, scattering or madness, but in death” (Feral 1983: 208). In this instance, the strategies that performance art adopts in resisting the constraints of discourse and symbolization (and in accessing the subconscious) are associated with the death drive. For Freud, the notion of the death drive was formed out of an investigation of that which is “repressed;” and his preoccupation with “an instinctual compulsion to repeat, to return to a prior state” (Foster 1993: 9). In opposition to the “life drive” or “pleasure principle,”⁹ the death drive (symbolized by Thanatos) marks the need to “undo connections and so destroy things” (Freud 1938: 5). It is concerned with the destruction of the subject and aims for a state that exists before the construction of the ego. This “prior state” in Freud’s study of the subconscious resonates with the primal scene (and thus, the Real) which performance art attempts to access. Peggy Phelan elaborates:

The primal scene itself is (probably) a screen memory for the always-lost moment of one’s own conception. Moreover, within the logic of psychic displacement, the memory of the primal scene also functions as a rehearsal for one’s own death. The primal scene is a psychic revisiting and anticipation of the world without oneself (Phelan 1993: 5).

In reference to the “always-lost moment of one’s own conception,” the “prior state” is something that is, subconsciously, longed for and as Andrew Quick reveals, “is revealed to haunt the Symbolic order” (Quick 1996: 15). Phelan’s quote also reveals certain contradictions that exist within the notion of the “prior state” and the Real.

⁹ The “pleasure principle,” according to Freud, is concerned with the drive to the “self-preservative and sexual drives” and is symbolised by Eros (Foster 1993: 10).

Phelan notes that the “prior state” may allude to the chaotic, primal domain of the Freudian Id and evoke the compulsive, destructive elements of the death drive, or the “rehearsal for one’s own death.” It may also, referring to the quote, hold the promise to be “born again” through the fulfillment of the lost “primal scene,” or “utopia” of the womb which, according to Botting, the subject subconsciously mourns for and longs to return to (Botting in Quick 1996: 15). Despite the conflicting nature of this prior state, it remains what the subject lacks within the frameworks of language and society.

The Real stands as the opposite of this loss, as “the fullness of inert presence; of positivity” (Zizek 1989: 169). Therefore, according to Quick, “the Real is founded on the absence of absence, or as Lacan states, the ‘lack of lack.’” It is this lack (founded on the dichotomy of absence and difference) Lacan argues, that constitutes the order of language, forming the “structures of symbolization” (Quick 1996: 15). Performances characterized by a drive towards “oblivion” (a state beyond the reach of the Symbolic) expose a preoccupation with non-Being, as a promise of the fulfillment of the “lack” or “loss” of the primal scene. All these notions concerning the Real also suggest the simultaneous operation of destruction and creation. The Real promises the obliteration of discourse as defined by language (and the chaos and darkness that are associated with it), and through this destruction, it reveals the possibility of rebirth.

Performance art, in its attempts to expose the gaps that exist in symbolization, might then offer to “reconfigure” subjectivity through the deconstruction of the laws of signification. Lacan states that enactments of pain and violence exemplify “a path to *jouissance*” (Lacan 1960: 212). This “will to destruction” through *jouissance* also

demonstrates a “will to make a fresh start” (Lacan 1960: 212). This can be linked to the creative component of the destruction/creation dichotomy, in that it is through the obliteration of the subject that a new identity may be attained. The “fresh start” that Lacan locates within destructive acts and the Real could be the result of the shifts that take place within the roles of the performance artists and spectators therein. When “liveness” breaks through the representational frameworks that define an event, the Symbolic laws that constitute traditional representations of the body and of the subject fall away to accommodate new, fluid experiences that reside in the phenomenal, and (could) momentarily resist the grasp of language and meaning-making. Through a deliberate disavowal of the Symbolic structures that define the subject through violent and transgressive performed acts, the performer potentially undergoes an experience of transformation. By violating the materiality of the discursive body (which is bound by signification), a breakdown and subsequent reconstitution of subjectivity is possibly experienced.

2.3. The Politics of Performance Art.

As I have mentioned, the “drive to the live” amongst performance artists is concerned with revising the discourses that define the subject. These discourses may pertain to cultural, religious, racial and sexual identity (usually the artist’s). Performance art may also interrogate discourses with the aim of making political statements. In this section of the chapter, I will explore a variety of practitioners who utilize the live and the Real as the means of challenging certain ideologies.

I would suggest that the live acts of the Italian Futurists of the early twentieth century embody some of the characteristics of performance art that I have begun to investigate in this chapter. F.T. Marinetti, the predominant leader and writer of the Futurist movement, sought to dismantle traditional modes of art and philosophy in Italy, and was particularly opposed to the university (and therefore traditional discursive constructs as defined by academia) as the main source of Italian culture (Perloff 1986: 89). In light of this, the Futurists also took static art out of galleries and introduced it to the streets. Some of their “performances” were characterised by the intervention of public spaces. Their work was, in the words of Roselee Goldberg, directed “outwards...into real space: social, political, urban” (Goldberg 2004: 177).

F.T. Marinetti highlighted the “need for an art that was reactive and activating, reflective of, and effective on society,” and believed that such art was not to be achieved in the galleries, but in the open spaces of everyday life (Goldberg 1980: 370). In the case of the Futurists, social and cultural change was desired through thrusting art and performance into public spaces, thereby forcing the surrounding witnesses into situations that challenged the divisions between art and life. For instance, Marinetti encouraged art to inspire a “cult of energy, aggressiveness, violence and heroism” characterized by the destructive “gesture[s] of freedom-bringers” (Marinetti in Perloff 1986: 89). These Futurist values were inspired by the technological developments of the early 20th century, of which the motorcar was part. The “energy” and “aggressiveness” of Marinetti’s manifestos, and of the Futurist performances, partly stemmed from the vigorous automatism that the motorcar exemplified. Public interventions, the Futurists hoped, would incite spectators to similar vigorous action, and so transform society through “courage, audacity” and

revolt (Perloff 1986: 89). An example of this behaviour is evident in the following description of a Futurist event:

[On] July 8, 1910... Italian Futurist painters and poets threw eight hundred copies of their broadside 'Against Passiest Venice,' from the clock tower above the Piazza San Marco onto the heads of law-abiding citizens. The Futurists claimed that Venice was a "great sewer of traditionalism," [after which] a physical confrontation ensued (Wilson 1997: 1).

Through the "liveness" and immediacy of these public interventions, and the confrontations that followed, art became a "cultural weapon" to be implemented on the streets (Goldberg 1980: 369).

The Dadaist movement in Berlin, Zurich and Paris in the years between 1916 and 1922 was similarly concerned with the revision of traditional discourse. Dadaists sought to radically interrogate conventional artistic practices, such as theatre. Anti-traditionalism permeated the writings of Hugo Ball, who expressed, "Theatre has no sense anymore. Who wants to act now, or ever see acting?...I feel about the theatre as a man must feel who has suddenly been decapitated" (Ball in Goldberg 1980: 371). For Ball, the established forms of theatre and art that encouraged detached intellectual contemplation and aesthetic enjoyment had become obsolete. In order for what he called "the regeneration of society," art needed to activate, disturb and "shake you by the lapels" (Ball in Goldberg 1980: 371 and Wilson 1997: 1). Events at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich were fiercely resistant to representation, and this interrogation of the mechanisms of representation were viewed "as the first step towards the liberation of [the artist] from control and manipulation" by the dominant political and cultural order (Erickson 1996: 15). Performance events were often characterized by "chance assemblages, through the fusion and clash of objects, colours and sounds, and the simultaneity of expression" (Erickson 1996: 17). Such strategies were viewed as the antidote to the deadening effects of traditional theatre. Often, such acts were met with

confusion and outrage. The following excerpt from Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto* (1918) demonstrates a strong, enthusiastic encouragement of such outrage:

Every product of disgust that is capable of becoming a negation of the family is in *dada*; protest with fists of one's whole being in destructive action: DADA; acquaintance with all means hitherto rejected by sexual prudishness of easy compromise and good manners: DADA; abolition of logic, dance of those who are incapable of creation...DADA: the abolition of memory: DADA; the abolition of archaeology: DADA; the abolition of prophets: DADA; the abolition of the future: DADA; the absolute and indisputable belief in every god that is an immediate product of spontaneity... DADA DADA DADA...LIFE (Tzara 1911: 112).

This also expresses a radical refutation of some of the existing norms of early twentieth century Europe. For instance, Tzara calls for the "abolition" of elements such as "memory," "archaeology" and "future." All of these words in some way allude to linear time and to progress, while "logic" refers to sense. By calling for an abolition of such foundations, Tzara is simultaneously calling for an end to structure, to form and (through the eradication of linear time) to history. Dada, in light of this manifesto, immersed itself in the need for "spontaneity," which could refer to the unpredictable Real that performance art often attempts to actualise. Moreover, in its critique of history and progress, Dada also challenged the norms that had resulted in the eruption of the First World War in 1917.¹⁰

Just as the First World War functioned as the focal point for the rebellious acts of Dadaism, the Second World War (and the subsequent social and political shifts that occurred as a result of it) inspired a generation of performance artists to revise history.

¹⁰ The First World War was partly encouraged the discourses that comprised modernity, marked by progress, industrialisation and mechanisation. These notions, combined with imperialism (which characterised most European nations' foreign policies) triggered the War that was to determine much of the Dadaists' anti-war rhetoric (Willmot 2003: 10). At this point it is important to note that, despite its significant influence in Zurich, and later Paris, Dada had dissipated by the early 1920's. It had been "replaced" with the Surrealist movement, which substituted improvised Dada performances with more narrative and character-based theatre works.

Gunter Berghaus provides some context for the emergence of this type of performance art:

The mid-1960's was a period of great political upheavals and social change, both in the USA and Europe. It found its most visible manifestation in the 1968 revolt and the mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War, the Women's Liberation movement, civil rights campaigns, Black Panther activism and so on. This political counter-culture was closely related to the sexual revolution, the emancipation of the individual from social repression and conformity, the liberalization of the laws on censorship, etc. Re-embodiment of what in previous centuries had been disembodied was as much a response to the repression of the body in Christian societies as it was to the dominance of rationalist, intellectual discourses in Western culture as a whole...(Berghaus 2005: 133).

Artists tended to focus on individual identity in their performances. Moreover, with the development of the movements that Berghaus addresses in the quote above, the body became a central area of investigation in many performance artists' practices. This is because, as Berghaus highlights, the "revolutions" that marked the 1960's and 1970's were preoccupied with the "emancipation" of the individual from prescribed social and sexual ideas. For example, the availability of the contraceptive pill in the 1960's in America and Europe challenged traditional associations of women's bodies with marriage and motherhood. This connected with the development of the sexual revolution,¹¹ which interrogated the repression of the body and its drives. Performance art events of the 1960's and 1970's served to bring the material, sexual, cultural and political elements of the body to the forefront of the avant-garde. To reintroduce Judith Butler's notion of the citational laws of discourse, performance art investigated the body as a "site of social inscription" (Berghaus 2005: 134).

¹¹ The sexual revolution was encouraged by the notion of "free love" in the United States, as a result of the hippie movement in the 1960's. This movement emphasised the "power and beauty of sex" (which challenged traditional views which restricted sex to the function of procreation) inside and outside of marriage (Radner and Lockett 1999: 5).

Erika Fischer-Lichte refers to artists such as Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Chris Burden, Marina Abramovic and Hermann Nitsch, who were all concerned with the use of the body in a “striking” (and often violent) manner during the period of the 1960’s and 1970’s (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 244). These artists would literally “unfold their bodies in public...[and] aimed at peeling off the sedimented layers of signification with which the body...was historically and culturally coated” (Bergaus 2005: 134). These ideas link to the practice of self-mutilation in performance art, which will be explored later in this chapter.

During the 1980’s and 1990’s, performance art continued to utilize the body as a significant medium of expression, and in certain instances, was investigated in connection to contemporary technological developments. Stelarc, an Australian performance artist, began to explore the notion of an “obsolete” body;¹² an “object” that interfaced with its surrounding cybernetic landscape. He would link robotic devices and prosthetic limbs to his own body in attempts to perform an “interfaced” body that, through the fusion of flesh and machine, would be “better equipped” to cope with a technologically advanced, “extra-terrestrial environment” (Stelarc 2006: www.stelarc.va.com.au. Date accessed: 16/06/09).

Roselee Goldberg addresses some of the challenges that faced performance art in the 1980’s. She notes that in some instances, performance art became adopted by “the popular media” (Goldberg 1988: 210).¹³ This means that the mechanisms of

¹² Stelarc views the contemporary body as “obsolete” due to its inability to fit in with the complexities of a world that is fast becoming a digital landscape. He notes that a “bipedal, breathing body...cannot cope with the quantity...and quality of information it has accumulated” (Stelarc 2006: www.stelarc.va.com.au).

¹³ Goldberg makes specific reference to “a rather crass Hollywood movie” which included the story “of a performance artist and her Hollywood style performances” (Goldberg 1988: 210). These, according

capitalism (which, to re-introduce the theories of Peggy Phelan, performance art attempts to avoid) found ways in which to re-absorb and re-commodify some resistant modes of performance art. Goldberg questions whether or not performance art could “retain its anarchic ways” in light of this influence of capitalism (Goldberg 1988: 210). In this current context, performance art (or live art, as it is now commonly referred to) attempts to challenge the capitalist systems that threatened to nullify its aims in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Some performance acts address the alleged “monstrosity of consumer production” within a globalised society (Read 2004: 245). For example, The Critical Art Ensemble is one such collective that implements live performance, in conjunction with technology and literature, to dissect and criticize the consequences of late capitalism on art, culture and philosophy. They have garnered a reputation for their interventionist works (which resonate strongly with the public artistic displays of the Futurists), which serve to “contribute to the negation of the rising intensity [of capitalism]” as authoritarian (www.critical-art.net. Date accessed 03/01/09).

Like the performance artists examined up to this point, live artists demonstrate a drive to interrogate the “limits of representation-ability” (Reinelt 2002: 153). In doing so, live art practitioners attempt to “destabilize the frameworks that operate to transform the event into an object: to resist or undermine the apparatuses which both inculcate the representational order and render the performance event commodifiable” (Quick 1996: 13). I would suggest that some of the means by which performance is re-absorbed into the mechanisms of capital include stasis (which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, serves to frame and thus objectify an artwork), visibility (by which the

to Goldberg, involved the lighting of fires in a large loft, while “moaning and writhing” (Goldberg 1988: 210). This reference relates to Phelan’s theories concerning the “fetishizing” and objectifying effects of capitalism and the media on performance art.

performer/performance is marked as an object within capitalist mechanisms) and framing (which situates the performer/performance within certain hegemonic discourses of representation). In resisting the commodification of the performance event, the artist attempts to undermine the systems of capitalism as exemplified by the exchange of money for art objects. These endeavours resonate with my brief study of Jackson Pollock, in which the “performance” of the object’s creation is as important as the object itself.

From these observations, it is evident that performance art operates according to definitive political agendas. I will now explore some of the strategies that performance artists adopt in their attempts to expose the live and the Real. From this, I aim to highlight how performances of the live and the Real (if such actualizations are possible) attempt to challenge discourse. I will focus specifically on the manipulation of the body in performance art as a live strategy.

2.4. Abject Rebellion

In performance art, the artist’s body is often the primary medium. This frequently leads to the infliction of real violence on the body by the artist himself. Acts of self-mutilation, which characterise the works of, for example, Marina Abramovic, are met with mixed responses that extend from fascination to horror. Self-mutilation in performance art is a highly controversial issue, and later in this half-thesis, I will examine some of the legal consequences of violent and contentious public acts. Despite this, many performance artists adopt mutilation as a means of expressing the immediate and unspeakable Real. In order to gain a greater understanding of precisely why such acts of physical self-harm are performed by artists, I will introduce the

notions of the abject and abjection, and how these elements link to the live and the Real.

Elizabeth Gross introduces the abject as “the underside of the Symbolic” (Gross 1990: 89). In light of Gross’s notion, I have included the following quote by Christine Ramsay, who provides a descriptive definition of the abject:

It is where the true fragility of the human body exposes itself – where destruction, death, decay, murder, suicide, bodily orifices and wastes, genitalia, sex perversion and incest loom...this is the place where the...self as a secure and integrated thinking subject faints away because rational identity, system and order are disturbed, and borders, positions and rules for daily living are no longer respected (Ramsay in Van Heerden 2004: 12).

Kristeva states that the site of the abject “is the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 1982: 2), and where the subject confronts elements “necessary to death [and] to animality” (Gross 1990: 89). The abject, in this sense, threatens the totality of the subject through its anteriority to the Symbolic order. The recognition and disavowal of the abject by the subject reinforces the structures that define and maintain this totality. Kristeva states:

On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. They are the primers of my culture (Kristeva 1982: 2).

In this she suggests that the “I” as a speaking subject is protected by revulsion and loathing towards the abject. The abject simultaneously menaces and maintains the subject as constituted by the Symbolic order:

Loathing an item of food, piece of filth, waste or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewerage and muck...During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit (Kristeva 1982: 2-3).

In this quote Kristeva identifies abjection as a violent process by which the subject protects itself through its subconscious responses of disgust towards abject elements, such as rotting food, excrement and filth. These abject examples, on a social level, are viewed as unclean, poisonous, and therefore dangerous to the health and well-being of the subject. Faecal waste, for instance, is expelled from the body and is viewed as a polluting substance when re-introduced to the social sphere. For example, the health hazards that plagued London in the nineteenth century as a result of overcrowding and poor sanitation resulted in the spread of contagious diseases, “most notoriously, cholera” (Cohen 2005: xix).

In order for the subject to retain its totality, it needs to reject the elements that threaten it. In certain psychoanalytic theories, the body of the mother is associated with the “threat” of the abject. A rejection of the maternal body constitutes a decisive stage in the subject’s development. This correlates with Kristeva’s notions on the maintenance of the subject through the refutation of the abject. This is also evident in Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” in which the subject-to-be (at 6-18 months) encounters its own whole, specular image¹⁴ (Lacan 1966: 3). This marks the first time in which the subject perceives its body as a sealed, separate entity, apart from that of the mother. In order to remain a “whole” entity, the subject must separate itself from the body of the mother permanently. According to Lacan, it is at this point that the “I” is “precipitated in a primordial form” (Lacan 1966: 4). The Law of the Father, following this stage, marks the shift from the specular “I” to the social, speaking “I.” It constitutes the resolution of the Oedipal conflict, in which the father figure “forcefully” prohibits the fulfilment of the subject’s desire for maternal incest (Menezes 2006: 61). It is through

¹⁴ This image is encountered when the young child “recognizes his own image as such in a mirror” (Lacan 1966: 3).

this primary experience of authority from the Father that the subject is introduced to the Symbolic system, characterised by language and signification. It is also through this phase of development that the subject “represses” the mother, and enters a system defined by “law, culture, religion, family and language” (Menezes 2006: 62). The rejection of the mother within this stage of psychosexual development constitutes the rejection of the abject due to the influence of discourse, as exemplified by the Father.

This kind of violent disavowal reinforces the totality of the subject, and it is therefore through abjection and the abject that the “I” is sustained. Abjection is similar to the birth process, in which the infant (like the subject) has to undergo a violent process of severance from the body of the mother in order to constitute itself as a separate entity.¹⁵ Through fear and disgust as aroused by the abject, the subject adopts the borders and limits¹⁶ imposed on the body as defined by law and signification, and thus, it projects the inscriptions of the hegemonic order. Lacan and Kristeva highlight how gaps within these inscriptions reveal the Real. Such gaps may arise on the image of the subject’s mirror-ideal, in which the whole body of the subject is fragmented. These gaps are, literally, evident on the body of the performance artist who fragments his/her own “whole” body through mutilation. Through embracing the abject and the Real through these gaps, the subject (the “I”) dissolves and is “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” and enters a new mode, a “dark revolt of being” (Kristeva 1982: 1).

¹⁵ The relationship between the maternal body and the abject will be explored in greater detail in the third chapter of this thesis, in conjunction with the works of Peter van Heerden.

¹⁶ Such “borders and limits” might encapsulate the notions that pertain to the body as sacred, sealed and whole. This relates to Cartesian ideas concerning the separation of the body (containing the “base,” corporeal functions of the subject) and the mind (the purer, spiritual realm in which the speaking subject resides). Breaking these divisions, through an incorporation of the abject into the subject’s sphere, threatens the laws that connect the subject’s body to discourse. Abjection therefore produces the gaps in signification through which the Real may surface.

This is where the true rebellion of performance art resides. Through deliberately destroying the totality of the body, the artist “revolts” against the Symbolic and his/her subjectivity dissolves in an encounter with the “abyss” of the abject. In performance art characterised by self-mutilation, the body as a sealed and sacred whole is literally opened up, and ultimately reconfigured. A realm that exists beyond the grasp of the speakable and the conscious may be encountered through such violence. The political implications of such actions are patent in Bergaus’s study of the Viennese Actionists. The Viennese Actionists were a movement that came into prominence in Austria in the late 1960’s. Like Jackson Pollock, they were primarily concerned with the conjunction between performance and painting. The action paintings of Hermann Nitsch consisted of blood and slaughtered animals. These elements were combined with various quasi-religious icons, and the disturbing juxtaposition between these components assisted Nitsch in his interrogations of religion and sacrifice, and of the connections that exist between violence and the formation of culture (Romberg 2005: 12). The performances of the Viennese Actionists also addressed “repressive sexual mores, hypocritical religious values [and] the overt destructions of war” (Stiles and Selz 1996: 687). Such performed confrontations were viewed as “scandalous” and this resulted in the repeated arrests of Nitsch and his collaborators. By associating sacred, spiritual representations of Viennese society (such as the crucifix on the following page) with that which is socially taboo (the rotting meat and blood, which by their potentially polluting nature are abject), the Actionists unsettled the “clean” immutability of religion and its discourses. They undermined the repressive nature of religious doctrine by attaching prohibited, potentially threatening acts to its imagery. Berghaus expands on this notion in the following quote:

All avant-garde performance artists were concerned with overcoming the gap between art and life. In Vienna this took on the more specific form of breaking down the barriers between Super-Ego and Id, between socio-cultural conventions and the libidinal forces. Unveiling the psychic condition of the human race was a process of socio-political critique and brought the Actionists into conflict with the representatives of State Power (Berghaus 2005: 157).



Hermann Nitsch (1963). www.artmagazine.arcadja.it. Date accessed: 30/12/08.

In light of the clashes between the Actionists and the state, the anarchic nature of performance art is revealed. Herbert Blau associates such acts with revolution. He states the “revolution will have brought to life in society [that which was] otherwise is lost, trapped, dispersed in the unconscious” (Blau 1992: 88). This means that “revolution,” or, the “fresh start” (which, as explored earlier in this chapter, occurs after destructive encounters with the Real) occurs when that which is repressed (“libidinal forces” that exist beyond the grasp of language and culture) is realized. This notion of “revolution” also relates to Julia Kristeva’s quote on p.29, in which the subject “gives birth” to “itself” through the violence, “sobs” and “vomit” of abjection. It is within the “violence” of the Real and the repressed, as encountered in the gaps of the Symbolic, that a dismantlement and “rebirth” or “revolution” of subjectivity (and culture) can possibly occur. Cultural and political authorities, characterised by “imaginary and Symbolic economies” within the body, are possibly disturbed by the “unsymbolizable excess of the Real” (Quick 1996: 16).

I will now examine how other performance artists introduce abjection to their works. I will begin with introducing the notion of the “transgressive body” in performance, using Hugo Ball’s Dada performances as an example of one of the earlier forms of body-based performance art. I will then explore the works of Marina Abramovic, Ron Athey and Franko B, who all perform acts of self-mutilation. They rupture the surface of the body in attempts to similarly rupture the discourses that are etched onto it.

2.5. The Body in Crisis

Alan Read relates body performance art to the “bio-political” (Read 2004: 244). This term depicts the body as the “fundamental and indispensable element of any performing act,” which functions as the primary site on which social and cultural discourse inscribes its authority (Feral 1982: 215). Judith Butler has conducted extensive studies on this notion of the bio-political, and how it pertains to the relation of “agency” and the subjectivity of the body to “language and law” (Reinelt 2002: 156). In Janelle Reinelt’s study of performativity¹⁷ and discourse, she notes that ruptures in the performativity of the body could result in a potential “destabilization of the law, [allowing] an opening for resistance and also for transformation in iteration” (Reinelt 2002: 156). In terms of the experience of the spectator, Elin Diamond notes that the unmediated experience of the materiality of the body could “raise political consciousness...and even produce new communal structures” (Diamond 1996: 3). In this instance, body performance art – that which is particularly defined by the manipulation of the body in ways that run contrary to what is

¹⁷ “Performativity” in this sense, refers to how “identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes” (Derrida in Parker 1995: 2). In terms of J.L Austin’s study of the Speech-Act Theory, it refers to “state[s] of affairs from utterances that accomplish, in their very enunciation, an action that generates effects” (Parker 1995: 3). In other words, the Speech-Act Theory denotes that by “speaking the word,” so the action thereof is accomplished.

constituted as “acceptable” within the norms of the authoritative order – can function as a mode of resistance to cultural inscriptions on the body’s totality.

The Dadaists believed the body to be a primal object; a tool for the expression of the anarchic animalism that characterised Dada’s rebellion against the “civilised” and the “logical” elements of the modern world. Dada’s close links with the Primitivist¹⁸ movement in the early twentieth century illustrates how this rebellion found its locus in the body. The dance activity of Zurich Dada was partly influenced by Sophie Taeuber (who studied dance under Rudolph Laban in 1916), whose works were influenced by jagged, weight-bound rhythms and energies (Prevots 1985: 5). Such dances opposed the aesthetics of, for example, ballet, which sought to “deny” the corporeal elements of the body by emphasising the qualities of lightness and line. Dada dance employed specific animalistic gestures and sounds with the usage of “primitive” masks, which, according to Hugo Ball, resulted performances “close to madness” (Ball in Prevots 1985: 6). Improvisation was often utilised in these dances of an unrestrained, even “ugly” body. It was the unrehearsed performance of the body in all its primal ugliness that inspired moments that were “chaotic and trancelike, eventually ecstatic and anarchic” (Preston-Dunlop 1996: 173).

Such performances resonate strongly with ritual and are comparable to the Balinese dancers that Artaud describes in his exposition of a transcendental theatre. Furthermore, Dada emphasized the significance of a grotesque, corporeal body in its various manifestos. The Dada preoccupation with the grotesque also links with some

¹⁸ Primitivism was an art movement that emerged in Europe in the early twentieth century, between the years 1906 and 1908 (Prevots 1985: 6). It placed an emphasis on non-Western forms of art and dance. Painters such as Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck and Picasso incorporated abstract, geometric, and decidedly “primordial” images into their works, which were influenced by African and Oceanic masks and sculptures (Prevots 1985: 6).

of the theories of the abject that I have explored earlier. For instance, Tristan Tzara wrote of the body's "baseness" and its revolt against a "decorous, good-mannered body" (Preston-Dunlop 1996: 178). He lists the words "shit, piss, fart, saliva, spermatozoa, syphilis, intestines, diarrhea, incest, fornicating" to denote what the body "simply was" (Tzara 1918: 111). Tzara's writings demonstrate the connection between the abject body (the "base," corporeal body) and transgression. It was the corporeality of the abject Dada body that challenged traditional views on the body as sacred and contained.

Whereas Dada was preoccupied with the grotesque body, some performance artists of the 1960's and 1970's demonstrated a drive towards self-mutilation. This act may be viewed as a highly contradictory practice. While self-mutilation is sometimes considered a self-destructive activity, it is also regarded as a significant ritualistic strategy for the acquisition of an altered, or higher state of consciousness in some religious domains. The practice of self-flagellation in certain Christian sects is one such example. It emerged in the 13th and 14th centuries in Europe as a form of penance, and is still practised by some ascetic monastic orders today. The Guardi Sanframondi in Italy, for instance, performs public parades of self-flagellation once every seven years. Ariel Glucklich calls this type of self-harm "integrative" as it attempts to "transform suffering" into "a positive religious-psychological mechanism for reintegration within a more deeply valued level of reality" (Glucklich 2001: 6). He also highlights the practice of "disintegrative" self-harm, which is usually associated with self-destructive behaviour characterised by personality and depressive disorders (Glucklich 2001: 6). This form of self-harm relates to the Freudian death drive, in its preoccupation with a compulsive need to repeat destructive acts.

Josette Feral's analysis of body harm in performance art demonstrates an affinity with this theory of "disintegrative" self-mutilation. She states that the artist "explores [the body], manipulates it, paints it, covers it, uncovers it, freezes it, moves it, cuts it [and] isolates it (Feral 1982: 215). She associates enactments of real pain and defilement with the release of that which is usually "repressed" or taboo within the Symbolic law (Feral 1982: 215). In other words, through self-mutilation, the performance artist deliberately unites with the abject. Performances of self-harm expose a body "made conspicuous: a body in pieces, fragmented and yet one, a body perceived and rendered as a place of...displacement and fluctuation, a body the performance conceives of as repressed and tries to free – even at the cost of greater violence" (Feral 1982: 216). In terms of the theories of Freud, the repressed refers to desires, memories, or other familiar phenomena that haunt the subject, and are rendered "daemonic" through such repression (Foster 1993: 7). These repressed phenomena cannot be articulated (or accepted) within the structures of the Symbolic constitution of the hegemonic order, and thus threaten the order through their very enactment. It is possible that through the exposition of the taboo – the "unspeakable," the abject – the performance artist conducts an "exercise" of rebellion against Symbolic law; an act characterised by the "disintegration" (to refer to Glücklich's term) of orders and connection. Through this, the performance event might resist the representational (and thus, political) mechanisms that seek to claim it.

Erika Fischer-Lichte discusses the significance of "resistance" in body-based performance art through the transgressions of the boundaries between the "semiotic and the phenomenal body" (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 5). She states:

While it is the semiotic body that creates the illusion in the mind and the imagination of the spectator, it is the phenomenal body, i.e. the vital, organic, energetic body whose sensuousness works directly on the phenomenal body of the spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 5).

It is the phenomenal body that can prohibit representation, and potentially avoid a distanced, intellectually-driven reception of a performance work. I wish to illustrate an example of this “phenomenal body” with an example of one of Marina Abramovic’s works, *The Lips of Thomas* (1975). Erika Fischer-Lichte offers the following description:

Abramovic started by undressing totally and everything she did was performed naked...She then took a razor blade and cut a five-pointed star into the skin of her belly. Then she...started to flog herself violently on her back [with a whip]. After this, she lay down, arms stretched out, on ice cubes laid out in a cross. A radiator hung from the ceiling was directed towards her belly. Through its heat, the slashed wounds of the star began to bleed copiously again. Abramovic remained on the cross of ice for thirty minutes until some spectators spontaneously removed her from the ice and thus broke off the performance (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 242).

Not only did this performance test the physical limits of the artist, but also the established “rules” of spectatorship. Interactive participation replaced detachment when the spectators/witnesses broke the imaginary divide between themselves and the performer. The presence of the phenomenal body incited an unexpected physical reaction in the people who intervened.



Lips of Thomas (1975). www.mocp.org. Date accessed 22/08/08.

In *The Lips of Thomas* (1975), Abramovic also utilizes violence in juxtaposition with certain symbolic elements. The purpose of this practice is to situate symbolic objects (such as a Christian cross and a five-pointed star) in unlikely contexts, such as that of self-mutilation, in order to revise their traditional meanings. For example, the five-pointed star that Abramovic cuts into her belly has representational value in many “mythical, metaphysical, cultural-historical and political contexts,” and is also the symbol of socialist Yugoslavia (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 242). This is significant as Abramovic was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1946. Through this act, she is deliberately conducting a re-imagining of the symbol of her country of birth by transforming it into a flesh wound. Abramovic also subverts the image of the Crucifixion by transforming the traditional cross into a bed of ice. She also substitutes the figure of Christ with that of her own bleeding body. The discourses behind such symbols (for example, Christianity as exemplified by the cross) are rendered “strange” when juxtaposed with Abramovic’s deliberately violent acts. Abramovic’s

self-inflicted violence also may also be applied to the theories of the Real and the abject addressed earlier. Abramovic's mutilated body stands in opposition to the "whole" body that the subject acquires in the Mirror stage of development. Her ruptured flesh reveals a fragmented body, in which the border (the skin) that separates the abject (her blood) from the outside world is broken. These wounds stand as gaps in Abramovic's own body of signification, through which the threatening force of the abject literally leaks to menace the discourses that frame it. The gaps on Abramovic's body correlate with the gaps in symbolization through which the repressed, libidinal Real may arise. The presence of the Real in *The Lips of Thomas* render Abramovic's body a phenomenal entity, a body that, through its performance of real violence, is experienced instead of "marked." It is in this way that Abramovic potentially resists the framing powers of discourse, and, through "destroying" both the physical integrity of her body, and traditional meanings of the symbols with which she performs, she conducts revisions of the constructions of her own identity and culture. *The Lips of Thomas* could therefore serve as a ritualistic act of self-mutilation in which Abramovic employs "incision, flogging, bleeding and freezing" in conjunction with certain fictive and representational elements to interrogate her political and cultural heritage, and thereby potentially "acquire a new identity" (Fishcer-Lichte 1997: 242). The notions of destruction and creation become apparent in this work, as the destructive acts that constitute Abramovic's self-caused physical harm create opportunities for the traditional representations of her body and her culture to be revised.

Ron Athey is an American performance artist who is similarly concerned with the performance of the mutilated body. Athey's work, which originated in gallery spaces,

questions the “public’s perception of self-destructive behavior [by] repackaging it into a rite” (Athey in Heathfield 2004: 87). He attempts to revise traditional perceptions of self-mutilation, which are commonly associated with the “disintegrative” products of psychosis (Glucklich 2001: 6). Like Abramovic, Athey juxtaposes live violence with symbolic elements. His work is predominantly based on the religious aspects of his upbringing as his grandparents were strict Pentecostal fundamentalists, and his youth was marked by distinct practices of Evangelical fanaticism.¹⁹ Athey sublimates self-mutilation (distinguished by syringe piercing, lacerations and particular sado-masochistic practices) by presenting it as a “sermon.” He contrasts real violence with many symbols of Christian iconography and by doing so, he interrogates the traditions that constituted his upbringing as a Christian in the United States.

The following description as an example of the kind of violence Athey employs in his works, from *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* (1994):

I don’t literally cut my face in the piece, but the words cue me to start gouging my forehead with long thick steel needles, which triggers profuse bloodletting. The audience has ringside...seats...Then [I] diligently place criss-cross rows of hypodermic syringes into my arm, from inner wrist to shoulder cap (Athey in Heathfield 2004: 87).



Four Scenes in a Harsh Life (1994). www.aubinpictures.com. Date accessed 22/08/08.

¹⁹ Kateri Butler notes that Athey was primed to be a minister from an early age, and he was raised with the nickname, “little angel prophet of doom” in the hope that he would be comparable “to John the Baptist” (Butler 2007: 1).

In this particular description, Athey utilises the symbols of the syringe and the needle to address heroin use and HIV. Athey himself is HIV-positive and used heroin as a teenager through the use of hypodermic needles. He therefore reinterprets aspects of his personal history through performing them in different contexts. Athey treads highly controversial ground in performing the HIV-positive body. In cutting and piercing his flesh, Athey challenges the various discourses that stigmatise HIV-positive blood by exposing it in live acts. In light of Kristeva's theory of the abject, it is this kind of "infected" blood that constitutes the most dangerous threat to the subject. Indeed, in a contemporary context, it is HIV-positive blood, as the abject, that provokes the most fear and loathing. This is not only due to its association with disease and death (both abject notions that menace the totality of the subject), but its link to certain practices that are viewed as "transgressive," particularly within conservative, heteronormative discourses. For instance, the emergence of HIV and AIDS in the 1980's in the United States provoked an unprecedented wave of homophobia when the "incurable" disease infected predominantly homosexual men. In light of this, homosexuality and homosexual sex were "smeared" by their association with the disease; they were abjected by the hegemonic order and viewed as filthy and threatening.²⁰ By his exposing his own abjected blood in a performance, Athey is challenging the norms that associate disease with social ostracism. He actualizes the taboo (the repressed, the unspeakable) on his own body and, like Abramovic, performs a fragmented, phenomenal body in the interrogation of signification.

²⁰ According to Nelkin and Gilman, when AIDS first emerged in 1981, blame of the disease was placed on "dangerous lifestyles and immoral behaviour" (Nelkin and Gilman 1991: 40). Right-wing religious groups in the United States, for instance, associated the disease with "sexual deviancy" as practiced by homosexual men, and viewed AIDS as "God's Punishment" for homosexual lifestyles (Nelkin and Gilman 1991: 45).

Franko B is London-based performance artist whose works explore the contradictory aspects of self-mutilation. His work, in his words, focuses on the “visceral,” the “untouchable” the “unspeakable” (Franko B 2004: 226). In *I Miss You!* (2002), the substance of blood is addressed as a destructive and creative element. He walks up and down a “catwalk,” also white, and bleeds copiously from his arms, which are pierced and opened by tubes. This resonates with some of Kristeva’s theories concerning *jouissance*, in which the abject dissolves the subject, and thus potentially creates the opportunity for the creation of a new identity. To reiterate some of the notions explored in Chapter One of this study, *jouissance* is associated with the simultaneous experience of ecstasy (creation) and horror (destruction) when the subject transgresses/transcends the boundaries of the Symbolic. Franko B’s performances may be likened to this *jouissance*, and are comparable to Ariel Glucklich’s theory of “integrative” and “disintegrative” self-harm. Franko B states:

I activate a process of purification, which implies complete self-liberation, in my search for freedom. When I perform I feel free. It is an emotional process because in the end I feel I’ve totally evaded my neuroses, that I’ve completely donated myself with my gestures (Franko B in Trigona 2001: 1).

In this statement, it is possible to note that Franko B’s acts of self-mutilation simultaneously alleviate the symptoms of “neurosis” (which link to the compulsive “disintegrative” practices of self-harm, such as “cutting”) and bring about a state of “purification” (this resonates with the religious significance of body mortification). This kind of practice links to Freud’s death drive, in which the subject compulsively performs destructive acts in order to repeat, or return too, some kind of utopia. However, in its attempts to experience this “utopia,” the subject has to encounter the horror of the abject, and experience its own dissolution in the violence of its acts. This dissolution is evident in the fragmented, bleeding bodies of the performers studied

thus far. In terms of Franko B, acts of abjection constitute this duality of utopia and violence, and catalyse personal healing.



I Miss You (2002). www.youmustbecertainofthedevil.blogspot.com. Date accessed 22/08/08.

Abramovic, Athey and Franko B express the body in its most “existential and essential” form in order to challenge the discourses that label it (www.tate.co.uk. Date accessed 30/12/08). In both their respective writings resides a distinct rebellious voice in which the established modes for the presentation of art are severely critiqued. In these performances emphasis is placed on the “temporary [and] the haptic” as well as the effects of “fluid exchange” between spectator and the performer, as opposed to “static relation” (Heathfield 2004: 7).

All works that employ real violence as their primary strategy risk losing their audiences, since such performances could alienate their spectators. Kateri Butler, having attended a few of Ron Athey's performances, notes that she witnessed people fainting, vomiting, "weeping with recognition" and walking out (Butler 2007: 1). The experience of bodily harm is disturbing for the spectator, and Erika Fischer-Lichte asks that, "in such performances, is it still valid to hold aesthetic distance as the adequate attitude of reception?" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 247). This highlights performance art's rejection of the aesthetic, in favour of the political. Josette Feral proposes that the violence that the performance artist inflicts on his body similarly inflicts the audience's sensibilities:

Some performances are unbearable...which do violence not only to the performer (in this case, a violence freely consented to), but also the spectator who is harassed by images that both violate him and do him violence (Howell and Templeton in Feral 1982: 216).

The spectator is "harassed" by these performances because the actions of the artist are "projected onto the scene of the imagination" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 245). The imagination, in this sense, is automatically "tied to the body, or even part of the body," and is what Fischer-Lichte refers to as "a physical imagination that causes physical sensations...a physical impulse, in a physical response in the spectators" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 248). It is the experience of abject performance art that is responsible for most of these physiological reactions within the spectator. It is then possible to note that the phenomenal body (to refer again to Fischer-Lichte's term) of the performance artist and the phenomenal body of the spectator unite in a reciprocal experience of physical pain. Peggy Phelan relates her own responses as spectator to an endurance work by the performance artist Angelika Festa called *Untitled Dance*

(1987). The performance lasted twenty-four hours, during which “Festa hung suspended” from an eighty-degree pole. She was wrapped to the pole with white sheets, “her face and weight leaning to the floor...her eyes...covered with silver tape” (Phelan 1993: 153). Although there was no explicit violence in this performance (compared to those of, for example, Franko B) it was the durational exhaustion and “pain” that Phelan encountered in this performance that made her feel, in her own words, “cannibalistic, awful, guilty, ‘sick’” (Phelan 1993: 160). Why do these performers attempt to elicit such reactions from their spectators? Perhaps performance artists attempt to plunge the spectator into an unpredictable, traumatic situation in which the horror of the unnamable Real is potentially actualized, in order to incite alternative modes of experience. Performance artists aim for events to be felt as well as seen, and hope to transfer performance acts from the visual, to the visceral. These aims cannot be achieved unless some element of the performance profoundly brings out such violent, disturbing, and physical reactions within the spectator.

2.6. Distorted Perceptions and Unmediated Experience.

Violent acts may be viewed as the means by which the performance artist encourages a kind of “exchange” between him/her and the spectator/witness. The experience of the Real in the “decentering of the subject” (in which the “whole,” signifying body of the performer is unsettled in the spillage of its contained, abject components) could promote different, more immediate ways of experiencing art and performance (Carlson 1996: 61). These altered modes of perception and experience could subsequently challenge spectators to “think critically about the traditional frameworks of representation” (Carlson 1996: 61). The Real, in terms of the experience of the spectator/witness, is also marked by an encounter with the unsymbolizable through

the exposition of pure effect. This notion of “pure effect” is evident in the performances of Abramovic, Athey and Franko B, in which real violence marks the end of fictive representation, and the rise of authentic, experiential performance. Quick refers to Gilles Deleuze in his account of performances that “fracture” the “[Symbolic] system,” which result in the ““destruction of the world, the dissolution of the person [and] the disintegration of bodies,”” resulting in a shift from “language” to pure “intensity” (Deleuze in Quick 1996: 19). Intensity, in this instance, resists the intellectual or emotional mediation of an event by the spectator/witness. It gives rise to a response that, like the primal scene, cannot be framed by any form of symbolization. “Intensity” could correlate with the Real as theorized by Lacan, which arises through the gaps in signification. Lacan’s notion of the Real links with the “collapse” of the spectator/witness’s “understanding” of an event. This absence of conventional meaning-making creates “fissures or holes in perception and interpretation,” which have the potential to disrupt conventional thought processes (Heathfield 2004: 9).

The spectator/witness finds him/herself in a situation in which meaning-making strategies (which are assisted by representational framing devices) are interrupted. The usual means by which the viewer absorbs and frames an event gives way to responses that interrupt conscious modes of understanding.²¹ Adrian Heathfield notes that, in such instances, the spectator/witness is required to “de-link the demands so prevalent in contemporary culture for instantaneous relationships between art and

²¹ Such “conscious” or conventional modes of understanding are usually molded by representational devices. For instance, in theatre, narrative, characterization and design all serve to frame the performance; to situate it in a specific discursive frame of reference. The perception of a traditional theatre event is filtered by certain lenses of discourse. These conventional habits of viewing performance are therefore consciously and intellectually mediated. Peggy Phelan notes that “human eyes” have the same potential to “frame” an event as do “representational technologies” (such as the camera, the canvas and the proscenium arch) (Phelan 1993: 13). Performance art, on the other hand, encourages perception that is more immediate and experiential, and perhaps, physical.

meaning, intention and realization, desire and fulfillment” (Heathfield 2004: 10). He notes that the “spectator who [tries] to make sense of the event... [becomes] aware that his/her usually applied patterns of constituting meaning [do] not fit” within the primal scene that is exposed in the performance act (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 245). “Looking on,” within the usual habits of spectatorship characterized by aesthetic distance, cannot take place in the immediacy of performance art.

Erika Fischer-Lichte highlights the possibility of such acts “initiating the merging of signifier and signified” should the “actions...succeed in causing exactly the effect which [they] signify” (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 245). She notes that, in the particular case of violent body performance, the spectator/witness is forced to focus purely on the experiences of the performer’s body:

The performance does not structure the process of perception and meaning constitution in such a way that any symbolic associations are emphasized and foregrounded. Therefore the semantic accretion may result in a similar process as the merging: it may draw the spectator’s attention away from the possible meanings of a gesture – that may mean anything – and focus on its materiality, back to the body of the performer (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 245).

In this instance, the performer, as well as the spectator/witness, both share a fleeting moment in which signification is possibly avoided. With the connections between perception and meaning temporarily broken, and with representational frameworks dismantled, pure effect is potentially realized. With reference to the experience of “utopia” in performance art and pure effect, Fischer-Lichte states the following:

While during the performance, for a fleeting moment, signifier and signified seem to merge [and] the subjective constructions of the performers and the spectators...irretrievably fall apart. In this respect, one might even discover a potential utopia in performance (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 246).

This statement links the experience of pure effect to the notion of the “primal scene” that Peggy Phelan describes in her examination of the Real, and how the Real could refer to the subject’s “always-lost,” “utopic” existence prior to the acquisition of language and socialisation. This notion could also correlate with Julia Kristeva’s notion of pre-Symbolic *jouissance*, in which the subject experiences the simultaneous phenomena of dissolution (destruction) and rebirth (creation).

2.7. Performance Art and Ritual

The following chapter will explore how the destruction and creation duality (which correlates with *jouissance* and the Real) is revealed in sacrificial ritual as well as in performance art. For now, I will attempt to highlight some of the links that exist between performance art and ritual, in order to prepare for the upcoming discussion on sacrifice, performance and the Real.

Ritual works “first of all on the body of the spectators, on their senses and nerves, and not so much on their imagination, their mind, via empathy” (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 6). Ritual also constitutes an attempt to access the unsymbolizable Real, through acts that stand as a deliberate refutation of the laws that construct subjectivity. Josette Feral notes that ritual constitutes the enactment of “all possible transgressions” which are both “real and staged” (Feral 1892: 216). The spectator/witness is implicated in these acts by being present at “a ritual [that brings] the performer back to the limits of the subject as constituted as a whole” (Feral 1982: 216).

Franko B’s *I Miss You*, Marina Abramovic’s *The Lips of Thomas*, and Ron Athey’s *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* are all examples of how performance art can act as

transgressive and taboo ritual, in which the performers and spectators/witnesses become implicated in the events that unfold. For example, in the works of the Viennese Actionists, the performers and spectators formed an assembled “community” of “various individuals” in the performance-as-ritual (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214). This “community” was transformed in the performance by becoming part of a temporary collective of people “who dared to violate strong taboos publicly and in this way, revolt against the existing social and symbolic order” (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214). In this sense, the spectators/witnesses entered a “state of liminality” (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214). This “state of liminality” relates to how the actualisation of the Real can reconfigure traditional roles. For instance, in performance art, the performer enters a state of liminality in the experience of *jouissance* through acts of abjection which reveal gaps in the Symbolic. The spectator, confronted with this *jouissance*, transforms from a passive spectator to an active participant or witness. The spectator/witness therefore becomes involved in the ritual, unbound by the constraints of the Symbolic law. She/he partakes in an experience of abjection that marks a distinct refutation of discursive authority:

By acting out their potential to violence, by symbolically dismembering their cultural tradition, (in an attempt to access that which is beyond the *Symbolic*) they entered a state of liminality and were transformed²² (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214).

This “liminal state” may occur, for example, when the spectator/witness becomes participant, as in the case of the people who intervened in Abramovic’s *The Lips of Thomas* (1975). In *The Lips of Thomas* (1975), the spectators entered a situation in

²² It is important to note that this “transformation” does not apply to all spectators/witnesses. The violence of performance art events has the potential to drive audiences away. This is evident in Kateri Butler’s account (p. 38) of some of Ron Athey’s performances, in which some spectators are more alienated than transformed. Herein lie some of the contentious issues surrounding performance art, violence and the ethical implications thereof. Unfortunately, a detailed investigation of the ethics of performance art is beyond the scope of this chapter.

which they were placed “between the norms and rules of art and everyday life, between the aesthetic and the ethic” (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 217). However, unlike the audiences of the Actionists’ events, the “community” of spectators exposed to Abramovic’s violence did not become “hypnotized” or complicit in the event, but responded by stopping the performance and removing Abramovic from the dangerous situation being enacted. A “crisis” ensued in which art and everyday life merged, and in which the “generally accepted and common patterns of behaviour associated with being a traditional audience member” were broken (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 217).

Fischer-Lichte expands:

By transferring the spectator to an in-between situation, to a state of liminality, the performance destabilized his perception of himself, the others and reality. In this sense, the crisis induced by the performance can be understood as a crisis of identity (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 219).

However, such “crises of identity” also have the possibility of transforming the spectator into the chief aggressor. In Marina Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0* (1974), in the Studio Morra, Naples, she stood as a completely static and passive object. The crowd that gathered at the studio could manipulate and treat her body with seventy-two objects laid out on a table beside her. Thomas McEvelly describes the event in which she was “stripped, painted, cut, crowned with thorns, and had a muzzle of a loaded gun thrust against her head” (McEvelly 1995: 46). As in the case of *The Lips of Thomas*, *Rhythm 0* was interrupted and brought to an end by concerned spectators. Acty Tang, in his study of this performance event, states that the hostile treatment of Abramovic’s passive body by the responsible aggressors demonstrated a projection of their desires, some of which were socially and ethically transgressive (Tang 2005: 136). These acts functioned as “outlets” for the repressed desires of some spectators, in which they too experienced the *jouissance* of the prohibited and the taboo. The mutilation of Abramovic’s body, in this sense, was not self-inflicted, but performed

by participants who displaced their own destructive drives onto the body of another. It illustrates how the spectator/witness/participant can, in the performance event, experience and enact his own “forbidden” desires that would otherwise be “locked up and prohibited” within the laws of symbolization (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214). This performance divided the audience into “protectors” and “instigators,” and therefore highlighted how the “roles” of the spectators could transform within the violence of the event (Schimmel in Phelan 2004: 18). Peggy Phelan also raises an important concern in relation to the ethics of *Rhythm 0*. She asks: “what keeps us blind to the consequences of our actions and our passivity?” This question resonates strongly with the tensions that exist between subconscious, repressed desires and a conscious awareness of “right” and “wrong.”²³ It demonstrates how, within a performance space, the boundaries distinguishing prohibited behaviour from acceptable behaviour dissolve. It also highlights how, in live performance, the “assumed bond of ‘good will’ and ‘trust’ that exists between performer and spectator can be broken,” (Etchells 2004: 214). It therefore challenges conventional constructions of the audience-performer relationship

However ethically controversial these situations are, Fischer-Lichte notes that such crises in spectatorship have the potential power to “cure” the outbreak of violence in society. She states that actions, such as those that occurred within Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0*, “induced a crisis in the individual participants that led to a ‘healing’ of their disease ‘violence’” (Girard in Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214). This, in turn, “prevented violence from infecting society and hindered the outbreak of a social

²³ I have decided to use Phelan’s interpretation of the event instead of certain feminist interpretations which emphasize the role of Abramovic as the passive female “object of desire” and the “largely male audience as the active and violent agents of power” (Phelan 2004: 18).

crisis” (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 214).²⁴ Gunter Bergaus refers to the Viennese Actionists when examining the “curative” potential of performance-as-ritual. He states that the spectators who “release their aggressive impulses” within a shared event (such as the rituals of the Actionists) are less likely to direct them in “barbaric warfare against human beings” (Bergaus 2005: 156). He concludes that the experiences “purified the performers, and, in the end, liberated them from feelings of guilt” (Bergaus 2005: 156). Within the context of ritual, then, the performer whose body is violated either by him/herself, or by the spectator/participant, is a sacrificial victim who surrenders his/her physical and subjective totality for the good of the community.

2.8. Conclusion

Erika Fischer-Lichte and Gunter Berghaus both identify transformative potential within performance art and ritual. They propose that, through experiences of performed violence, societies may be “cleansed” of the repressed, dangerous elements that endanger it. Since all the examples of performance art investigated thus far involve acts of abjection, it may be possible to suggest that “abasement [may] lead to salvation” (Cohen 2005: xix). This quote will form the basis of my next chapter, in which I attempt to locate performance art within the realm of sacrificial ritual. Sacrificial ritual will be examined in light of the ethical crises it presents through the extermination of a scapegoat. These ethical quandaries will also be examined in relation to performance art. The notions of abjection, the taboo and the Real – as explored in this chapter in relation to the liveness of performance art – will be applied to Rene Girard’s theories concerning sacrificial rituals and the nature of the

²⁴ Ultimately, the repressed urges of the participants of *Rhythm 0* were released within the “legitimate” space of the performance, and therefore, did not affect the society beyond the gallery. This contentious notion relates to Rene Girard’s study of the restorative potential of violent sacrifice and will be explored in Chapter Two.

scapegoat. I will also investigate how these elements function to either reinforce, or fracture the communities that perform sacrifice. These issues will be applied to performance art, in an examination of the performance artist as a scapegoat.

Chapter Three

A Bloody Reckoning: Sacrificial Ritual and the Scapegoat in Performance Art

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the significance of ritual within performance art, focusing specifically on the transformative potential of its practice, and how it operates in terms of creation and destruction. The purposes of ritual are extremely varied. In South Africa, for example, rituals extend from Xhosa initiation rites of male circumcision, to Christian matrimonial ceremonies. What I intend to investigate in this chapter is the dual function of ritual in both the maintenance and transcendence of discourse. I will relate this component of ritual to performance art, and investigate how performance art and ritual interrogate traditional constructions of identity.

Acty Tang notes that ritual in South African theatre is marked by a drive to transcend “illusion” and to access the Real (Tang 2005: 85). He observes that it is within the Real that “daily reality” (or the putative real) is surpassed in the acquisition of a “higher reality or spiritual truth” (Tang 2005: 85). In this argument, he refers to South African theatre practitioner Brett Bailey’s *iMumbo Jumbo*²⁵ (2003). This performance piece incorporated traditional AmaXhosa rituals in attempts to thrust audiences out of the safety of the theatre, and into the realm of primordial acts that transcended the fictive (Rudakoff: 2004: 81). Tang’s notion of a “higher reality” in the Real (as possibly revealed by performance art and ritual) resonates with Artaud’s argument for a transcendental “theatre of the plague” (Artaud 1970: 22). Tang states that “ritual theatre...purports to provide a spiritual or psychic communion that transcends the

²⁵ A more detailed exploration of Bailey’s *iMumbo Jumbo* will be found later in this chapter.

barrier of conceptual representation” as defined by the Symbolic (Tang 2005: 85). Moreover, as has been discussed in Chapter Two, it is the visceral experience of the phenomenal body in performance art that resists the structures that claim the identity of the subject. Tang’s thesis proposes that ritual, characterized by the experience of the body in extreme states, can serve to heal a community of “trauma and loss” and thus trigger the transformation of the community as a whole (Tang 2005: 85). This notion links to ideas of Erika Fischer-Lichte and Gunter Berghaus, who concluded the previous chapter of this study. To re-iterate, both theorists suggest that performance art and ritual have the potential to transform both performer and witness. They state that it is through the enactment of violence (and the experience of *jouissance*) that some performance events may heal its participants, and “purge” a community of their repressed, violent desires.

Tang’s argument connects with those of Fischer-Lichte and Berghaus, in stating that ritual can function as a strategy of healing in times of social and political crisis. The notion of “trauma” in this instance refers to the tumultuous conditions of fractured communities, which seek resolution through the performance and subsequent purging of the scourge of violence. This notion of trauma also refers to that which is experienced in the performance event/ritual, which may act as a kind of “crisis.” The trauma inflicted on the body of the performance artist extends to the physical and emotional trauma of the spectator/witness, who joins the performance artist in an immediate, violent present. In ritual (and, for the purposes of this study, sacrificial ritual) this trauma is encountered in the treatment of the body of the scapegoat. In performance art and ritual, it is possible to argue that since this experience of collective trauma is located within violence, it is also closely linked to abjection and the contradictions of horror and revelation found therein.

Sacrificial ritual, in its (paradoxical) exposition of the violent and the transformative, is, in my opinion, linked to the physically violent performance actions of the artists explored in Chapter Two. These dangerous performances simultaneously generate and resolve crises through the presentation of destructive acts. In this instance, sacrifice is connected to destruction and creation in performance art. Rene Girard has conducted an extensive study of sacrificial ritual, with specific reference to its transformative qualities, which may pertain to this exposition of destruction and creation.

Girard demonstrates that it is through sacrificial ritual that a community experiences, first hand, the projection of its own violent desires. The ritual event could consequently rid the community of violence on a larger scale, through a purging of these violent desires. This notion resonates with the events of Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1976) explored in the previous chapter, in which her body became the "canvas" for the reception of the "community's" (the spectators') prohibited desires. To re-iterate the conclusion of the previous chapter, both Fischer-Lichte and Berghaus interpret such acts as being "curative," because they designate specific space for the performance of violence (as evident in the mutilation of Abramovic's body in *Rhythm 0*) and, in doing so, prevent this violence from spilling over into broader society. In attempting to link performance art to sacrifice, it is possible to state that Abramovic became a "scapegoat" in *Rhythm 0*. In light of these discoveries, it is not my wish to define sacrifice as the ultimate means by which troubled societies can be healed. I am also not stating that the outcomes of sacrificial ritual (and performance) are always beneficial. The violence of a sacrifice or performance art event might even "infect" society, and become "a scandalous accomplice in the process of [its] pollution"

(Girard 1972: 39). For example, “Muti” or medicine murders²⁶ are sacrificial practices that have roused the much civil unrest. In 1994, the murder of fourteen-year-old Segametsi Mogomotsi in Botswana resulted in student riots in the district of Mochudi (Titlestad 1996: 1). This event relates closely to the Girard quote above, in which ritual sacrifice was the catalyst for social unrest in the form of riots. It “polluted” the community due to the violence of its practice.

These issues resonate with Girard’s interpretation of violence and justice, in which he notes that “evil, and the violent measures taken to combat evil, are essentially the same” (Girard 1972: 37). This observation highlights some of the ethical quandaries that sacrifice presents, and reveals how the very practice of sacrifice is met with much controversy in contemporary society. It also reveals some of the ethical issues that are presented in particularly violent forms of performance art. These issues are present within Marina Abramovic’s *Rhythm 0*. Although this performance created an environment in which the spectators/participants had full license to manipulate her body with the objects available, it had escalated to a point in which she might have been, according to Paul Schimmel, “assaulted,” “raped” or even killed (Schimmel 1998: 101). In light of such dilemmas, I do not intend to examine sacrificial ritual and violent performance art as a moral strategy for reformation of violent societies. Rather, I will use sacrificial ritual as a practice to which performance art can be compared, in an attempt to highlight the political significance of the enactment of live, violent acts. Sacrificial ritual, in its implementation of the live, works similarly to performance art as an “autopsy” of society and culture.

²⁶ Medicine murder has been documented in parts of Southern Africa, including South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. It entails the murder of a victim in order to excise body parts to be included in the ingredients for traditional medicine. According to Charlanne Burke, poor, uneducated families are often pressured to sell their children for “muti” murders or *diphoko* to “better” the community or family through sacrifice (Burke 2000: 209).

3.2. Ritual, Taboo and the Maintenance of Law

To begin this study of ritual, it is worth highlighting its seemingly ambiguous nature within various societies. In Freud's study of the taboo in certain cultures, ritual identifies and criminalizes certain "acts," which leads to the construction of law and order.

Freud refers to the "totem feast" (Freud 1919: 236). The "totem" in this study is a system of prohibition within certain cultures. For example, within the context of the aboriginal tribes of Australia, Freud defines the totem as "a tribal ancestor of the clan, as well as its tutelary spirit and protector" (Freud 1919: 8). Its specific function is to prohibit incest and promote exogamy. Certain rituals within this community serve to commemorate the totem, and go as far as to enact the very transgressions that they attempt to prohibit. In this instance, the act of human or animal sacrifice serves as a platform for the taboo to be enacted. Freud states:

The totem feast...would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began, social organization, moral restrictions and religion (Freud 1919: 236).

The totem feast also refers to the sacrifice of living flesh "to be destined for the god [and] looked upon as real food" (Freud 1919: 222). This ritual is the means by which a society could "joyously transcend [its] own interests" and "emphasize social community and community with [the] god" (Freud 1919: 224). In this instance, it is worth re-examining the implications of the closing statement of Chapter Two, in which "abasement leads to salvation" (Cohen 2005: xix). This suggestion by Cohen links to the potential reenactment of the taboo in the

“reconstitution [of] moral laws (Cohen 2005: xix). The performance of the taboo resonates strongly with Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. Kristeva notes that in order for the speaking subject to affirm its integrity, and its part in the wider social and moral order, a recognition and a refutation of the abject both need to take place. Freud’s description of the totem feast also calls for this recognition of the abject through rituals in which transgressive acts are performed and subsequently cleansed from the community. Rituals of this nature, therefore, can be said to establish the foundations of the discourses that frame and identify the community and the subjects therein. Kristeva links such rituals to the origin and influence of religion in the following way:

The various means of purifying the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion (Kristeva 1982: 17).

Rituals that are responsible for uniting the community and for reinforcing the laws that sustain it are known as “fusion rituals” (Lincoln 1989: 73). An example of a “fusion ritual” is Freud’s aforementioned totem feast, which entails the performance of certain prohibited acts (such as sacrifice) to “cleanse” the community of (to use Girard’s term) the “disease” of violence. The fusion ritual may then function as a cathartic experience; a “purging” of the elements that threaten the community as a whole. According to this theory, the community fuses by the cathartic result of the ritual, and the laws that are transgressed in the ritual are reinforced through this catharsis. This “catharsis” could link with the notion of *jouissance*, which is experienced when Symbolic order is relinquished in encounters with the Real through

abjection. This notion may also be linked to Fischer-Lichte's theory on the curative aspects of abjection in performance art.²⁷ Acty Tang expands on this notion of abjection in performance art as ritual. He compares performance art events to "repetition[s] of the original patricide" (which refers to the ultimate abject sin of the realization of the Oedipal nightmare) (Tang 2005: 85). In these acts, the body of the performer is sacrificed to the abject; it becomes a "casualty...burnt (prohibited, repressed, abjected) in commemoration of the death – the loss – at the origin of presence" (Tang 2005: 85). In other words, like the fusion ritual, the performance art event deliberately acts out the taboo. This taboo is expressed in the live violence that the artist enacts. The exposure of blood, excrement and other forms of abject bodily filth, for example, constitute the dark, pre-Symbolic elements of the Real. It is the Real, then, that may link to the notion of the "original patricide," or the death of the Symbolic as constituted by the death of the Father. This "death of the Father" may resonate with the dissolution of Lacan's "Law of the Father," which, as explored earlier in this study, constitutes the discursive laws which prohibit the taboo, and which maintain the totality of the subject in society.

"Fission rituals," on the other hand, do not seek cohesion. They seek to transform the community and fundamentally alter the laws that define it. Bruce Lincoln locates such rituals within minority groups or "othered" identities that seek to be reestablished outside of the discourses that marginalize them, and aim to "...demystify, delegitimize, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination" (Lincoln 1989: 5). Lincoln states that "fission" can occur through the following means:

²⁷ These notions concluded the second chapter of this study.

[Fission can be employed] in a variety of ways disruptive to the established order, including scattered assaults on persons and private property as well as more organized struggles in which they seek (1) to remove themselves from an encompassing and exploitative social aggregate (secession), (2) to dislodge and replace those in positions of power and privilege (rebellion) or (3) to reshape established social forms and habituated patterns of behaviour in sweeping and fundamental ways (Lincoln 1989: 4).

It is possible to establish the links that performance art and fission ritual share. The “scattered assaults on persons and private property” that Lincoln refers to connect with the interventionist practices that some performance acts initiate. For example, site-specific performance art purports to deconstruct the Symbolic qualities of place by utilizing site in ways that contradict its original function. Public intervention has the potential to upset the societal laws that designate the functions of space. For example, the aforementioned Futurists of the early twentieth century performed an “assault” on the Venetian Piazza San Marco by throwing copies of one of their manifestos on the heads of bystanders. The Piazza, which houses many Venetian museums and was commonly used as a site for art exhibitions and festivals, became a “battlefield” for the confrontation that developed between the Futurists and the public. The manipulation of space within the performance event also serves to affect the way in which the performance is perceived. The immediacy of the event, without the comfortable frame of the traditional theatre space, functions as an “attack” on the sensibilities of the spectator/witness, disorienting him/her and catalyzing a renewed sense of perception. He/she also becomes a participant in the event, a “member” of the “community” of the group that seeks change within its regulated existence. The

third strategy of fission ritual that Lincoln proposes operates when the community is roused from its established complacency. Fission rituals, and performance art acts, could trigger movements that may have the potential to reform habituated laws and practices. Violent performance works could encourage the spectator/witness to question established social and political discourses. For example, my investigations of body-based performance art (referring to Dada, Abramovic, Athey and Franko B) highlight how social and political discourses pertaining to the body and sexuality are subverted when certain prohibited elements of the body are exposed. In rituals which utilize the abject, similar interrogations of the body may take place. In Chapter Two I discussed how religious acts of self-flagellation have spiritual potential for those who practise them within the Guardia Sanframondi. I would suggest that, in such instances, the abject, bleeding body becomes the means by which spiritual fulfilment can take place. This kind of practice unites the body with what is conceived as the spirit, and therefore “contradicts” certain doctrines that deem the body and mind separate. As in performance art, the body of the flagellant transforms from an apolitical entity into a “tool” for cultural, political, and spiritual investigations.

Such rituals might, therefore, be viewed as resistant or revolutionary. Indeed, in these rituals, performances of the abject (as in performance art) attempt to access the Real, to expose gaps in signification, and therefore challenge the specificities of discourse, culture and identity. Bruce Lincoln situates these live acts within forms of political resistance:

Change comes not when groups or individuals use ‘knowledge’ to challenge ideological mystification, but rather when they employ...ritual as [an] effective instrument of struggle (Lincoln 1989: 7).

In light of this, it is possible that the Real can be used as a strategy to invert, and subsequently demystify, discursive norms by marginalized social groups. In terms of resisting representation, performance art might serve as a mode of fission ritual, in which established discourses are interrogated and reconstituted. Like the abject, some rituals simultaneously reinforce and disturb the totality of the community. Babcock states that “all symbolic inversions define a culture’s lineaments at the same time that they question the usefulness of and the absoluteness of its ordering” (Babcock in Stallybrass and White 1986: 20).

3.3. Sacrifice and Scapegoat

As has been noted in Chapter Two of this examination, the acts of physical violence that are inflicted on the body of the performer – such as Abramovic’s cuts and burns in *The Lips of St. Thomas* (1975) and Athey’s self-inflicted wounds in *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* (1994) – interrogate the Symbolic laws of a community and allow for a new point of reference to be established. In the context of performance art as sacrificial ritual, the artist may function as the scapegoat who is endangered for the sake of the community. The notion of the scapegoat, however, is a contentious issue. I have highlighted how some ritual sacrifices (“muti” killings) become responsible for the spread of disease, murder and other social ills. These rituals run contrary to Bruce Lincoln’s models of fusion and fission ritual, which purport to restore order to the community. An analysis of the ethical implications of scapegoat ritual is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, in my examination of the scapegoat, I am not suggesting that the murder of a sacrificial victim is a justifiable strategy for either reinforcing, or interrogating discourse. I am rather outlining some of the characteristics that have defined the figure of the scapegoat in myth and history.

Within these characteristics, I aim to highlight some of the links that might exist between the performance artist and the scapegoat, and how the performance artist potentially reinterprets and recreates some of the defining elements of scapegoat ritual.

Girard introduces his investigation of the scapegoat through a reference to the Book of St. John, in which Caiaphas speaks at a trial prior to the crucifixion of Jesus:

You don't seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed (John 11: 47-53 in Girard 1986: 113).

From Girard's point of view, the scapegoat is exterminated for in order to transform the community. As in performance art, scapegoat rituals purport to amass collective violence and find an outlet for it on a victim. In the case of performance art, this victim is self-nominated. This kind of voluntary violence allows for the enactment of certain transgressions that "would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people (the community) it most desires to protect" (Girard 1972: 4). Girard defines this scapegoat as the "surrogate victim" (Girard 1972: 7). He notes that the sacrifice of the surrogate victim serves to absorb "all the internal tensions, feuds and rivalries pent up within the community" (Girard 1972: 7). The sacrificial act is mainly performed at moments of crisis within a society. In terms of performance art, the motivation for a specifically violent act might not be a social or political crisis, but a social or political issue that the artist feels should be addressed.

According to Girard, sacrifice was most widespread in the context of ancient Greece, in which the "*pharmakon*" (the surrogate victim) was "maintained by the city at its

own expense and slaughtered at the appointed festivals as well as at a moment of civic disaster” (Girard 1972: 9). Girard notes that the “*pharmakos*” were marginalized members of the community. Within the context of ancient Greece, these included “prisoners of war, slaves, small children, unmarried adolescents and the handicapped,” who were ultimately “incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link[ed] the rest of the inhabitants” of the community (Girard 1972: 12). According to Girard, these scapegoats were associated with the “negative” elements that affected Greek society. By eradicating the individuals who embodied these types of social “scourge,” authorities hoped that the scourge itself would be cleansed from the community. Girard refers to Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* to expand on this notion of the *pharmakon*. In the play, Oedipus’s acts of incest and patricide are associated with the sickness that propagates civil unrest, plague and violence within the community. Oedipus is therefore linked to a “monstrosity [that is] contagious” and embodies the “infectious presence of a murderer that has brought on this disaster” (Girard 1972: 76-77). This illustration can possibly highlight why the marginal *pharmakos* were selected for extermination.

In the case of the performance artists examined in this study, such as Marina Abramovic and Ron Athey (as well as South African practitioners such as Peter van Heerden and Steven Cohen, who will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter), I would suggest that they could all in some way be classified as marginal individuals. Their marginal positions could link them to the Greek *pharmakos* described above. Ron Athey’s works, for example, address constructions of homosexuality within mainstream discourses, especially those determined by religion and traditional notions of masculinity. Athey performs Girard’s “*pharmakon-as-*

scourge” by utilizing his own “contaminated” HIV-positive blood as a medium. As discussed in Chapter Two, it was the association of homosexual men with HIV in the United States in the 1980’s that lead to the branding of this social group as diseased, unclean and threatening. Athey could, in light of Girard’s theories, stand as an appropriate scapegoat in his “sacrificial” performance practices. Through these acts of self-sacrifice, Athey becomes the abjected subject (or the “deject,” explored later in this study) that is exposed, wounded and forfeited for the greater good of the community.

The sacrificial performance of Athey’s *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* (1994) at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis demonstrates how the results of ritual are not always consistent and that the promise of peace can sometimes result in the outcome of chaos. A fellow performer’s back was sliced with a blade and the blood was mopped up with paper towels, which were then hoisted into the air. A report of this event sparked a widespread furor among the media that HIV-positive blood was exposed to audience members. Even though this accusation was false, the result of this outcry was a sharp increase in homophobic anxiety and it subsequently led to a case laid against Athey, as well as other performance artists (such as Karen Finley and Holly Hughes), demanding that their NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) funding be withdrawn (Grimes 1994: 1). This instance highlights how acts of physical danger (such as those enacted on the body of the performance artist and the scapegoat) reveal the paradoxical nature of ritual and how it has the potential to create the opposite of that which it is purported to do.

Girard makes an observation that the Greek *pharmakon*, like the purported effects of ritual, is ambivalent in its constitution. Just as the ritual has the potential to either strengthen the community, or irrevocably scatter it, so does the *pharmakon* function as both its antidote and poison. Girard states:

The word ‘*pharmakon*’ in classical Greek means both poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure – in short, any substance capable of perpetrating a very good or vary bad action, according to the circumstances and the dosage. The *pharmakon* is thus a magic drug or volatile elixir, whose administration had best be left by ordinary men in the hands of those who have special knowledge and exceptional power – priests, magicians, doctors and so on (Girard 1972: 95).

The *pharmakon* in this instance mirrors the abject in its dual nature. Like the abject, the *pharmakon* simultaneously threatens the community with dissolution and promises its rebirth. In light of the discoveries of this investigation, the abject and the *pharmakon* need to possess these dual attributes in order for the mechanisms of destruction and creation to be performed. In terms of sacrifice and performance art, the enactment of the taboo (as found in the *pharmakon* and the abject) is the essential means by which the collective violent desires of the community find an appropriate outlet for the entire society to be “purged.”

The *pharmakon* (and the performance artist) acquire a status that is concurrently reviled and revered. Girard notes that the *pharmakon* is at the same time “a woebegone figure, an object of scorn who is also weighed down with guilt; a butt for all sorts of gibes, insults, and of course, outbursts of violence,” and a “cult object;” a persona surrounded by “a quasi-religious aura of veneration” (Girard 1972: 9). It is through these contrasts that the transformative value of the *pharmakon* is presented.

Girard states:

This duality reflects the metamorphosis the ritual victim is designed to effect; the victim draws to itself all the violence infecting the original victim and through its own death transforms this baneful violence into beneficial violence, into harmony and abundance (Girard 1972: 9).

The dual nature of the scapegoat reflects that of the abject. To re-iterate, the abject inspires the horror of the dissolution of the subject and the “promise” of utopia through *jouissance*. The *pharmakon* attracts the scorn and loathing associated with the abject, but it is also “sacred” in the healing that is attached to its sacrifice. Girard makes this connection through a statement on blood (an abject element), in which he notes that “blood serves to illustrate the point that the same substance can stain or cleanse, contaminate or purify, drive men to fury and murder or appease their anger and restore them to life” (Girard 1972: 37). In performance art, this notion is rendered apparent through acts that involve bloodletting. The image of the surrogate victim is notable within the performances of Ron Athey and Franko B, in which ruptured, bleeding flesh simultaneously reveals death and re-birth.

Incidences of bloodletting in South African performance have paradoxical outcomes, and some have generated more chaos than intended. Brett Bailey is a South African theatre practitioner, whose work *iMumbo Jumbo* (2003) entailed the sacrifice of a live chicken onstage at the Baxter Theatre on 9 August 2003. This act resulted in a reaction from the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), which sought to have Bailey, his cast, and the Baxter Theatre charged for “inflicting or causing unnecessary suffering to the chicken” (Kemp 2003: 1). Bailey argued that he “did not understand what the fuss was about” as the performance constituted a ritual that was usually “performed in real life” in AmaXhosa culture (Kemp 2003: 2). This performance revealed the different reactions that some spectators had to a live sacrifice. Some felt implicated in the sacrifice and responded with outrage and

“unrest.” Interestingly, this performance revealed the “cultural divides” that exist within South African audiences (Rudakoff 2004: 84). It served to expose the differences between “well-heeled and...white” audience members (most of whom were outraged by the slaughter) and African audience members for whom such rites are accepted and practiced (Rudakoff 2004: 84). This kind of incident correlates with Girard’s theories concerning the negative outcomes of sacrifice, and how some events have the potential to divide a community (the audience) rather than unify it.

Transgressive acts – such as self-mutilation and animal sacrifice – become significant in revealing the political and cultural priorities of a community, and can also reveal the moral priorities of a specific society. This is evident in the case of Brett Bailey and the slaughtered chicken. Western, white audience members reacted with horror to an event that is also practiced as a ritual within an African context. Differing cultural positions regarding animal sacrifice were revealed through this act. In this instance, that which was “socially peripheral” (the live slaughter of a chicken) highlighted what was “symbolically central” (discourses on animal slaughter) (Stallybrass and White 1986: 23). In other words, Stallybrass and White note that what is transgressive (abject) informs the discourses that control it. These discourses become part of the constructions of culture, religion and politics. This notion links to Freud’s theories concerning the significance of the taboo in the formation of culture. It also resonates with Julia Kristeva’s treatise on abjection, in which she explores how the subject is simultaneously threatened and reinforced by the abject. The contrast between the pre-Symbolic chaos of the Real and the Lacanian Law of the Father operates within these instances, and this highlights the fraught, yet evidently indissoluble relationship between culture and violence.

3.4. The Abject in Sacrificial Ritual

Freud suggests that deviancy and order both find their origins in the Oedipus complex. The theory of the Oedipus complex marks a critical stage in the psychosexual development of the subject in which the crises of patricide and maternal incest are encountered and resolved. According to Freud, it is the Oedipus complex that is responsible for the formation of the subject, determined by the acquisition of language and the renunciation of the maternal body. Kristeva notes that when the subject is introduced to the Symbolic, “a fissure in the relationship between consciousness and corporality” forms (Kristeva in Bernstein 1991: 28). The subject begins to differentiate between the body and consciousness. It is within this moment that the subject makes a distinction between the “inside and the outside” of the body and recognizes the skin as the “container” of the elements – “urine, blood, sperm, excrement” – that it must reject in order to be whole (Kristeva 1982: 53).

Julia Kristeva notes that if the subject does not, or cannot recognize its body as whole in its early years of formation,²⁸ it will remain trapped; it will always remain integrated with the abject. She notes that this “exiled” subject has not experienced “maternal separation” (Cohen 2005: xiii). Rather, this exile has fused with “the horror of feeling undifferentiated from the mother, and thus, with the disruption of the Symbolic ordering of the world” (Cohen 2005: xii). The horrors of fusion with the mother do not refer to the comfort of the womb (which could be viewed as a kind of “utopia”), but to the animality and chaos of the pre-Symbolic, in which the laws that determine the subject and society are absent. This state also marks the breaking of the borders that protect the subject’s whole body from the abject elements that threaten it.

²⁸ This resonates with Lacan’s Mirror Stage as discussed in Chapter Two.

Kristeva refers to this fractured subject as the “deject,” “the one by whom the abject exists” (Kristeva 1982: 8). Having refuted the Symbolic, the deject remains outside of discourse; it is a stray “on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding” (Kristeva 1982: 8).

The deject, who exists without a stable moral or cultural point of reference, lives outside of the law. In this instance, the abject as characterized by “bodily and cultural boundary violations” is what this exiled subject recognizes as his reality (Cohen 2005: xii). The exile no longer acknowledges the boundaries between the inside and the outside, the “conscious” and the “corporeal” (Bernstein 1992: 28). Moreover, it is the dissolution of the boundaries that define what is socially “acceptable” within the subject’s constitution that gives rise to all kinds of horrors, such as violence and perversity. These horrors deliberately threaten the social and political constructions that have attempted, and failed, to enclose the subject. Michael Bernstein constructs a study on the “abject hero,” an idea that refers to the abject within the European novel, and specifically, to the “exiled deject” that Julia Kristeva proposes. Although his study is based on European literature, it highlights certain characteristics of the Kristevan deject that provide some links between it and the bodies of the subjects that are encountered in performance art. The performance artist her/himself exists outside of the laws, through the abject violence of his dangerous acts. The body of the performance artist is rendered “conspicuous;” its container (the skin) is ripped open and the repressed elements of his animality spill forth in the destruction of his subjectivity (Feral 1983: 207). In this sense, the performance artist plays the abject hero. Bernstein notes that the abject hero (and the performance artist) is just as

“incompatible with the existing order as...the most ruthless monster” (Bernstein 1992: 27).²⁹

According to Kristeva, the horrors that exemplify the abject hero and the deject also promise the potential for the subject to be born anew. This resonates with my exploration of the abject in Chapter Two, in which experiences of the Real and of *jouissance* could potentially transform the subject. In light of this, Cohen notes that the abject “is structured by the dialectical notion of it as object-making and subject-unsettling, at once dystopic pollution and utopic resource” (Cohen 2005: x). This statement links with the dichotomies of culture and violence; law and chaos; and creation and destruction that have recurred in my investigations on ritual and the Real. Cohen and Kristeva suggest this: just as the abject threatens the subject, and heralds its dissolution, so does it create a pre-Symbolic “utopia” in which the subject may be transformed and reborn. According to these theories, abject rituals could serve to reconstitute the subject, and encourage the formation of a new “I” (Tang 2005: 101). Acty Tang expands on this theory of the “restorative” properties of the abject in the following statement pertaining to ritual and subjectivity:

If the purpose of ritual is to resolve some fundamental contradiction in humanity, it is ultimately the definition of ‘man’ – and the fragility of which this standing definition is constructed – that ritual...must negotiate (Tang 2005: 101).

Abject rituals in performance art have then the potential to function as platforms for the investigation of culture and subjectivity, which may be unpacked, examined, and interrogated. In performance art, abject rituals are reinterpreted, in which live acts

²⁹ The notion of the monstrous body (as transgressive) in performance art will be explored in the following chapter.

occur alongside specific cultural and political symbols. Symbols, and the attempted exposition of the Real, both serve to situate the performance on the border between art and life. The results of this endeavour are unsettling, as observed in the Brett Bailey case in which the Real, within the realm of “performance,” divided audiences concerning the ethical implications of violence on stage. The conflict that performance art incites results in a dissection of the values of a community. Such dissections are significant in the analysis of the discourses that construct the position of the subject within its social, political and cultural context.

3.5. Conclusion

In light of these discoveries, I would conclude that ritual itself cannot function as an absolute means to combat the violent problems that communities face. The controversies concerning its practice, whether in reality (medicine murders) or in theatre (Brett Bailey’s *iMumbo Jumbo*), contest Erika Fischer-Lichte’s notion of ritual as a “curative” strategy in the eradication of violence in a society. Ritual does, however, allow for communities to be analysed. It deliberately provokes the members of the community to question the standards by which a society operates. This provocation, I believe, functions as a significant means by which communal crises may be abated through dialogue.³⁰ Ritual also allows for identity formations to be revised. In the following chapter, I will discuss the significance of the monster as *pharmakon*, and how two South African performance artists, Peter van Heerden and Steven Cohen, embody these elements in their performance works as interrogations of identity.

³⁰ Peter van Heerden highlights the importance of dialogue in connection to South African performance art. He notes that the cohesion of South African society (after apartheid) may only be possible through “the cathartic process of resolution through dialogue” (Van Heerden 2004: 2). This “dialogue,” in relation to Van Heerden’s performance practice, resides within an interrogation of racial and sexual stereotypes. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter 4

A Politics of the Monstrous: The Abject Body in the Performances of Steven Cohen and Peter van Heerden

4.1. Introduction

The monster has, in many different forms of art, been connected with the filthy and the abject. For example, Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's gothic novel, *Frankenstein* (1818) is a composite body made up of a variety of rotting fragments, whose limbs and other appendages come from many different sources. It is a good example of the fractured body, the body in tatters "wounded, dismembered, cut-up" yet whole, that might comprise Kristeva's deject, the one who exists beside the abject (Feral 1983: 216). This might also refer to the body of the performing artist, whose deliberate and violent practices of physical self-harm bring the subject to the edges of its being:

In relation to the abject, the monster inspires fear and loathing. If one imagines certain fictitious embodiments of monsters in literary and popular culture, one encounters all kinds of manifestations of the "filthy" (Cohen 2005: ix).

In terms of the aforementioned Frankensteinian monster, the dismembered corpse is the primary abject component that is brought to the fore. It is the corpse that, in terms of Julia Kristeva's study, is the "most sickening of wastes," the "entire body" that has "fallen beyond the limits" of abjection (Kristeva 1982: 3). In light of the example of Frankenstein and Kristeva, the monster (like the abject) may be viewed as part of the underside of the Symbolic. Beyond the corpse are the other filthy elements of corporeality that designate the abject. Ruptured flesh and buckets of blood encapsulate the monster that is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Unholy matrimonies between flesh and machine are what inspire the horror of the cyborg, in films such as *The Terminator* (1984) and *Total Recall* (1990). William A. Cohen has noted that it is

the filthy, the “polluting, infectious, fearful,” out of which the monster emerges (Cohen 2005: ix). Cohen examines the implications of the term, “filth:”

[Filth is that] which instantly repudiates a threatening thing, person or idea by ascribing alterity to it. Ordinarily, that which is filthy is so fundamentally alien that it must be rejected; labelling something filthy is a viscerally powerful means of excluding it... People are denounced as filthy when they are felt to be unassimilably other, whether because perceived attributes of their identities repulse the onlooker or because physical aspects of their bodies (appearance, odour, decrepitude) do (Cohen 2005: ix-x).

In terms of the “otherness” of that which is deemed “filthy,” Cohen notes that throughout history, monstrous attributes have been linked to differences in gender, culture and sexuality. He refers to Rene Girard in terms of the marginal status of the victims chosen for human sacrifice, and notes that it is because of their marginality that the surrogate victims/*pharmakos* are chosen from various groups and classed as one, and “assembled as the monster” (Cohen 1996: 11). Furthermore, this “othering” of the marginal monster functions to justify the act of sacrifice, through the creation of an entity that “can then claim an independent identity” and is therefore no longer part of the community as a whole (Cohen 1996: 11).

4.2. Steven Cohen’s “Queer as Monster.”³¹

In terms of performance art, it is the artist himself who becomes the monster, the “performance creature” whose totality is sacrificed for the benefit of society (Van Heerden 2004: 13). In terms of the artistic practice of South African performance artist, Steven Cohen, the monstrous is examined in relation to prejudiced views of Jews and homosexuals within a patriarchal system.³² He unites physically dangerous

³¹ This stems from a title of one of Steven Cohen’s works, *The Theory of Queer as Monster* (1997).

³² Steven Cohen’s work has challenged the “patriarchal, militaristic [and] heterosexual” values that formed part of the apartheid regime (Cohen 2003: 6). His experience in the South African military

performance acts with striking costumes, or “monster drag,” to embody the “othered” individual in its most visually extreme sense (Cohen 2003: 6). The titles of Steven Cohen’s works consist of certain pejorative terms that are used to label marginal individuals. Works with titles such as *Jew* (1998), *Faggot* (1998) and *Ugly Girl* (1998) reflect “monstrous” or inhuman attributes given to “othered” peoples. It is also apparent how such terms have functioned to aid past human atrocities. The Rwandan genocide in 1994, which involved the massacre of eight hundred thousand Tutsis by militant Hutus, utilized monstrous terms in propaganda to galvanise the murders. Tutsis were referred to as “cockroaches,” to liken them to animals and “vermin” (Schorn 2007: 3). Anti-Semitism, in the European context, has created in many monstrous and “horrible imaginings” of the Jewish body: an enlarged nose was the immutable, “visible sign of Jewishness,” whilst the feet were “thought to be congenitally deformed” (Cohen 2003: 17).

Steven Cohen’s monstrous drag performances present the viewer with “something radically different from reason” (Bernstein 1992: 26). Moreover, Bernstein suggests that that which cannot be named, that which is the opposite of reason, resides within the monster. It substantiates the notion that the monster is a product of the individual’s repressed desires, which lie (temporarily) dormant in the subconscious. Steven Cohen describes his particular brand of “confusing and threatening” monstrous embodiment as a “sort of bogeyman or *golem*”³³ that rises “from Lake Subconscious” (Cohen 2003: 13). Cohen’s monster is therefore an uncanny entity that cannot be clearly classified. Its “ontological liminality” threatens the structures that define the

“crystallised his sense of identity” (Cohen, as a young, Jewish homosexual, was “automatically marked as marginal, even subversive”) and encouraged him to become an artist (Cohen 2003: 6).

³³ A *golem* is a “legendary creature of Jewish folklore” and is “made of earth and blasphemously given life via magic spells or misuse of holy writ” (Cohen 2003: 13).

dichotomies of man/woman and human/animal (Cohen and Garber 1996: 6). In other words, the monster resists classification. It inhabits a liminal space in terms of the essence of its being. It cannot be definitively conceptualized because it is created out of contradictions in gender, in species and in behaviour. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that this kind of monster provokes anxiety within its beholders because of “a fixation that is born out of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and therefore disempower) that which threatens” (Cohen 1996: viii). The monster, like the abject, inhabits a liminal space beyond the grasp of language. Michael Bernstein offers the following insight:

Abjection always contains a strong admixture of the monstrous... The rejection of conventional ethical and social codes that both embody may take the form of daemonic rebellion in the monster whose pride refuses all shackles or restraints (Bernstein 2005: 26).

The monster therefore resists the “shackles” of classification and the law. In its resistance to classification, it belongs to the “underside” of the Symbolic, and could function as an “embodiment” of abjection as *jouissance*. It is this aspect of the monster that inspires the fear and loathing associated with it. The monster also has a strong affinity with taboo, and is viewed as the antithesis of morality and order. As examined in Chapter Two, Franko B and Ron Athey’s performances conduct deliberate revisions of moral codes. This is evident in their public performances of the highly taboo act of self-mutilation. Through embodying the monster, Frank B and Athey embody the taboo that law attempts to stifle.

Despite these negative associations with the monster, its existence is necessary for the subject to be born and remain unsullied by its horrifying components. Cohen notes

that “the monster is the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities – personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, particular” (Cohen 1996: 20).³⁴ However, similar to performance art’s destructive/creative nature, the monster and the abject both reveal the “partiality,” the vulnerability, of such constitutions. The monster transgresses the boundaries between the human and the animal, the machine and the flesh (in the case of the cyborg), the male and the female, the animate and the inanimate. In mythology, illegitimate fusions between “animals and men” provide the most “spectacular modality of the monstrous” in which “incomparable phenomena” coexist within the same body (Cohen 1996: 6).

Like the monster, the performance artist is a marginalized entity, an embodiment of that which cultural and political structures deem transgressive. Such transgressions are evident in the works of Steven Cohen. Like the body of the monster, the performance artist’s body is not contained, but open, vulnerable and subject to mutability. The materials that make up the bodies of monsters and performance artists are exposed, dissected and examined through violent acts. The monster’s exposure of the abject elements of the body is rendered apparent in one of Cohen’s more controversial performances. In *Taste* (1999), he appears with “his face covered, de-identified, by a latex mask” (Cohen 2003: 20). After performing a striptease, Cohen “slides from his anus a set of anal beads,” and “black fluid” pours out of the anus. This fluid is “voided into a Victorian bedpan, decanted into a glass, and then, with a gesture of toasting at his (usually horrified) audience, Cohen drinks it” (Cohen 2003: 20). This performance piece is a deliberate negation of the body as a closed, sacred

³⁴ The monster is then part of the taboo elements that are ultimately responsible for the formation of culture.

vessel. Cohen's body, like that of the monster, is open and perforated, the abject constituents of which pass freely from the inside to the outside. The shocking actions of this performance enact the abject transgressions of the "other" in full view of spectators. It is possible to detect a relationship between the abject monster that Cohen performs, and Stallybrass and White's study of the transgressive implications of the grotesque body. Stallybrass and White's transgressive body is usually characterised by open orifices ("mouth, flared nostrils, anus") and exposed lower regions ("buttocks and genitals"), which have priority over the "head, 'spirit' or reason" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 10). The focus on the grotesque body is, for Steven Cohen, a way in which the animalistic presence of the body as a physical being – "both as surface and a collection of cavities" – is evoked (Cohen 2003: 21). The experience of such a body has a dual function. It attempts to elicit an "internal," physical response in those who are witness to it. It also functions as a means by which the performer himself exposes and revises his "personal baggage" of sexuality and identity. As Cohen himself states, *Taste* is a performance in which he, literally, "deals with [his] 'shit'" (Cohen 2003: 21). The adoption of the monstrous in this abject performance presents the taboo in a deliberate subversion of physical and sexual norms.

4.3. Monstrous Masculinities.³⁵

Another South African performance artist, Peter van Heerden, also utilizes the grotesque body in his own performative investigations of the monster. His actions

³⁵ Marneweck's notion of the "monstrous masculine" is located within the Kristevan construction of the semiotic body of the feminine, a "figure of abjection" that "must be repressed and controlled in order to secure and protect the social order" (Creed in Marneweck 2006: 5). Marneweck transfers this notion of the "monstrous feminine" to Peter van Heerden's appropriation of the "monstrous masculine" in performances characterised by the "dissolution of form and then metamorphoses through the maternal and feminine other" (Marneweck 2006: 5).

may not be as directly aggressive and shocking as those in Cohen's *Taste*, but they also serve to equate a grotesque, monstrous physicality with that of the marginalized individual.

In his thesis, Van Heerden notes that such abject rituals dissolve the totality of the subject, and result in the emergence of a "performance creature" (Van Heerden 2004: 14). This "othered" entity stands as the antithesis of the subject; it is the Kristevan deject, immersed in the abject and dislocated from any paradigmatic construction. This performance creature, in its departure from the Symbolic and its reintroduction to the abject maternal realm of simultaneous dissolution and rebirth, cannot be defined as human, but rather as the most extreme example of the monstrous. Van Heerden transforms his body – through rituals of abjection – into this "othered" monster, in order to contest the body's prior cultural inscriptions.

For instance, in *so is 'n so gemaak* (2005), a deliberate manipulation of the genitals transforms the traditional embodiment of masculinity in the performer to an "othered," more "monstrous masculinity" (Marneweck 2006: 1):

Van Heerden edges on all fours. His genitals, tied to the yoke by a thin rope, are pulled backwards as he strains forward in a resonant image of the tension between tradition and progress, between the old-fashioned demands of masculinity and the necessity for painful compromise (Rayneard in Van Heerden 2004: 3).

This deliberate act of pain provokes a visceral sense of horror within the spectator/witness, but it also transforms the performer from what is signified as "male" into something other. In doing this, Van Heerden becomes something non-human. The penis and testicles, stretched and distorted, are no longer defining

characteristics of masculinity, but foreign objects that are rendered unfamiliar. If the penis, as an embodiment of the phallic signifier,³⁶ is rendered “strange,” then the discourses as the products of the Symbolic (which are “represented” by the phallus) are also distorted. These acts of genital manipulation therefore serve to subvert the power of the Symbolic order.

Steven Cohen also enacts the manipulation of the male penis. In his “living art” he often “binds” his penis to “make it appear erect (though also somewhat mortified), and/or attaches objects to it” (Van Heerden 2003: 10). For example, in the work *Limping Into the African Renaissance* (1999-2000), Cohen performed in a rural homestead in Swaziland. Wearing a white tutu, a prosthetic leg, a bondage mask (with a dildo for a mouth) and white tape around his penis (which bound it to a point of mortification), it is no surprise that he was simultaneously regarded as a “magician” and a “*stabane*”³⁷ by the witnesses to the event.

³⁶ The phallic signifier, according to Lacan, is an imaginary construct that defines the assumption of sexual identity. The male, according to this theory, possesses the phallus (the signifier, as embodied by the penis). The female, in lacking the phallus, “becomes” the phallus (and is thus the signified) (Lacan in Butler 1999: 59). This theory, interpreted by Judith Butler, imagines the phallus as that which reflects the power of the Law of the Father, which encapsulates the discourses which define sexual identity. By “becoming” the phallus, the female is “marked” or defined by paternal law. The male, therefore, possesses the “power” to mark that which is “other” through having the phallic signifier.

³⁷ “*Stabane*” is a derogatory Zulu term for a homosexual man, literally meaning “hermaphrodite.”



Limping Into the African Renaissance (1999-2000). www.artthrob.co.za. Date accessed 22/08/08.

In this performance, Cohen's body became "othered" and monstrous, not only through the implementation of monstrous "drag," but also through the experience of a body physically altered through painful practices. The clumsy movements that Cohen attempted to perform as a result of the prosthetic leg, as well as the visually horrific sight of the bound penis, all functioned to destabilize the body; to render it monstrous. The fundamental nature of this work is to illustrate the inability of the "othered" body to fit in with prescribed physical ideals. Steven Cohen states the following:

The work is about disability and challenge. It's about not fitting in, about struggle and trying and about unsuccess. The dancing [in the work] consists of frustrated attempts to balance, to pose, to do tricks, to do anything (Cohen 2003: 25).

It is evident that this work about “disability” actually poses a deliberate challenge of the mythologies surrounding the physical masculine ideal. *Limping Into the African Renaissance* as well as *so is ‘n os gemaak* both address the “vulnerability of hegemonic white masculinity” (Van Heerden 2004: 4). As mentioned earlier, the manipulation and mortification of the penis resonates strongly with the manipulation of the *phallus*. Jacques Lacan notes that the phallus represents the Symbolic, and ultimately, the aspects of “knowability” and “signifiability” that constitute discourse as defined by the Law of the Father. By manipulating the penis in performance, and rendering it monstrous, Van Heerden and Cohen both disrupt the discourses define the male body and, subsequently, challenge the very foundations of patriarchy. In *Limping Into the African Renaissance*, Cohen’s “deconstruction” of the penis, and the creation of a monstrous drag figure, serve to subvert the traditional “patriarchal” and often “homophobic” African perceptions of a “white, queer, Jewish body” (Cohen 2003: 25).³⁸ The responses of Cohen’s spectators/witnesses, characterized by exclamations of “magician” or “*stabane*,” highlight the prevalent attitudes of superstition and downright loathing towards an “othered” body within a patriarchal system.

In terms of *so is ‘n os gemaak*, genital manipulation exposes the tensions that exist within Afrikaner male identity.³⁹ In the moment described above, Van Heerden’s body is literally pulled apart in the painful search for a new point of reference. It is the

³⁸ Vasu Reddy notes that within certain patriarchal African social systems, constructions of masculinity dictate that homosexuality is “un-African” (Reddy 200: 83).

³⁹ Van Heerden’s performative investigations into the contemporary experience of the white male Afrikaner will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

phallus – the core of masculinity, patriarchy and the Symbolic – that has to be distorted and destroyed for a new subjectivity to be found. Van Heerden notes that a dilemma exists within this search, and asks whether or not “the white South African man, like the ox, [is] going to become a neutered beast, a beast of burden harnessed to pull a new social dispensation into being at the cost of his identity” (Van Heerden 2004: 4).

The fluidity and mutability of the monster’s body resembles that of the performance artist’s, whose subjectivity is never fixed, but constantly evaluated and reevaluated in ritual acts. It is through the experience of the dismembered, grotesque body that the community (that constitutes the witnesses to the performance event) can encounter the existence of the abject as manifest in the monster. Performance art allows for the spectator to experience the horrors of this entity in a live event.

The monster’s fluid identity produces anxiety in those who encounter it. It stems from an encounter with the repressed and the uncanny. The uncanny, meaning “*unheimlich*,” refers to “a familiar phenomenon (image, person, and event) made strange by repression” (Foster 1993: 7). Its containment within the subconscious renders it uncanny, or in Hal Foster’s terms, “daemonic” (Foster 1993: 7). Through certain patterns of behaviour (often repetition), the subject attempts to bring such phenomena to the surface (Foster 1993: 7). In this instance, the monster is the most apt embodiment of the uncanny and of what the subject is concurrently repulsed and fascinated by. These notions of the uncanny and the repressed relate to the Real as conceptualized in Chapters One and Two. The monster, like the Real, refers to the unspeakable, libidinal forces of the repressed.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that “the monster haunts; it does not simply bring past and present together, but destroys the boundary that demand[s] their twinned foreclosure” (Cohen 1996: ix-x). The horror of the monster eradicates the logical intervention of its beholder, resulting in the experience of a terrifyingly charged present. Like the Freudian uncanny; “the ghost of Hamlet,” the monster disturbs the subject (Cohen 1996: ix-x):

It introjects the disturbing, repressed, but formative traumas of ‘pre-’ into the sensory moment of ‘post-’ binding the one irrevocably to the other...the monster commands ‘Remember me’: restore my fragmented body, piece me back together, allow the past its eternal return” (Cohen 1996: ix).

Like the abject, the monster inhabits a “primal space between fear and attraction” (Cohen 1996:19). The abject also intrigues while it repels. It is the ubiquitous presence of both the monster and the abject in ritual, art, literature and performance that highlight its appeal. Cohen notes “we distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom and perhaps its sublime despair” (Cohen 1996: 17). It is the monster that, by its very constitution, enacts and lives by the possible transgressions that the human as subject subconsciously (or consciously) desires. Franko B, for instance, performs acts that are at the same time violent and erotic through a restrained, sacred anguish. He enacts the “beauty” of the infinitely suffering monster. David Thorpe notes distinct similarities that exist between Franko B in the performance piece *I Miss You!* (2005) and the monstrously androgynous beauty of St. Sebastian. Both figures explicitly render “the cathartic link between blood, suffering, redemption and homosexuality” (Thorpe 2001: 1). Franko B also resonates with other monstrous figures in literature and art. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is similarly associated with the eroticism and violence that Franko B evokes through his artistic explorations

of blood, whilst Frankenstein's monster illustrates the despair that is attributed to a hideous entity that nevertheless is sensitive and intelligent.

4.4. The Monster as *Pharmakon*.

The exposition of the monstrous (in the victim *and* the perpetrator) examines the constructions of culture and subjectivity. In connection to the theories of Rene Girard, these interrogations (and potential transformations) occur when the community treads the fine line between the monstrous and the human, the acceptable and the unacceptable. Through this, laws are challenged. The presence of the monster resides in many aspects of the sacrificial ritual, including the surrogate victim who is simultaneously admired and reviled; the violence of the sacrificial act in all its horror and violence; as well as within a community itself, which is confronted with the enactment of all the repressed desires of its subjects.

The monster may be viewed as an "embodiment" of these repressed desires and forbidden practices. In light of this, the monster is a manifestation of the *jouissance* that is the result of abjection. In the confrontation with the monster, the spectator's repressed, tabooed desires are allowed to surface. Cohen notes that the collective "fantasies" of the community, such as "aggression, domination and inversion, are allowed safe space of expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" (Cohen 1996: 17). Like the *pharmakon*/surrogate victim, the "othered" monster is "ritually destroyed" to "purge the community by eliminating its sins" (Cohen 1996: 18). Girard notes that the monster itself is transformed within the ritual killing. It changes from an entity that is reviled and "monstrous," to an entity possessing "fantastic power" (Girard 1986: 54). Girard states that monsters, although

responsible for “sowing disorder,” are equally responsible for the reestablishment of order and therefore “become founding fathers or gods” (Girard 1986: 54).

4.5. Conclusion

These performance artists forfeit their identity for that of the monster. By performing the monster as an embodiment of the transgressive and the anarchic, these performance artists “destroy” the rules of representation that define them as speaking subjects. In doing so, they create new monstrous identities. It is through such strategies that the destruction/creation characteristic of performance art functions to revise systems of identity construction. By contravening the rules that comprise the Law of the Father, and through the assumption of the role of Julia Kristeva’s deject, the performance artist transforms into the “othered,” scapegoated monster that arises at a time of crisis. In the Chapter Five, the works of Peter van Heerden will be examined in connection with the role of performance art as ritual, and the way both function to potentially challenge and investigate issues pertaining to social crises.

Chapter Five

Revolt and Redemption: the works of Peter van Heerden as contemporary ritual.

5.1. Introduction

Peter van Heerden is a South African performance artist who is currently living and working in Cape Town. Since he obtained his MA degree from the University of Cape Town Drama Department in 2004, his performance works, which unite live art installation, multimedia performance and physical theatre, have interrogated masculinity and specifically Afrikaner male identity within the context of contemporary, post-1994 South Africa. His work is inspired by a personal preoccupation of his role as a “white, English Afrikaner” (Van Heerden 2004: 14). He utilizes the Afrikaner Vootrekker as a representational device⁴⁰ in most of his performances. Van Heerden states that, although he is not exclusively Afrikaans, his ancestry extends to Afrikaner men and women who took part in the Great Trek in the 19th century of South Africa’s history. He states that his name is “Peter Andrew Hamish van Heerden,” named after his grandfather “Pieter Andrik Hendrik van Heerden” (Van Heerden 2004: 13). He explores the notion of the Afrikaner male as a “Diasporic” identity, one that has become “dishonoured” due to its “complicity in apartheid” (Van Heerden 2004: 5 and Nunns 2007: 2).

In works such as *so is 'n os gemaak* (2005)⁴¹ and *Bok* (2006), white male Afrikaner identity is examined in light of this Diaspora. Through rituals that constitute violent

⁴⁰ It is important to note that, although a representational device *is* used in Peter van Heerden’s performance art, it is reinterpreted by the live acts that constitute the performance event. This links to the interplay between symbols and the live, and how the live serves to challenge the representational frameworks that it is juxtaposed with.

⁴¹ This performance piece formed part of the greater live art installation *Totanderkuntuit* (2005), which was first performed at the 2005 Grahamstown National Arts Festival. This particular work functioned

acts of abjection, Van Heerden seeks to reconstitute the traditional manifestation of the Afrikaner male, and relocate him within the context of a democratic South Africa. The rituals in these works (the details of which will be described later in this chapter) explore the subjectivity of the individual performer. They deliberately push the body to a state of liminality, through encounters with the abject, in attempts to access a new point of reference for subjectivity. In the controversial work *6 Minutes* (2007), Van Heerden employs acts of self-reconstitution through performed sacrificial ritual. It is within such rituals that the destruction/creation dichotomy is revealed. Through the enactment of abject acts, Van Heerden challenges (and deconstructs) the cultural signifiers that define his body and his identity. It is through these acts of “destruction” that opportunities are potentially created to rebuild new identities. This process is applicable to the spectator/witness, as well as to the performer. In *6 Minutes* (2007), Van Heerden creates a space in which the performer and the witness are both thrust into a state of liminality. For the spectator/witness, this state entails a revision of the established roles of the traditional audience member. As examined in the second chapter of this study, the spectator/witness’s conventional habits of perception are manipulated through the functions of site-specificity and liveness, to create the potential for new modes of perception (and interaction) to arise.

I intend to examine *6 Minutes* in light of abjection and sacrificial ritual. The notion of the Real in performance art will be re-examined in light of Van Heerden’s performances, and how these performances function to challenge the traditional discursive constructions of Afrikaner male identity in contemporary South Africa. Such an examination will serve to highlight how an encounter with the abject in the

as a performance-as-research project, which, through praxis, served to accompany his thesis, *Hitchhiking on the Ox-Wagon of Destiny: Voortrekker-Draadtrekker-Saamtrekker* (2005).

performance event may transform the body of the performer, and subsequently, the cultural and political elements that frame it. This exploration will lead to a discussion of the performer (Van Heerden) as surrogate victim and *pharmakon*, and will examine how the representational device of the Afrikaner male serves as a scapegoat in performance as ritual.

In *6 Minutes*, Peter van Heerden adopts the identity of the Voortrekker, an archetypal representation of South African patriarchy. Van Heerden's Afrikaner male as Voortrekker resembles Girard's surrogate victim/*pharmakon*, a sacrificial figure that is the primary element of transformative ritual. *6 Minutes*, in particular, explores a South African crisis as a consequence of the most extreme forms of patriarchy, namely the subjugation of women and children through sexual violence. In *6 Minutes*, Van Heerden becomes the perpetrator as well as the "healer" of such crimes. He aims to unpack the crisis of sexual abuse in South Africa, through adopting the role of the *pharmakon*.

5.2. Interrogating History: *so is 'n os gemaak* (2005) and *Bok* (2006)

Before an examination of the Girardian elements of *6 Minutes*, I would like to explore the significance of the Afrikaner male in more detail with reference to two earlier works, *so is 'n os gemaak* and *Bok*. Both of these performances adopt the theme of the Voortrekker to represent traditional images of the 19th century Afrikaner. In Peter van Heerden's thesis, he discusses the notion of the Afrikaner male as "experiencing Diaspora," with reference to Melissa Steyn's definition:

Diaspora, then, is usually understood to consist of the most pushed out of the pushed out ones: those who are dislocated from their own centres of identification,

and usually have very limited power in relation to the centres which impact immediately upon their lives (Steyn in Van Heerden 2004: 5).

The word “Diaspora” is derived from Greek and means “a scattering or sowing of seeds” (Kantor 1992: 81). It generally refers to the dislocation of the peoples of a particular ethnic identity from their settled territory. Originally, it was used to refer to the displacement of Jews from Israel and Judea in the years 607 BC and 70 CE respectively (Kantor 1992: 81). Diaspora, in its truest sense, refers to physical displacement. However, in the sense of the Afrikaner male, a different kind of Diaspora is experienced, since no such deliberate dispersal of Afrikaner people from South Africa has occurred.⁴² Afrikaner male Diaspora is a psychological condition, which, according to Van Heerden, stems from “a hard fall from grace,” characterized by the dismantlement of apartheid in 1994 and the subsequent introduction of democracy to the country (Van Heerden 2004: 5) In Sandra Swart’s essay, “Man, Gun, Horse: Hard Right Afrikaner Masculinity Identity in Post Apartheid South Africa” (2001), she claims that the Diasporic nature of the Afrikaner Male has been the result of being thrust “over the short space of a decade from a hegemonic, indeed, exemplary identity, to a socially marginalized and, in many sectors, an actively dishonoured identity” (Swart 2001: 77). In this sense, the Afrikaner male experiences Diaspora within his own country, and – like the Diasporic Jews who were scattered throughout “all kingdoms of the earth (Deuteronomy 28: 25) – is travelling, psychologically, in search of a new homeland. This notion of the Diasporic Afrikaner male sounds similar to the Kristevan “deject,” or the one by whom the abject exists. In this sense, the Afrikaner male is dislocated from his origins; he is in the midst of a crisis of identity characterized by “othering,” and is searching for a new point of

⁴² It is worth noting, however, that “Diaspora” in this case may be applicable to the conditions experienced by the early settlers of South Africa from the 17th century, who were separated from their countries of origin in Europe, and had to find new cultural orientations on a foreign continent.

reference. Both the Kristevan deject and the Diasporic Afrikaner male are on a journey through the “hinterland,” and are cut off from any stable, crucial point on the map of identity. It is apt that Van Heerden utilises Voortrekker costumes in his performances. The Voortrekker or Trekboer movement (the Great Trek) was the journey undertaken by Afrikaners from the Cape to the interior of South Africa in the 19th century. This resonates strongly with the current mobile or “rootless” state of Afrikaner identity in contemporary South Africa, linked to a “psychological” Diaspora.

This resonates with the Kristevan notion of the deject trapped in the “fluid confines” of a “universe” that “constantly questions his solidity and impels him to start afresh” (Kristeva 1982: 8). Thus the deject, like the Afrikaner male, is an identity “traveling in search of a new location, a new strategy of practice from which it can redefine itself to align with its new cultural dispensation” (Van Heerden 2004: 13).

In light of this crisis of Afrikaner masculinity, Van Heerden has devised a “manifesto” to drive his performance practice. This manifesto calls for a re-examination of the traditional discourses that construct masculinity in contemporary South Africa. It expresses the need for “dialogue” and an active sense of communal participation in reconstituting “othered” South African cultural groups. Moreover, it is fundamentally concerned with the resolution of contemporary South African crises, whether cultural (in the case of the Afrikaner male, in *so is ‘n os gemaak* and *Bok*) or social (the notion of sexual abuse, which shall be explored in conjunction with *6 Minutes*) through participative ritual. The introduction to this manifesto is also the slogan for Van Heerden’s performance initiative, the Erf 81 collective, called

“Voortrekker-Draadtrekker-Saamtrekker” (Van Heerden 2004: 19). The word “draadtrekker” is particularly aggressive in its exposition of the role of the Afrikaner male in contemporary South Africa. Peter van Heerden states, in an interview with Adrienne Sichel:

We coined the slogan “voortrekker, draadtrekker, saamtrekker.” The “draadtrekker” was the wanker, so we’re tired of being wankers” (Van Heerden in Sichel 2006).

The “draadtrekker” or “wanker” is a particularly pejorative association of the Afrikaner man with the perpetual masturbator. The word “wanker” is generally used in English slang to denote a masturbator, as well as a disreputable person. In the case of Peter van Heerden’s argument, the “Afrikaner-as-wanker” refers to the latter definition, and therefore resonates with many contemptible perceptions of Afrikaner men. The association of the Afrikaner male with a “shameful” and socially inappropriate act such as masturbation links him to that which is abject, or taboo. Another perception is the stereotype of the Afrikaner male as a racist, sexist, beer-swilling Boer. Such a stereotype, in light of a post-1994 South Africa, may be marginal due to its association with racism and white domination. It also refers to another (significant) historical stereotype, with reference to the Voortrekker, in which early Afrikaners are perceived as “backward Boers who, in an isolated corner of the world, missed the Enlightenment by being exposed only to the Old Testament rather than Voltaire” (Adam 1979: 17).

Both stereotypes are evaluated and interrogated by Peter van Heerden in *Bok*, in which he conducts an analysis of certain historical components of Afrikaner culture.⁴³

The stereotypes described above are consequences of this particular history. Van Heerden seeks to redefine these roles through a dissection of history, and potentially to create a space for dialogue concerning the reform of the identity of the Afrikaner male through performed rituals. In *Bok*, these rituals are juxtaposed with multimedia and the footage of various execution sites spread throughout the Eastern Cape. Aja Marneweck has written a detailed examination of the implications of this performance, and notes the following:

By traveling to historical sites of the execution of Boer rebels by British soldiers in the Boer War, as well as of the murders of anti-apartheid black activists, he was able to posit his body in the full weight of his appropriating re-enactment. Van Heerden calls this process...“histrionic intervention.” In his intervention with the site through the act of performance, Van Heerden says that he is intervening with history itself. His interrogation of the site through bodily transformation facilitates a process of acknowledgement and reclamation of the most painful parts of white heritage (Marneweck 2006: 2).

Through situating images of these sites next to live acts, Van Heerden thrusts elements of Afrikaner history into a new context. In this way the representational devices of the film are rendered strange by the live acts that accompany them. History itself is deconstructed and redefined through the performance of live acts. Such juxtapositions, Marneweck notes, “are primarily concerned with extracting, purging, and digesting the residual decay and historicification of [Van Heerden’s] own body of troubled masculinity” (Marneweck 2006: 3). In these instances, Van Heerden strips

⁴³ In the case of *Bok*, Van Heerden addresses the role of the Afrikaner in the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, between 1899 and 1901.

his body and places it in extreme states to provide certain historical and cultural icons with a new meaning. Marneweck refers to the following from *Bok*:

In his work he often returns to the defunct yet hauntingly familiar symbols of apartheid nationalism, or the soundscapes of the white cultural past. *Liedjies* about lost fathers as a Boere mother scrubs the “dirty laundry”⁴⁴ of a wash basket full of entrails, or the old South African flag of the Republiek covering up his naked body (Marneweck 2006: 3).

In *Bok*, icons from the South African past are also accompanied by “caricatures” that have come to epitomize the marginalized Afrikaner male. One instance that Marneweck describes consists of “a soldier” as well as a “rowdy, sexist Afrikaner rugby supporter...shouting his masculine needs to the audience” (Marneweck 2006: 2). The latter stereotype resonates with the aforementioned perception of the “Afrikaner-as-wanker” that Van Heerden seeks to reform. This element of masculinity, although comical in the context of the performance, has more disturbing connotations. Peter van Heerden notes in his thesis that such extreme embodiments of masculinity are the result of specific reiterative practices⁴⁵ that have defined the Afrikaner male at the expense of those that are perceived as “other.” He highlights how such reiterative practices find their locus in the “passages of manhood” that highlight the “journey from being a boy to one of the ‘*manne*’” (Van Heerden 2004: 14). He states that such rites of manhood occur “on any given Saturday when there is a rugby match” (Van Heerden 2004: 14). He notes how such rituals emphasize the characteristics of “physical confrontation, perseverance and skill” as predominantly

⁴⁴ Marneweck uses this choice of words from Adrienne Sichel’s article “Duo hang out our dirty intestinal washing,” which appeared in the Sunday Independent, 5 March 2006.

⁴⁵ “Reiterative practices” constitute part of Judith Butler’s study of the formation of the behaviour of the body. She notes that “bodies” are indissoluble from the “dynamics of power” that constitute the hegemonic order. This is located within the “performativity” of the body’s assumption of identity (in this instance, gender identity), which is defined by the citational “power of discourse,” which produces “the phenomena that it regulates and contains” (Butler 1993: 2). Refer to Chapter Two for more details on this theory.

revered within the traditional ideals of the Afrikaner male (Van Heerden 2004: 14). Rugby also carries with it a political significance, and is viewed as a last “bastion of white supremacy” since the end of the apartheid era in 1994 (Wessels 2008: 1). Rugby and racism have often been linked. An example of this is an incident that occurred on the 30th of August 2008, in which a black female rugby supporter, Ziningi Shibabmo, was subjected to racist taunts by three white men at a Tri-Nations match between South Africa and Australia. In another case, the players of Johannesburg’s first senior black rugby team, the Soweto Rugby Club, met with many racist slurs during their matches. On the 11th of September 2008, the club threatened to quit the main provincial union due to the apparent notion that “claims of racist abuse” were not “dealt with” (Wessels 2008: 1). These events are demonstrative of how rugby is viewed as an exclusively white “elite” sport, characterised by acts of racist intimidation, which aim to inhibit its integration into the broader South African demographic. In embodying a “negative” stereotype of an Afrikaner rugby supporter, Van Heerden is possibly associating the game with these matters of racial exclusivity. I do not think that he seeks to attack rugby as a racist and sexist “ritual” of masculinity. Rather, he aims to address some of the issues that are present in rugby as a “practice” of male whiteness in South Africa. He highlights how some of the characteristics of rugby, such as “physical confrontation,” could be assimilated and distorted by white Afrikaner men who are compelled to adhere to behavioural norms that are deemed “ideal” in certain Afrikaner social practices.

Aja Marneweck states that Van Heerden’s performances of these negative aspects of the Afrikaner male serve to highlight and question an embodiment of patriarchy that is ultimately “dis-located” and “dis-eased” (Marneweck 2006: 2). With reference to

Christine Ramsay, Marneweck notes that works such as *Bok, so is 'n os gemaak* and *6 Minutes* ultimately subvert “mainstream representations of white masculinity” which denote “the ideal of an ultimately dominating, in-control and impenetrable masculinity” (Ramsay in Marneweck 2006: 3).

5.3. Disgusting Celebrations

I would like to highlight some of the strategies Van Heerden employs in his attempts to reconstitute these mainstream characteristics of Afrikaner masculinity. As mentioned earlier, abject ritual has been utilized in performance art as a means of dissolving the traditional constitution of the subject by bringing it back to the pre-Oedipal⁴⁶ limits of what defines its totality. Earlier in this study, I have explored how other performance artists such as Ron Athey, Marina Abramovic and Franko B manipulate the surface of the body, and spill its contained, abject elements, in acts of self-redefinition. Peter van Heerden adopts similar strategies of the abject, in what he calls “rituals of anarchy” (Van Heerden 2004: 18). The term that Van Heerden employs in the definition of these rituals implies the purpose it aims to serve: the dismantlement of traditional norms in favour of new points of reference. In this section of the chapter, details of *so is 'n os gemaak, Bok* and *6 Minutes* will be explored in relation to abject ritual, and how these strategies seek to dissolve the hegemonic constructions of Afrikaner masculinity, with particular reference to the subjective constitution of the performer himself. Throughout this study, I have attempted to identify the links that exist between performance art and ritual, and how sacrifice may function as the site for the enactment of destruction and creation. In the

⁴⁶ The “pre-Oedipal” phase of the subject’s development refers to the Lacanian notion of the Real. It is at this stage of development that the bodies of the subject and the mother are completely intertwined, with no “separation between self and mother; self and other; subject and object” (Menezes 2006: 55).

case of Peter van Heerden, bodily sacrifice forms the crux of these “rituals of anarchy,” in order for cultural reassessment to take place. Sacrifice in these works is constituted by ritualized encounters with the abject.

In *so is'n os gemaak*, Van Heerden literally immerses himself in the Kristevan “muck” and “defilement” of the abject (Kristeva 1982: 8). Hanging upside-down from a rope, he inserts his head into a pile of dirt, thereby identifying himself with the “improper and unclean,” the very *filth* that the subject has to expel in order to maintain its integrity (Kristeva 1982: 8). In *6 Minutes*, similar abject rituals occur. The events of this performance include a period of time in which Van Heerden is hung from a tree in a large transparent bag. The bag is filled with a mixture of sheep’s blood and entrails. Naked, he writhes inside the bag until it breaks, in a simulated birth sequence characterized by blood and afterbirth. In terms of the materiality of the scene, Van Heerden identifies with the innermost components of the body. In light of this, he becomes a part of the internal corporeal elements that the speaking subject rejects in order to remain whole. The blood that is present in this bag resonates with the Girardian notion of blood that is simultaneously sacred and profane. It is sacred, because it is the by-product of the birth-process, that which gives rise to new life. It is profane because it is also the maternal blood that is shed during birth. This blood of the female genitalia also resonates with “the greatest abhorrence” of “all corporeal sites and functions:” menstruation (Kristeva in Oliver 1997: 260-261). It is the element of menstrual blood that is the “forceful reminder of the maternal body that was repudiated in the construction of the self” (Menezes 2006: 121). It is both menstrual blood, and the blood of the birth process, which haunt the subject and inadvertently threaten it with pre-Oedipal dissolution as part of the abject mother.

According to Lacan, the “maternal” represents the time prior to the rise of the subject, before the acquisition of language as espoused by the Law of the Father. When Van Heerden is submerged in the womb-like device of the blood-filled bag, he is conducting a deliberate inversion of the abjection of the mother. He reinserts himself in the womb, and goes back to the limits of his subjectivity through an encounter in which “what existed in the archaism of the pre-objectal⁴⁷ relationship, in the “immemorial violence with which the body becomes separate from another body in order to be” (Kristeva 1982: 10).



6 Minutes (2007). Picture by Ant Strack. www.nytimes.com. Date accessed 22/08/08.

⁴⁷ “Pre-objectal” refers to the “pre-Oedipal” phase of the subject’s development, with specific emphasis on the absence of the “object” within the reality the subject’s reality (Kristeva in Oliver 1997: 253).

The monstrous state of Van Heerden's body within such instances culminates in the actualization of the grotesque. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the grotesque body is the antithesis to the socialized body. It is an "open" body, not a contained, sacred entity. It openly acknowledges its corporeality, and its susceptibility to change and division. Aja Marneweck describes Van Heerden's primordial body in *Bok*, in which it rolls and extends through powdery white lime "naked, his arse in the air, orifices open to the world" (Marneweck 2006: 4). In light of this description, it is worth emphasizing Stallybrass and White's study of the grotesque body and its emphasis of the needs and functions of the "lower body stratum" (Stallybrass and White 1986: 23). Such elements are irrevocably tied to the abject and the monster (of the previous chapter) and highlight the primal urges of the bodily orifices (sexual, excretory, and otherwise) that the subject, through socialization, rejects.

Van Heerden transforms into this "othered," grotesque body by rendering it vulnerable to the abject. In most of his performances, the naked Van Heerden becomes a grotesque, malformed newly born infant, at the borders of its acquisition of subjectivity. The infant at this stage of development possesses no self-awareness. According to Natalie Menezes, the infant, within the first six months of its birth, "experiences its body as fragmented, uncoordinated and helpless," (Menezes 2006: 54). This links to Lacan's Mirror Stage as addressed in Chapter Two. According to Lacan, the child's body image is of it "in bits and pieces" (Lacan in Gallop 1985: 79). The fragmented body of the infant is related to the body of the performance artist. Both exist within the *chora*, which refers to the Kristevan concept of the Real. The *chora* is "an ancient, mobile, unstable receptacle, prior to the One, to the father, and

even to the syllable, metaphorically suggesting something nourishing and maternal” (Kristeva in Menezes 2006: 54). In this instance, the *chora* itself is a paradoxical concept that embodies the dialectic of destruction and creation. Just as the *chora* (and the Real) threatens the subject with dissolution, so does it promise the creation of a new constitution. The *chora* is therefore simultaneously destructive and nurturing. In the case of Peter van Heerden, it is the *chora* that he encounters in his performance of the fragmented, foetal, grotesque body. Through immersing himself in the abject womb of the maternal, he returns to the state in which the pre-Symbolic being views itself as one with the abject mother.

It is therefore through a ritualistic encounter with the grotesque and the monstrous, that Van Heerden begins to dismantle, and subsequently reconstruct, his subjectivity.

5.4. A Contemporary Crisis

The title of the work *6 Minutes* stems from a South African crime statistic. It notes that, in South Africa, an act of abuse against a woman or child occurs every six minutes. The work is a response to disturbing statistics that are released annually, pertaining to the national crime and violence rate. According to these statistics, 55 000 rapes were reported in 2006, whilst it is estimated that another 450 000 cases of rape went unreported. These facts reveal that one in two South African women could expect to be raped in their lifetime. In terms of child rape, roughly 20 000 cases are reported each year (www.rape.co.za Date accessed 31/12/08). The information here reveals that South Africa is, undoubtedly, in the midst of a crisis of sexual abuse towards women and children. This situation resonates with the crises that Rene Girard discusses in relation to ritual sacrifices. In my opinion, *6 Minutes* is a performance

that adopts some of the strategies that Girard proposes in his analysis of crisis and ritual. It does not attempt to use real sacrifice as the ultimate means to end the South African rape crisis, but it does implement liveness and symbols as tools to unpack and examine the social and cultural conditions that cause it. Van Heerden aims to promote a more thorough understanding of crime and sexual violence beyond ubiquitous newspaper articles and news bulletins. “We desperately need to unpack this stuff and examine it, because it’s never going away” (Van Heerden in Nunns 2007: 1). My experience of *6 Minutes*, for instance, allowed me to comprehend the true horrors associated with adult and infant rape, unfiltered by the lens of the media. Being witness to the shocking events of the performance allowed me not only to think about abuse, but also to also feel it, in all its sickening intensity. This experience also encouraged me to play an active role in promoting rape awareness. In 2008 I collaborated with the Rhodes University branch of Amnesty International in the direction of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* (1996). This endeavour, although small, was an attempt to encourage other theatregoers to discuss the nature of sexual violence within a South African, as well as an international context.⁴⁸ My role in this production, in conjunction with my experience of *6 Minutes*, revealed to me the significance of dialogue as a means to develop a greater understanding of certain social crises. Performance art’s attempts to dismantle discursive norms form part of this endeavour. It is my belief that, through unpacking and interrogating discourse through the exposition of live acts, performance art may encourage spectators/witnesses to engage with, and examine the roots of their societal problems.

6 Minutes is by no means a sacrificial ritual in the truest, most brutal sense. It is a

⁴⁸ *The Vagina Monologues* contains elements in which sexual violence is explored in relation to social and political turmoil. For example, a monologue entitled *My Vagina Was My Village* is an exploration of the experiences of women in Bosnian “rape camps” at the time of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the years 1992 and 1995 (www.un.org Date accessed 31/12/08). The piece explores systematic rape as a strategy of war, which was implemented regularly during the conflict.

ritual in which spectators/witnesses are brought close to the exposition of the Real. It is through the awareness promoted by such raw experiences that, I believe, South African society can learn about and subsequently strive to prevent such abhorrent crimes.

6 Minutes therefore functions as an examination of sexual abuse in South Africa. The rape crisis has sparked off similar artistic endeavours from other South African theatre practitioners. A significant piece of theatre concerning this issue is Lara Foot-Newton's *Tshepang* (2003). The play, written and directed by Foot-Newton, grapples with an event in 2001, in which a nine-month girl from Louisvale was "raped and sodomised by her mother's boyfriend" (Fisher 2004: 1). The play does not explore the specifics of the rape or rape victim, but rather the context in which the event occurs. *Tshepang* portrays the conditions of a terribly poor township, in which "the monotony of daily life" is characterized by the frustrated despair of poverty, which indirectly triggers a deadly cycle of abuse that spans generations (Fisher 2004: 1).

Whilst Foot-Newton's *Tshepang* play text provides a deeply delicate treatment of an otherwise horrific subject matter, *6 Minutes* employs confrontation as its main strategy of communication. This work utilizes the strategies of performance art (as explored in the second chapter of this study), with a distinct emphasis on liveness, to create events in which the horrors of abuse are not merely observed, but experienced. *6 Minutes*, in this instance, is a ritual by which the social ills of a community are not only performed on the body of the scapegoat, but also encountered by its witnesses. It is through this distinctly experiential element of the performance that Van Heerden also hopes to encourage dialogue. If spectators/witnesses are compelled to interrogate

the implications of the real, brutal acts that the performance work enacts, then it is possible that the same interrogative strategies could be employed in reality. It is through these crucial interrogations that spectators/witnesses could potentially search for solutions to such problems.

5.5. Van Heerden the Scapegoat

As has been discussed in the third chapter of this study, Girard's notion of sacrifice stems from a need to end the cycle of retaliation that characterizes "the contaminating force of violence" within a society (Menezes 2006: 19). Girard asserts that violence is "endemic" to all societies, in that "it cannot dissipate naturally" (Girard: 1972: 7). Sacrifice, according to Girard, serves to prevent reprisal, and restore social stability. The *pharmakon* is the surrogate victim that is sacrificed in such rituals, and is usually (as has been discussed in Chapter Three) a marginal individual. In *6 Minutes*, Van Heerden nominates himself for sacrifice, and, by playing the marginalized white male Afrikaner, could be viewed as an appropriate scapegoat. I examined earlier in this chapter that the white male Afrikaner is a new marginalized identity. According to Van Heerden, this identity is in its *uitspan*,⁴⁹ traveling in search of a new cultural dispensation. It is also the identity of the male Afrikaner that has the potential to be a most fitting *pharmakon*. Despite existing on the borders of the hegemonic order, he is potent as both antidote and poison to the social ills of the community. The association of the Afrikaner with the social evils of apartheid, as well as with the negative implications of colonialism, reinforces his "poisonous" status. Nunns notes that Peter

⁴⁹ Van Heerden states that the term "*uitspan*" refers to a resting point on a journey, as characterised by the Great Trek. In terms of Van Heerden's performance practice, *uitspan* highlight's the Diasporic Afrikaner male's "journey" on the search for a new cultural dispensation. He notes that "*uitspan* [is a] resting place to gather and allow for a new strategy of practice" (Van Heerden 2004: 20).

van Heerden is deeply concerned with the role of the white South African male in the current problems facing the country:

He contends that South Africa's current social ills are the residue of colonialist rule and he attributes the problems facing South Africa's blacks to the dehumanizing effect of centuries of racist policies (Nunns 2007: 1).

Van Heerden utilizes the representational device of the Voortrekker to characterize the surrogate victim that he becomes, in order to highlight the appearance of the white Afrikaner in his most traditional (and extreme) way. It is the Voortrekker that is most strongly identified with the notion of a far-right Afrikaner. Adam focuses on the significance of Calvinism within the Voortrekker identity, and its role in the development of a collectively ingrained sense of prejudice through religion. Moreover, he argues that it was within "primitive Calvinism" that the origins of what constituted apartheid were conceived (Adam 1979: 17). He states that it was through the "Israeli-like visions" of Boers during the Great Trek that influenced the formation of apartheid policies (Adam 1979: 17). He locates this within the Voortrekkers' "harsh frontier existence" and a stance characterized by a "civilizing mission by a chosen people with a destiny in a sea of primitive heathen natives" (Adam 1979: 17). In incorporating Adam's rather harsh vocabulary into this study, I am by no means advocating a derogatory attitude towards Calvinism and its followers. Rather, I am highlighting how, through their own Diaspora, the Voortrekkers sought to acquire a new cultural point of reference through the subjugation (culturally and politically) of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. Such forms of subjugation ultimately culminated in the institutional prejudice of the apartheid government and resultant negative perceptions of Afrikaners within South Africa and abroad. Adam refers to the premise that "the Afrikaner perception [of apartheid] is less of a tyranny than the necessary result of a divine task" (Adam 1979: 17). When the details of apartheid are

analyzed, it becomes evident that such a “divine task” influenced decades of a “chauvinist ideology of white supremacy” (Adam 1979: 26). Adam suggests that the proto-fascist elements of this institutionalized racism created apartheid based on the segregation of black from white, and a consequential uneven distribution of wealth at the expense of non-white South Africans. Ultimately, it becomes evident that apartheid, at the hands of the Calvinist Voortrekker, both directly and indirectly influenced the crippling poverty experienced by more than nearly half the population, and this provides the context for the devastating events that Foot-Newton illustrates in *Tshepang*. The Voortrekker may then be an appropriate scapegoat in the sacrificial ritual of *6 Minutes*.

Girard notes that the scapegoat must inspire loathing within the community (this loathing is similar to that which the subject experiences through the process of abjection). The state of the Afrikaner male as “dis-eased” and “on the border of disintegration” characterises him as an apt scapegoat (Marneweck 2006: 2). Girard notes that in order for the surrogate victim to confirm its status as scapegoat, it needs to reflect the crisis of the community in its very constitution. Menezes relates this to the fact that “those with deformity and infirmity” immediately became scapegoats, for they physically represented the “diseased and disordered states of the society as a whole” (Menezes 2006: 26). This stigma, to return to Girard, inspired the collective, mimetic violence⁵⁰ of the community, which culminated in the sacrifice. In the case of the Afrikaner male, such stigma are not physical, but historical. It is the dark history of the Afrikaner that has inspired its dis-ease. Adam also notes that the current dislocated states of this identity stem from a struggle to adapt to “a post-colonial

⁵⁰ “Mimetic violence” refers to the unanimity of collective violence as viewed in sacrifice (Praeg 2007: 42). In terms of my study of *6 Minutes*, Van Heerden is the “othered” identity that inspires a collective loathing, which ultimately leads to his sacrifice.

reality” (Adam 1979:17). The Afrikaner male may therefore be the “othered” identity of the *pharmakon*.

Another aspect of the Afrikaner male (as the poisonous component of the *pharmakon*) lies in some of the distorted notions pertaining to the masculine ideal that exist within certain discourses. For instance, earlier in this chapter I noted how the characteristic of aggression might be misinterpreted in some practices of Afrikaner masculinity, to result in unhealthy and threatening modes of behaviour. *6 Minutes* links such behaviour to the current crisis of sexual abuse. Violent behaviour finds fruition within oppressive discourses of masculinity and is marked by unflinching bigotry and misogyny. It is within a strictly patriarchal family system that women and children are relegated to positions of subservience, at the cost of their identities. Adam, again, emphasizes the role of the Calvinist doctrine, and notes that misogyny and racism are the result of “conformity pressure” as espoused by the “authoritarian” characteristics of the deeply patriarchal family system (Adam 1979: 20). This pressure, in turn, results in the development of “repressed aggression” that finds its outlet upon certain “othered” individuals, including women, children and non-whites. *6 Minutes* addresses how such ingrained patriarchal discourses influence the way that rape, and victims of rape, are viewed within the broader South African context. According to the *Survivor Journey* website, “of South African men who knew somebody had been raped, 16 percent believed that the rape survivor had enjoyed the experience and had asked for it” (www.rape.co.za: 2006. Accessed 31/12/08). With these thoughts in mind, I wish to highlight that it is not my intention to simply state that the issues concerning rape in South Africa are purely the cause of male Afrikaner Calvinism. Rape, infant rape, and other modes of sexual abuse are the products of many complex

factors, whether sociological or psychological, and are unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter. For instance, Foot-Newton's *Tshepang* provides an interpretation of infant rape that is exclusively based within the squalor of South Africa's poorest townships. *6 Minutes*, although referring to the same phenomenon, derives its context from that which relates to the performance artist himself – the identity of the white Afrikaner male. It is through the analysis of Peter van Heerden's works that I refer to the specific notion of Afrikaner masculinity in crisis, with reference to extreme manifestations of patriarchal discourse and religious practice. Moreover, it is from the malpractice of these doctrines that the misogynistic attitudes characterising a dis-eased masculinity stem. It is through this lens that Van Heerden's performative rituals concerning rape and sexual violence must be viewed. Ultimately, he does not attempt to offer a solution to the problem of rape in its entirety, but he does examine and challenge a facet of it.

It is worth noting that Rene Girard's *pharmakon* need not be directly guilty of the events of the social crisis. This notion reveals the chasm that exists between a justified punishment (an execution, for example) and a sacrifice. According to Girard, the *pharmakon* is not the architect of the crimes that threaten the community, but the embodiment of the community's dis-ease. The *pharmakon* "is considered a polluted object, whose living presence contaminates everything it comes into contact with" (Girard 1972: 95). This notion is apt in the case of Peter van Heerden. As the performance artist, he is by no means the direct perpetrator of the crimes and crises associated with sexual abuse. By employing the representational device of the Voortrekker, he is embodying a figure of South African society that reflects an aspect of its social problems. In this instance, symbols (in the form of the representation of

the Voortrekker) and the live (in terms of the abject acts performed) function together in *6 Minutes* to create an event akin to the sacrifice of the *pharmakon*.

5.6. The Scene of the Crime

If *6 Minutes* is to function as an “exorcism” of the spectre of rape in South Africa, what ritualistic strategies does it employ to encourage transformation? The site-specificity of the performance thrusts the spectator/witness into what Robyn Sassen (a festival reviewer for *Cue*) describes as “an experience coloured by the terrifying unknown” (Sassen 2007: 1). It was the proximity of the spectators to the visceral performance that enhanced its experiential quality, and therefore its similarity to ritual. The unpredicted and highly violent rape⁵¹ that opens the experience plunges the spectator into an ethical crisis of her own. She is suspended between the urge to act (for example, to assist the woman being sexually assaulted) and the knowledge that what is happening is “just” a performance. In terms of performance art, it is this very state of liminality (within the spectator) that is required in order to plunge the performance into the realm of the experiential and the participative.⁵² With reference to this opening act of *6 Minutes*, Sassen states that “It [was] like being at the scene of a violent crime” (Sassen 2007: 1). But the spectator/witness is not merely destabilized by the performance’s events alone. Van Heerden employs various strategies to enhance the sensorial impact of the performance through the inclusion of elements such as raw meat, hot water, fire and tepid entrails to encourage an experience that is physically unsettling as it is emotionally disturbing. After the simulated rape, the spectators (after much confusion) eventually follow the perpetrator, where, under a

⁵¹ Although the rape was not real, it was still realistically performed.

⁵² For other examples of the participative elements of performance art, refer to Chapter Two, and in particular, my examination of Marina Abramovic’s *Lips of St. Thomas* (1975) and *Rhythm O* (1974).

tree, he is submerged in the bag of blood and innards, which has been described earlier in this chapter.

Here begins Van Heerden's journey, from "perpetrator" to "sacrificial victim." These moments of *6 Minutes* violently perform the *pharmakon's* journey after its birth. Immediately after spilling out of the torn transparent "womb," accompanied by the overwhelming stench of the falling blood and entrails, Van Heerden is fiercely whipped by fellow performer, Andre Laubscher. At this point it is worth noting that these sequences allow both performer and spectator to experience the violent development of a subject plunged into an authoritarian, patriarchal realm. Laubscher's whipping is unrelenting, as he quotes Biblical passages in Afrikaans that accompany the subject into socialization. It also reinforces the effects of a strict Calvinist doctrine on the developing child, and reveals how the influence of an aggressive father figure distorts the Lacanian Law of the Father, stretching it to the most extreme state of proto-fascist control. The significance of the development of the child within a violent context reverberates throughout Foot-Newton's *Tshepang* as well as *6 Minutes*. In *Tshepang*, Foot-Newton refers to the character Alfred, who, at the age of three, was nearly beaten to death with a broomstick. The events of the play reveal that this same Alfred is the rapist of the nine-month old child. He thus repeats "his own childhood molestation" on the body of another victim (Fisher 2004: 1). Van Heerden's scapegoat enacts similar atrocious deeds, including a simulated sex act with a plastic baby doll.

Throughout these instances, the whip continually abuses his body, and it is through this whipping that the scapegoat is prepared for his own murder. In light of *6 Minutes'*

preoccupation with Calvinism, Van Heerden's ritual flagellation also resonates with that of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, prior to his crucifixion. Such acts, according to Girard, function to ignite the crowd who are witness to the persecution. He notes that, with reference to the Passion, such rituals of degradation encourage the "mimetic violence" of the crowd (Girard1986: 115).

In *6 Minutes*, these rituals eventually culminate in the sacrifice of the surrogate victim. Van Heerden is eventually "sacrificed" by being pummeled with heavy bags of white lime. He falls under the weight of the bags, and is dragged, still naked, to a tree, from which he is hung upside down by the ankles, an act which resonates with the upside-down crucifixion of St. Peter. Martyrdom, in this instance, reveals to the persecutors the sacred elements of the otherwise derided *pharmakon*. In these acts, Peter van Heerden shifts from perpetrator to martyr, revealing the conjunction between violent and sacred within sacrificial ritual, and namely, performance art.

In *6 Minutes*, Peter van Heerden undergoes two significant transformations. Through rituals of abjection, he brings his body to the margins of the Symbolic, and by doing so, he conducts a redefinition of his subjectivity as defined by the discursive constructions of white Afrikaner maleness. Secondly, he nominates himself as the surrogate victim for the enactment of sacrifice. Through becoming the *pharmakon*, Van Heerden performs the "scourge" of the community in crisis, as well as the martyr – the sacred entity that promises the potential for the transformation of the society in peril. It is within these transformations that Van Heerden demonstrates the link between performance art and ritual, and its significance for both the subject and the community.

5.7. Conclusion

It has been discussed how, through the visceral experience of performance art (especially through the performance artist's transgression of the social boundaries of space and the body) the spectator/witness is also transformed. However, in order for performance art as sacrificial ritual to succeed, this transformation needs to transcend the temporal experience of the performance alone, and affect the spectator/witness beyond the designated space of the performance. Peter van Heerden proposes that the performance as ritual must not end with the performance. He invites the spectators to participate further through designating a space for "dialogue" at the end of the performance. At the end of the 2007 performance of *6 Minutes*, the audience was invited to remain at the performance site and interact with each other and the performers. In such sessions, spectators were allowed to respond to the work in a direct interface with the performance artist himself. It is through these interactions that Van Heerden hopes for the actualization of "constant and 'reiterative' communication to take place (Van Heerden 2004: 19). It is through such constant communication that the issues pertaining to the crises that South Africa faces may potentially be unpacked and resolved. Van Heerden proposes that, through a performance practice ritual and interaction, "a new cultural dialogue of South Africa" can hopefully be attained (Van Heerden 2004: 19). Van Heerden includes this need for reiterative communication in his manifesto. "*Saamtrekking*" is the strategy that is suggested in his thesis, which literally means, "pulling together" (Van Heerden 2004: 19). It is through *saamtrekking* that the performance artist and the spectators, as a community, can collectively "push through to the other side," and develop a common sense of understanding pertaining to relevant South African issues (Van Heerden 2004: 19). With reference to the identity of the Afrikaner male within contemporary

South Africa, Van Heerden highlights the importance of “unpacking history” (Van Heerden in Sichel 2006: 1). Performance, in this instance, is simultaneously ephemeral and progressive. The ephemerality of performance art resides in its liveness, in the immediacy of the actions performed which aim to provoke, and ultimately to transform the spectator. Performance art’s progression lies in its after-effects, the residues that continue to affect the spectator after the events have ended. In light of this, the performance never really ends. It continues to be enacted through the dialogue of its witnesses, through the spirit of *saamtrekking*. I would suggest, through Van Heerden’s manifesto and performances, (as well as through the other examples of performance art that have been included in this study) that performance art can function as a contemporary manifestation of the rituals that once were deemed so vital in the reconstruction of identity and community. Performance art encourages (and sometimes necessitates) spectators/witnesses “pulling together,” getting involved and engaging with acts that function as microcosms of the larger social sphere in which they live (Van Heerden 2004: 19). It is through these effects that the true significance of performance art is revealed.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Within this investigation I have sought to highlight the links that exist between performance art and ritual. I have explored how both phenomena operate within the domain of the Real. Through the exposition of live, real acts within the frame of fictive performance, performance art attempts to dismantle the mechanisms of representation. Through this, it aims to question and challenge the discursive formations of identity within various established discourses. The violent performance works of the artists described in this study provoke a re-evaluation of the construction of identity through processes of abjection. Through encountering the violence of the Real as espoused in the abject, these artists perform rituals in which subjectivity is dissolved, and brought back to the dark and bloody domains of its origin.

The implications of the performance of the abject body are apparent in the works of Steven Cohen, who interrogates the constructions of his cultural and sexual identity through the exposition of the monstrous. In these instances, Cohen performs the monster as the embodiment of the Real, beyond the grasp of signification. It is also through the acquisition of a monstrous distinctiveness that the subject is also brought to a state of liminality, and is transformed into an entity that potentially resists the mechanisms of representation. Peter van Heerden's rituals of abjection also serve deconstruct and reinterpret his identity as a white male South African. They also function as cathartic rituals of self-sacrifice in attempts to interrogate and to potentially resolve the crises that are specific to South African society.

These performed rituals seek to alter the perceptions of those who are witness to them. I have examined how, through the unmediated experience of the suffering, abject body of the performer, the spectator/witness is also brought to a liminal space in which he/she finds herself suspended between the roles of passive spectator and active participant. Without the lens of representation, the spectator/witness becomes immersed in the present, live actions of the performance art event. With the exposition of this immediate perception, it is hoped that the spectator/witness develops alternative ways of interpreting social and cultural phenomena. Such interpretations aim to influence the ways in which social problems are unpacked and combated.

The outcomes of these endeavors, however, are never absolutely certain. Indeed, performance art is by no means a definitive solution to the crises that communities face, whether in terms of collective identity or social emergencies (such as the pertinent issue of sexual violence in South Africa, as explored in *6 Minutes*). However, I argue that the visceral horror that such acts provoke is necessary in order for collective (and established) attitudes concerning identity and society to be challenged, and hopefully, altered for the benefit of the larger community.

In light of these discoveries, performance art extends its significance from practice to praxis. Performance art questions the role of art in society through practical investigations and interrogations of traditional forms. In such investigations, the aesthetic falls away to accommodate the political. Performance art utilizes certain strategies – such as liveness and the abject – to comment on and investigate social, political and personal phenomena, beyond the “densely mediated” qualities of

traditional “cultural experience” (Heathfield 2004: 7). The partnership of destruction and creation in performance art demonstrates its drive to “encounter new realities” through the dismantlement of established norms (Heathfield 2004: 7).

My own experience of performance art has also fundamentally altered my own position in terms of art-making. It is within the immediacy of the performance event that exposes the fundamental, Real, and often disturbing realities that constitute the true nature of the subject. This exposition lends performance its fundamental potency, and its overwhelming, inescapable truth. I believe that in order for this potency to be retained, more artists should explore this notion of the live, and its significance in interrogating the discourses in which they (and all subjects) exist.

Bibliography

- Adam, H. (1979). *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Artaud, A. (1970). *The Theatre and its Double*. Translated by Victor Corti. London: Calder & Boyars.
- Athey, R. (2004). Public's Perception of Self-Destructive Behaviour: Repackaging it Into a Rite. *Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.
- Auslander, P. (2003). *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Benvenuto, B and Kennedy, R. (1986). *The Works of Jacques Lacan*. London: Free Association Books.
- Berghaus, G. (2005). *Avant-garde Performance: Live events and electronic technologies*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bernstein, M.A. (1992). *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the abject hero*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Blau, H (1992). *To All Appearances: Ideology and performance*. London: Routledge.
- Burke, C. (2000). They Cut Segametsi into Parts. *Anthropological Quarterly*. The George Washington Institute for Ethnographic Research.
- Butler, J (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.

Carlson, M. (1996). Resistant Performance. *Performance: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge.

Cohen, J.J ed. (1996). *Monster Theory: Reading culture*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Cohen, W.A. and Johnson, R. e.d. (2005). *Filth : dirt, disgust, and modern life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Diamond, E. e.d.(1996). *Performance and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge.

Ensler, E. (2000). *The Vagina Monologues*. Dramatists Play Service.

Feral, J. (1982). Performance and Theatricality: The subject demystified. *Performance: critical concepts in performance and literary studies*. London and New York: Routledge.

Fisher, P. (2004). Review of *Tshepang* by Lara Foot-Newton.
www.britishtheatreinfo.com/reviews/tshepang. (Last accessed 04/01/09)

Fischer-Lichte, E. (1997). Performance Art and Ritual: Bodies in performance. *Performance: critical concepts in literary and cultural studies*. London and New York: Routledge.

Fischer-Lichte, E. (2005). *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual : exploring forms of political theatre*. London, New York: Routledge.

Fletcher, J and Benjamin, A. ed. (1990). *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The work of Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge.

.Forster, S. ed. (1996). *Dada: The coordinates of cultural politics*. New York: G.K. Hall.

Foster, H. (1993). *Compulsive Beauty*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Franko B. (2004). *I Feel Empty. Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.
- Freud, S. (1919). *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the psychic lives of savages and neurotics*. London: George Routledge.
- Freud, S. (1927). *The Ego and the Id*. Authorized translation. London: Woolf.
- Freud, S. (1922). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by Hubback, C. J. M. London and Vienna: The International Psychoanalytical Press
- Freud, S. (1938). *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by A. A. Brill. New York: Modern Library.
- Freud, S. (1938). *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. Translated and edited, with an introduction by Dr. A. A. Brill. New York: Modern Library.
- Gallop, J. (1985). *Reading Lacan*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Girard, R. (1979). *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Girard, R. (1989). *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Goldberg, R. (1979). *Performance: Live art 1909 to the present*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Goldberg, R. (1980). Performance--Art for All? *Art Journal*. Vol. 40, No. ½ (Autumn - Winter, 1980), pp. 369-376.
- Goldberg, R. (1988). *Performance Art: From Futurism to the present*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Goldberg, R. (2004). *One Hundred Years. Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.

Gordimer, N. (1983). Art and the State. *The Nation*. 1983/12/24.

Grimes, W. (1994). For Endowment, One Performer Means Trouble. *The New York Times*. 1994/07/07.

Gross, E. (1990). The Body of Signification. In Fletcher, J and Benjamin, A (ed). *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The work of Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge

Hawker, D and Makoba, N. (2007). SABC pulls contentious drama on circumcision. *Pretoria News*. 2007/04/02.

Heathfield, A. ed. (2004). *Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.

Heathfield, A. (2004). Alive. *Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.

Howell, A (2000, c1999). *The Analysis of Performance Art: a guide to its theory and practice*. Netherlands: Harwood Academic.

Janse van Rensburg, S. (2006). Red Eye: Access Denied/Access Granted in Durban. www.artthrob.co.za (Last accessed 02/08/08).

Jones, A. (2004). Working the Flesh. *Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.

Kantor, M. (1992). *The Jewish Timeline Encyclopaedia: A year-by-year history from creation to present*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Kaye, N. (2000). *Site-Specific Art: Performance, place and documentation*. New York: Routledge.

Kemp, Y. (2003). Big Flap Over “Senseless Murder” of Chicken. *Cape Argus*. 12/08/03.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An essay on abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristeva, J. (1986). *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Moi, T. Oxford: Blackwell.

Kristeva, J. (1997). *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Oliver, K. New York: Columbia University Press.

Krouse, M. (2007). Moving the Changing Body. www.chico.mweb.co.za/art/2007/ (Last accessed 22/11/07).

Krouse, M. (2007). Objects of Affection. www.chico.mweb.co.za/2007/ (Last accessed 22/11/07).

Krut, D. (2003). *Steven Cohen*. ed. Jillian Carman. Johannesburg: David Krut.

Lacan, J. (1959). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Transl. by Porter, D. London and New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (1966). *Ecrits: A Selection*. Transl. by Fink, B. London and New York: Norton.

Lacan, J. (1988). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leader, D and Groves, J. (2000). *Introducing Lacan*. ed. Richard Appignanesi. Trumpington: Icon.

Lincoln, B. (1989). *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative studies of myth, ritual, and classification*. New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press. London, New York: Routledge.

Marneweck, A (2006). Antagonising History: the monstrous masculine in Peter van Heerden's *Bok*. Unpublished UCT article.

Menezes, N. (2006). Towards a Post-Sacrificial Theory of Identity Formation. Rhodes University: Unpublished M.A. Thesis.

Merrett, C. (1994). A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and intellectual repression in South Africa. Cape Town: David Phillip.

Nelkin, D, Willis, D and Parris, C. ed. (1991). *A Disease of Society: Cultural and Institutional Responses to AIDS*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nunns, S. (2007). Struggle for Relevance in Post-Apartheid Era. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/13/theater/> (Last accessed 16/05/08).

Parker, A and Kosofsky Sedgwick, E. (1995). *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge.

Perloff, M. (2003). *The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, avant-guerre, and the language of rupture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Praeg, L. (2007). *The Geometry of Violence: Africa, Girard, Modernity*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.

O' Connor, N. (1990). The An- Arche of Psychotherapy. *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The work of Julia Kristeva*. in Fletcher, J. and Benjamin, A. (ed.) London: Routledge.

Phelan, P. (1993). *Unmarked: The politics of performance*. London: Routledge.

Preston-Dunlop. (1996). Notes on Bodies in Dada. *Dada: the co-ordinates of cultural politics*. New York: G.K. Hall.

Prevots, N. (1985). Zurich Dada and Dance: Formative Ferment. *Dance Research Journal*. 17(1). pp. 3-8. University of Illinois Press.

Quick, A. (1996). Approaching the Real: Reality Effects and the Play of Fiction. *Performance Research: On Illusion*. 1(3).

- Quick, A. (2004). *Taking Place: Encountering the Live. Live: Art and Performance*. London: Tate.
- Radner, H and Luckett, M. (1999). *Swinging Single*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Reddy, V. (2001). Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality. *Agenda*, No. 50.
- Reinelt, J. (1997). The Politics of Discourse: Performativity meets theatricality. *Performance: Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies*. London and New York: Routledge
- Rush, M (1999). A Noisy Silence. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 2-10.
- Sassen, R. (2007). Not for the faint of heart. cue.ru.ac.za/theatre/drama/2007/ (Last accessed 18/05/08)
- Schimmel, P. ed. (1998). *Out of Actions: Between performance and the object: 1949-1979*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Schorn, D. (2007). Rwanda Genocide Survivor Recalls Horror. www.cbsnews.com/stories.com (Last accessed 04/01/09).
- Stallybrass, P and White, A. (1986). *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen.
- Swart, S. (2001). Man, Gun, Horse: Hard Right Afrikaner masculine identity in post-Apartheid South Africa. in Morell, R. (ed). *Changing Masculinities: Men in South Africa*. University of Natal: Zed Press.
- Tang, C.W.A. (2005). *Gazing at Horror: Body performance in the wake of mass social trauma*. Rhodes University: Unpublished MA thesis.

Titlestad, M. (1995). Seeing Things Differently: Four years of teaching English in Botswana. *Scrutiny*2. 1 (1).

Thorp, D. (2001). Franko B. www.franko-b.com (Last accessed 04/01/09).

Tzara, T. (1977). *Seven Dada Manifestoes and Lampisteries*. Translated by Barbara Wright. London: Calder.

Van Heerden. (2004). Hitchiking on the Ox-wagon of Destiny: Voortrekker-Draadtrekker-Saamtrekker. Unpublished MA Thesis. University of Cape Town.

Wessels, V. (2008). Antidote to Racism and Rage in Rugby? *Pretoria News*. 11/09/08

Wilden, A. (1968). *The Language of the Self: The function of language in psychoanalysis*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Willmott, H.P. (2003). *World War I*. New York: Dorling Kindersley.

Wilson, M. (1997). Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of This Century. *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4. pp. 2-3.

Zizek, S (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso.

Other Websites

www.artmagazine.arcadja.it Date accessed: 30/12/08.

www.aubinpictures.com Date accessed 22/08/08.

www.artthrob.co.za Date accessed 22/08/08.

www.critical-art.net. Date accessed 03/01/09.

www.mocp.org Date accessed 22/08/08.

www.nytimes.com Date accessed 22/08/08.

www.rape.co.za Date accessed Date accessed 31/12/08.

www.stelarc.va.com.au Date accessed 22/06/09.

www.un.org Date accessed 31/12/08.

www.youmustbecertainofthedevil.blogspot.com Date accessed 22/08/08.

