

**THE MIRROR AS DEVICE:
A STUDY OF THE MIRROR MOTIF IN SELECT EXAMPLES OF SOUTH AFRICAN
AND WESTERN ARTWORKS**

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And indeed there will be a time...
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.
[Lomas 2000:7 (Elliot 1936: 12)]

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To Dad, until our paths cross again, in end of this life or the next.

DECLARATION

Except where acknowledged to the contrary, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other tertiary institution.

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December 2010

SUPERVISOR'S CONSENT

As the candidate's Supervisor I have approved this dissertation for submission.

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Michelle Stewart

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The mirror, like a painting, reveals an illusion of reality on a flat two-dimensional surface that captures a segment of our world bound within its frame (Schmahmann 2004:6). But what happens when an artwork itself depicts a mirror? This frequent occurrence can be referred to as the mirror motif in art. This study aims to explore instances of such occurrences.

In western discourses of knowledge, *sight* was regarded as the sense of validation and was favoured above all senses. This is one of the many reasons why western tradition perceived 'seeing as knowing' (Bartsch 2006:15). The mirror motif formed part of the foundation of western tradition, as symbol of truth and reality in the drive toward enlightenment.

From the earliest times, the mirror motif established itself as a masterful object - a precise reflector of reality (Enoch 2006:1). This mimetic nature of the mirror motif is prevalent in western art from the medieval age through to the Renaissance. It also had a significant influence on the Academic tradition (Phay-Vakalis 2001:28). The mirror's mimetic nature of reality acted as a template, to govern the rules of two-dimensional fine art. Artworks were to obey the logic of the mirror, therefore artworks were judged according to its 'mirror-likeness' of reality. (Meskimmon 1996:1)

While the mimetic nature of the mirror motif was significant at its inception, the characteristics of the mirror motif has expanded over centuries to become dynamic and varied (Phay-Vakalis 2001:28). The reflective nature of the mirror motif has evolved since medieval times and has come to suggest more than a precise reflector of reality. It is these complexities of meaning that this dissertation aims to investigate.

According to Stanke, the mirror in ancient times was so rare and expensive, that only the wealthy could afford it (2004:1). Today the mirror is no longer costly and rare, nor ornate like ancient mirrors which were surrounded by gold and jewels. Today, the mirror is everywhere, from our first morning encounters in the bathroom, to surrounding us in the

car and bracing entire cities in the form of skyscrapers. A superstition often held is that the one who breaks a mirror would encounter seven years of bad luck (Stanke 2004:1). This superstition is thought to have derived in order to deter breakage of the precious object (Bartsch 2006:17). Today, the mirror is no longer considered rare and as a result - when a mirror breaks, seven years of bad luck is often considered in jest. The mirror may have lost its rarity, but since its existence the mirror still remains a precious object, ever regarded for its distinctive reflective quality. (Bartsch 2006:17)

The earliest and most inexpensive mirror of all is undoubtedly, water. Margret Stoljar posits the mirror's symbolic association to water as timeless, from the nymph - Narcissus' first encounter with his reflection in the water of a still pond to the mirror reflection's volatile, water-like nature (1990:366). Like water, the mirror glass' mirroring surface is not static but fluid. Stoljar reinforces this notion by stating that the mirror reflection is like water which is volatile, at times frozen, flowing or silent (1990:366). Stoljar employs the terms *open* and *closed* with regards to water (1990:366). When water is in a state of movement or in darkness its reflective surface is *closed*. The surface is *open* when water is silent, still and in light. The mirror, like its ancient predecessor - water, chooses to be either *open* or *closed* according to its variables (1990:366). Water together with the lexis that defines the mirror, implies the volatile nature of *self*: where in recognizing one's reflection in the mirror, something more complex than the surface of visage is evoked. (Stoljar 1990:366)

The mirror motif has triggered many specular theories and magical notions. Its early associations varied – from its conception as the reflective vision of God, to a cursed device of vanity. Borzello maintains that the mirror motif eventually shed its ties to vanity and around the early twentieth century it became a symbol of introspection in self-portraiture (1998:128). Around the mid-twentieth century in Europe the mirror also became associated with an allegory - for the search of truth behind appearance (Borzello 1998:140). Soko Phay-Vakalis states that later the mirror motif expanded to include notions of illusion (2001:28). It is these layered, dynamic and transient characteristics associated with the mirror motif that the study seeks to examine.

Apart from Chapter 1 - an introductory to situate the mirror motif, there are three thematic chapters in this study. **Chapter 2** entitled, *Unconscious Drives of the Mirror* deals with

the concept of the mirror in relation to the unconscious. The chapter will focus on the mirror motif in relation to the unconscious and psychoanalysis. Chapter 2.2 examines the mirror's association with Surrealism and refers to selected artworks from this period - René Magritte for example. This section will also explore the mirror motif's relation to the metaphysical domain. Chapter 2.3 to 2.5 delves into the psychoanalytic drives of the unconscious such as narcissism, the *mirror stage* and the Oedipus complex. These psychoanalytic theories are further explored within the context of specific artworks, for instance in Chapter 2.3 narcissism is explored in relation to the artworks of Max Ernst's *Echo* (1936), Nicolas Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* (1629-1630), *Narcissus* (c1600) by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and Dalí's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937). The *mirror stage* will be discussed in Chapter 2.4, in relation to Dalí's *Les Chants de Maldor*. Chapter 2.5 briefly examines the Oedipus complex in relation to the mirror motif in Christine Dixie's, *Threshold Series* (1997).

As discussed earlier, man has privileged sight above all other senses and this trait is evident even today where it is regarded that *seeing is knowing*. Bartsch notes, 'of all the senses, sight especially makes possible knowledge and clarifies many differences.' (2006:45). It is within this context that **Chapter 3, *Women at the Mirror*** explores the masculine traditions - primarily the notion of the male gaze that dominated western art until the nineteenth century. This section will also investigate the manner in which female artists subvert this notion (Borzello 1998:7). Chapter 3 first references the female's earliest link to the mirror by means of vanity. Chapter 3.1 will consider select mirror motif artworks that are associated with vanity, (mostly dating from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century). Chapter 3.2 locates the male gaze in relation to earlier artworks of Venus and then discusses the inversion of the male gaze in later local artworks – such as Dorothy Kay's *Eye of the Beholder* (1953) and Penny Siopis' *Melancholia* (1986). Chapter 3.3 will mainly operate within female self-portraiture and the mirror, relating to artworks by Helen Chadwick, Sylvia Sleigh and Cindy Sherman. This chapter looks at how these artworks actively negate the issues of feminism pertaining to the mirror motif, which explicitly jeopardise the notion of masculine superiority.

Often the mirror is associated with identity in the context of *self*. As specified by Bartsch, seeing yourself in the mirror is how others see you (2006:23). According to Willard McCarty, 'The use of mirroring to represent cognition itself, which we still call *reflection*

was well established in classical times.’ (Bartsch 2006:54). In this manner the mirror becomes a device of introspection, especially in self-portraiture. This account of the mirror in antiquity’s function to incite self-knowledge (when one confronts their reflection in the mirror) is not definite, but is rather an exploration of what the mirror was interpreted as, at the time. The *self* is thought to be acquired by this outer appearance. In this instance the mirror is device which turns ‘viewer subject’ into ‘viewed object’ because one often judges their self or appearance in the reflection of a mirror (Bartsch 2006:23). With this in mind, **Chapter 4** entitled *Facets of the Looking Glass*, observes how the mirror’s reflection of reality could come to mean something other than that of reality. The mirror is termed *speculum* in Latin, which could be associated with the idea of *speculate* or to look at (Bartsch 2006:42). Chapter 4.1 *Reflected observer and implied observer*, explores the paradox between actual viewer and implied viewer in the works of William Kentridge, Penny Siopis, Marion Arnold and *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez. Chapter 4.2 *Mirroring the psyche*, investigates the interpretation of mirror motif as reflective of the soul or psyche in relation to *Girl at the Mirror* by Pablo Picasso (1932) and *Who is Pinky Pinky* (2002) by Penny Siopis. Finally, Chapter 4.3 briefly debates the positive and negative associations of the mirror with reference to *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434) by Jan Van Eyck and Hieronymus Bosch’s *Seven Deadly Sins* (1485). In these instances the mirror motif could be perceived as an instrument pertaining to God or the Devil.

It is hoped that by seeking to foreground selected themes relating to the mirror motif in art, this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the complex and layered interpretations of the mirror motif in art and why it still over centuries captures our attention.

Methodology

Due to the study's classification as a Social Science and the central focus being art theory, an appropriate method to undertake is qualitative research. Specific reference to socio-historical analysis will also be conducted. In this regard, the qualitative approach will investigate the main focus of the study in terms of the critical analysis of specific artworks that pertain to the mirror motif. In keeping with the nature of qualitative research, these examples have been purposely selected, as they typify certain key areas of mirror motif in the study. The qualitative analysis will also investigate the study in terms of the broader critical theory relating to art historical discourses (critical theory is recognised as one of the key paradigms of contemporary qualitative research) (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

To an extent, the dissertation will employ postmodernist questioning and analysis by means of deconstruction. A postmodernist stance offers the notion of heterogeneous research, critical reflection and understanding. John Dewey defines the nature of reflective thought as 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends' (Dewey 1933:9). It is hoped that through a postmodernist stance (of critically engaging with various discourses relating to the study) that it becomes possible to dismantle the former western traditions of the mirror motif from contemporary artworks. Drawing from Dewey's account of critical assessment, this dissertation will not limit itself to only postmodern theories. A subjective position is undertaken, as it is nearly impossible for a researcher to take a 'neutral' or distanced position and if achievable, is ultimately problematic (Blanche and Durrheim 1999:411). Even so, the subjective approach will be supported and referenced with appropriate academic texts.

The dissertation will also utilize Foucault's Ascending Type Analysis. In terms of the analysis of specific artworks, this form of analysis will enable the dissertation to explore the varied interpretations and broader discourses relating to the mirror motif that each example reflects. According to Rainbow, this method of analysis is suitable as there is no particular, fixed interpretation of the mirror motif in art (1994: 248). Conversely, the research will simultaneously examine what knowledge the artwork or artist intends to convey. As the dissertation does umbrella the theme of the mirror motif in art, all the artworks discussed will literally depict a mirror, with a few exceptions such as René Magritte's *Faux Mirror* (1928) where the retina of an eye acts as a mirror.

In embracing the Ascending Type Analysis, the dissertation does not impose particular artworks into a particular category or understanding, such as the belief that the mirror motif *only* communicates illusion. For example, the dissertation is not titled, '*The mirror motif as an illusionary device in art*' – as this would be forcing artworks pertaining to the mirror motif to be forced under the single theme of illusion. Instead the dissertation title, '*The mirror motif as a device in art*' clearly indicates its intention: to *explore* the meaning of selected artworks which pertain to the mirror motif. The mirror is then explored as a device - a device probable to multiple and interrelated meanings (not just as an object of illusion) (Jørgensen 1999).

The methodology research will implement the Ascending Type Analysis by firstly exploring specific artworks pertaining to the mirror motif. Each artwork relating to the mirror motif is examined separately. In this manner, information on the mirror motif in art becomes additive, which enhances research and knowledge, rather than employing a subtractive analysis. In the process of deconstructing the artworks, this will help reveal larger themes and its paradoxes. The dissertation will explore artworks pertaining to the mirror motif according to three main themes to be relayed in each chapter. The three general perspectives utilized in this dissertation are:

a) Psychoanalytic

Psychoanalytic theories will be used to explore the unconscious, in issues surrounding the mirror motif. The dissertation will employ psychoanalytic theories in order to investigate the mirror motif in relation to surrealist artworks of Salvador Dalí and René Magritte in Chapter 2 which pertain to the metaphysical realm. Surrealism is inextricably bound to psychoanalysis - it is the unconscious which binds the two. The surrealist movement was enriched by the writings of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and André Breton's *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924) for instance, which the study will briefly reference (Lomas 2000: 12-14). The psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, André Breton and Jacques Lacan will provide some insight for Chapter 2. The Freudian theory of narcissism will be related to in Chapter 2.3 entitled *Narcissus*, which explores the artworks of Max Ernst's *Echo* (1936), Nicolas Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* (1629-1630) and *Narcissus* (c1600) by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and Dalí's *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937).

Artworks which draw upon other Freudian theories, such as the Oedipus complex and the death drive will be discussed in Chapter 2. For instance, the dissertation will touch on classical theories of Freudian Oedipal drives in relation to Christine Dixie's *Threshold Series* (1997) which stems from the Oedipus complex. Jacques Lacan's hypothesis of the *mirror stage* will be discussed in order to attain a better understanding of the psychological component of the mirror motif in art with regards to Chapter 2.4, Dalí's *Les Chants de Maldor*. This section will employ the theories of the *mirror stage* by Jacques Lacan in conjunction with Kristevian *abjection*.

b) Feminism

In relation to the gaze, deconstructive processes located in postmodern feminist art theory will be undertaken. The dissertation often employs the word 'feminism' or feminist. It should be noted that the term 'feminism' is a broad discourse. The notion 'feminism' in this dissertation is contextualised with regard to the exploration of the mirror motif's relation to the female image. The dissertation will also employ the art theories of Marsha Meskimmon and Brenda Schmahmann in order to attain a more critical engagement of selected artists such as Penny Siopis, Marion Arnold, Helen Chadwick and Dorothy Kay. Particular reference will be made to the theories of Meskimmon and Schmahmann's term *artist's studio* and 'Venus at the mirror' trope in Chapter 3.2 entitled, *Venus and the male gaze*. The dissertation will speculate the implicit inversion of the male gaze in later local artworks of Dorothy Kay's *Eye of the Beholder* (1953) and Penny Siopis' *Melancholia* (1986) in Chapter 3.2.1: *Subverting Venus and the artist's studio*. The study will also investigate the manner in which artists such as Helen Chadwick, Sylvia Sleigh and Cindy Sherman explicitly subvert the Academic western tradition of self-portraiture. The underpinning of the male gaze theory will enable the dissertation to then observe how female artists, such as Chadwick, Sleigh and Sherman negate the issues of feminism pertaining to the mirror motif and purposely jeopardise the notion of patriarchy.

c) Alternate reality

The dissertation will research the manner in which contemporary theories of mirror motif in art differ or draw upon its earlier mirror interpretations. Some earlier interpretations regard the mirror's demonic function as an object of illusion and trickery in Late Medieval Europe (Phay-Vakalis 2001: 28). According to Phay-Vakalis, later interpretations in the Renaissance locate the mirror instrument as a precise reflector of truth (2001: 28). Like

many of the earlier theories of the mirror motif in art, Carla Gottlieb describes the mirror as an instrument which reveals hidden truths and that which acts as a portal to other worlds (an alternate reality) (Gottlieb 1966:510).

While these methodological perspectives may differ or oppose each other in some contexts, the study will employ counter arguments, or differing ideas that may serve to enhance the study and enable critical engagement with the topic. Evidently the mirror motif genre in art does not necessarily adhere rigidly into three distinct topics: the mirror motif in psychoanalysis, feminism and an alternate reality. In some cases these themes can sometimes be integrated. (Anderson 1990: 121).

The research will examine the practice involved in art making and how the artwork challenges, opposes or extends particular discourses. In the nature of qualitative research, the position of the researcher will be reflected in the study. While this position will at all times be supported by the appropriate critical theory, it will be reflected in the researcher's aesthetic analysis of artworks, such as surface, iconography and stylistic attributes. Moreover, the researcher's position will also be apparent in the choice of artworks that are selected.

The dissertation references western art because the mirror motif has been an extensive and established theme. Western artworks have been documented (particularly medieval to nineteenth century art), which enables further research to be conducted. South African artworks often drew from and reacted against the western art tradition of the mirror motif (Schmahmann 2004:7).

Due to the polysemic nature of artworks (multiple meanings), the paper will primarily utilise a semiotic critique in order to decode the mirror motif. The mirror motif in art can be interpreted as a sign which, according to O'Shaughnessy and Stadler 'communicates through systems of difference and the code of technical representation' between (in this case) artist, mirror symbol and viewers (2004:85). Semiotic analysis will provide the codes and conventions used in the artworks, both providing a denotative (a purely descriptive) account. This will draw our attention to the process of re-presentation or signification involved with the mirror, especially in post-modern feminist approaches to the mirror motif in Chapter 3 regarding the male gaze and Venus.

Literature survey

The research utilizes local and international texts, as the dissertation explores the mirror as a device in *South African and Western art*. The study refers to contemporary publications such as, *Through the Looking Glass* (2004) by Brenda Schmahmann, *Penny Siopis*, edited by Kathryn Smith (2005) and *The Haunted Self*, by David Lomas (2000). Earlier relevant texts such as, Marion Arnold's book *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) and Frances Borzello's, *Seeing Ourselves: women's self-portraits* (1998) are also used. In conjunction with the above mentioned books, electronic journals and publications are referenced. Two examples of note to the study are Wolfgang Zucker's *Reflections on Reflections* from *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1962) and Margaret Stoljar's *Mirror and Self in Symbolist and Post-Symbolist Poetry* from *The Modern Language Review* (1990).

Marion Arnold's book, *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) provides insightful information regarding the role of the mirror motif, particularly within in the context of the male gaze or *artist's studio*. Arnold's stance further illuminates the theory of male superiority common to the tradition of western painting. This association of male dominance is most evident in the western genre of the self-portrait and *artist's studio* where the 'active male' visibly takes prominence over the 'passive female' nude which *he* paints (Arnold 1996:122). This notion of the male gaze is explored in Chapter 3.2: *Venus and the Male Gaze*.

Women and Art in South Africa (1996) provides a brief but fairly precise insight of how the mirror is related to identity in terms of *self*. In Chapter 8 for example, entitled: *Contemplating Self*, further explores this idea in relation to the male gaze, of which the mirror is an instrumental device. Arnold further discusses the manner in which contemporary South African women artists dismantle the norms of the male gaze of which female self-portraiture is significant (Arnold 1996:121).

The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth-Century (1996) by Marsha Meskimmon provides constructive information for Chapter 3 of the study. This text focuses in part on the notion of the disruption of the male gaze in women's art and their struggle for recognition in the twentieth century. It appears that research on the mirror motif tends to be euro-centric in nature, as the artworks are described in a western tradition in *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth-*

Century. Contemporary western artworks, such as Sylvia Sleigh, *Philip Golub Reclining* (1971) to Helen Chadwick's, *Vanity 2 (Of Mutability series)*, (1986) are examples that will be referred to in the study. Overall, the text provides pertinent information on the origin and departure of the mirror thematic in art – which is a central focus of this dissertation.

A more recent notable text which addresses the symbolic use of the mirror in South African art is *Through the Looking Glass* (2004) by Brenda Schmahmann. This text explores the significance of representations by South African women artists such as: Marion Arnold, Christine Dixie, Dorothy Kay and Penny Siopis. In *Through the Looking Glass* (2004), Brenda Schmahmann briefly notes the mirror motif's history in art and touches on the following themes: self - representation, the illusion of reality, voyeurism, Jacques Lacan's *mirror stage*, 'venus at the mirror' trope and the postmodern discourses in female artists negating male dominance of art. While all of these concerns are relevant to the study, the main concern of *Through the Looking Glass* is the representation of women and the mirror is mentioned as an instrument in achieving this. The themes of Lacan's *mirror stage*, 'Venus at the mirror' trope and various feminists' interpretation of the mirror motif is further explored in the dissertation in relation to specific artworks such as; Dorothy Kay's, *Eye of the Beholder* (1935) and Penny Siopis's *Melancholia* (1986).

According to Schmahmann, the exploration of mirror motif in South African art is characterized by a feminist stance (due to numerous women artists which utilize the mirror in artworks and disrupt the desiring gaze) (2004: 7). In this regard, the dissertation draws on the 'feminist stance' of artworks by Dorothy Kay and Penny Siopis. The artworks of Christine Dixie and Marion Arnold, however, use the mirror trope to illustrate more diverse and dynamic meanings other than feminist principles. Dixie's, *In the Dark* from *Thresholds* (1997) and *In the Shattered Late Afternoon* from *Thresholds* (1997) portray the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex and *Some Kind of Whole Made of Shivering Fragments* (1992) by Marion Arnold uses the mirror to evoke the sense of dislocation and alienation (Arnold 1996: 122; Schmahmann 2004: 92).

Griselda Pollock offers a relatively current account of feminism theory today, in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (1996) and *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (1988). Pollock makes one more aware that the term *feminism* is a discourse that is constantly changing politically and

theoretically every year (1988:104). Pollock's text offers insight into the term *feminism* and locates feminism from its early years to recent. Pollock's interpretation of Lilith is of particular interest in relation to Chapter 3.1 *Vanity*, which makes reference to an artwork of Lilith.

Penny Siopis, edited by Kathryn Smith (2005) is a text which solely discusses the artworks of Penny Siopis. In the text entitled: *Penny Siopis*, Colin Richards provides commentary to more recent accounts of the mirror as a counter surface. This is evident in the chapter entitled *Prima Facie: Surface as depth* in the artworks of Penny Siopis which utilizes the mirror motif, such as *Foreign Affairs (Arutma)* (1994), *Hush Hush: Collaborator* (1994) and *Pinky Pinky: Mirror Eyes* (2002) from *Who is Pinky Pinky?* Series (Smith 2005: 29).

An integral aspect of the mirror in self-portraiture and central to the study is explored in Frances Borzello's, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-portraits* (1998). In the first chapter entitled, *The Presentation of Self* Borzello tackles the issue of representation and the difference between the self-portraits of female in comparison to that of male (Borzello 1998:19).

The Haunted Self, by David Lomas (2000), provides a psychoanalytic view of abject subjectivity and makes reference to the reflected image. The text references particular artworks pertaining to the mirror and reflection - such as the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* by Salvador Dalí (1937) and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *Narcissus* (1600) and its relation to issues of narcissism. Other artworks in Lomas's text also refer to the portrayal of the mirror, such as *Girl Before a Mirror* by Pablo Picasso (1932). Lomas explores the realm of the unconscious in relation to Surrealism and explores the Freudian theories of narcissism and the 'uncanny' or abject (2000:183). *The Haunted Self* deals with the integral hypothesis of Jacques Lacan's *mirror stage*, which explores how humans bridge the gap between 'self' and 'other' which is initially formed by looking at the mirror (Lomas 2000: 183). The *mirror stage* also extends to Julia Kristeva's concept of the *abject* which is incorporated into the study. Lacan and Kristeva's theories help create a better understanding in relation to Chapter 2.4: *The mirror stage in Dalí's Les Chants De Maldor*.

Electronic journals, such as Wolfgang Zucker's *Reflections on Reflections* from *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1962) and Margaret Stoljar's *Mirror and Self in Symbolist and Post-Symbolist Poetry* from *The Modern Language Review* (1990) provide general overviews of the mirror thematic in art. Other journals, which are artwork specific, such as Picasso's 'Girl before a Mirror' from the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* by Carla Gottlieb (1966) provide helpful information in relation to the artwork and the mirror motif. Although these journals are relatively dated, they are relevant to the issues pertaining to the research and raise important and useful topics on the mirror motif in art. The research combines and compensates for a broader understanding, by referencing fairly dated texts in conjunction with current texts.

CHAPTER 2: THE UNCONSCIOUS DRIVES OF THE MIRROR

2.1 The Unconscious and psychoanalysis in relation to the mirror

The unconscious is inextricably bound to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is the study of the unconscious (Lomas 2000:7). As this study is rooted in visual culture, the exploration will be on aspects of psychoanalytic theory that relate in particular to the focus of this study.

This chapter explores Surrealist ideas and artworks that explore the mirror motif in relation to the initial Freudian conception of unconscious drives, such as narcissism, the Oedipus complex and dreams. Surrealism is associated with psychoanalysis - it is the notion of the *unconscious* which binds the two. Moreover, the Surrealist movement was enriched by the psychoanalytic writings of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and André Breton's *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924) for instance (Criel 1952:134-6).

This chapter also considers Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the *mirror stage* in conjunction with Kristevian *abjection*. The ideas of Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan provide further insight for this chapter, in that their ideas relating to the unconscious extend beyond those of Sigmund Freud and the Surrealists (Lomas 2000: 5).

2.2 The mirror in the Surrealist works of René Magritte

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is necessary to briefly note the primary objectives of Surrealism, in relation to the frequent use of the mirror motif in Surrealist art. Hinged from Dadaism in 1922, Surrealism formulated as a result of the disillusionment from World War I. The Surrealist movement aimed to go beyond the rational logic of the human mind, to the subconscious mind. Andre Breton defined Surrealism as:

Psychic pure auto-matism by which one proposes to express, either verbally or in writing, or in any other manner, the true operations of thought. A dictation of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason or ethics...Surrealism depends upon the belief in the higher reality of certain forms of as-sociations previously neglected, in the total power of the dream, in the unprejudiced thought process. It tends to destroy all other psychic mechanisms and

to replace them in the solution of the principal problems of life.
[Ellipsis inserted (Criel 1952: 134)]

If Surrealism was the exploration into the true operation of thought - the emission of logic, the unconscious mind would be its objective. Since antiquity, the mirror has been considered as a doorway to an alternate world or psyche (Stoljar 1990:363). Furthermore, Margaret Stoljar deems the mirror to be an 'instrument of clairvoyance or prophecy' (Stoljar 1990: 363). To the same end, Surrealist artworks search for a higher truth and alternate reality. Aptly, the Surrealist artworks of René Magritte draw on the mirror motif to symbolise a reality *beyond* appearances, as an object that traverses both time and consciousness (Wilson 1975:8).

Wilson expresses that the mirror motif in Magritte's artworks generally act as a reflector of the subconscious psyche (1975:8). The selected artworks of René Magritte are examples that in one instance or another somehow interweave the mirror motif into the realm of the unconscious. Magritte's artworks which employ the mirror motif indicate, in this instance, the mirror motif's close relation to the metaphysical and subconscious (Wilson 1975:8).

The mirror motif comes to stand as an object of the metaphysical mind in *The Reckless Sleeper* also known as *Daring Sleeper* (1927) by René Magritte. A hand mirror appears embedded in a slab amongst other objects, which is most likely to belong to the dreams of the sleeper situated at the top of the artwork (Sylvester 1992:184). The title, *The Reckless Sleeper* could suggest that there is a *recklessness* in the act of sleep, by submitting oneself to dreams - domain of the unknown. The mirror amplifies this sense of the unconscious realm of dreams in the artwork (Wilson 1975:8).

In *Time Transfixed* (1939), Magritte employs the mirror in such a way as to heighten the tension between two reflected realities of the inside and outside world. The mirror is slightly angled away from the viewer, with an analogue clock placed at the centre. *Time is transfixed* and the clock further indicates this cessation of time fixed on 12:43. The chimney morphs into a steam train and the fire place transforms into a tunnel (Hammacher 1986:90). In *Time Transfixed* the mirror comes to represent truth and reality, as the mirror precisely reflects the objects in front of it. In doing so, the realism of the mirror creates a counter point to the surreal train emerging out the chimney place.

In *Time Transfixed* the mirror truthfully reflects reality, unlike its false reflection of reality in *Reproduction Interdite*. Magritte inverts our voyeuristic gaze and simultaneously evokes an air of mystery in *Reproduction Interdite* (1937), by use of the mirror. The viewers of the artwork are given a perspective from behind the man, who gazes at the mirror. Magritte provides an ironic twist to the oblique portrait of the collector, Mr James: the man isn't reflected, instead the viewer is provided with an impersonal reflection of his back - doubled by the mirror. Magritte accomplishes his 'visual double take' by inverting the mirror's reflective function (Sylvester 1992:134).

In 1966, Jonathan Miller (the owner of the artwork) responded about *Reproduction Interdite* in an article entitled *On the Face of It* that, 'Our face is where we are' and 'a person who is all back and no front is not really a person at all' (Sylvester 1992:134). As *seeking* for identity seems to become the prime concern of the painting, all 'answers' are denied. We see Mr James' back, we secretly gaze at the mirror in order to attain his identity - his face. But in the end our anticipations are thwarted by the reflection of his back. One could assume that as viewers, we become voyeurs, due to the perspective from behind his back, but our visual appetite is turned on its head. We do not see his visage. Instead, as voyeurs, we are exposed in the 'unconscious reflection' of the mirror. It is precisely this 'unconscious reflection' of the viewer in which 'the reality of the viewer himself is placed in doubt' (Sylvester 1992:471).

Another instance of the Surrealist interpretation of the mirror motif is employed in *Faux Miroir* or *False Mirror* (1928) by Magritte. In the artwork, the mirror is an eye - a cloud covered sky in the cornea of the eye. There is no mirror present in the artwork, yet the title *Faux Miroir* is explicitly evoked. Hammacher states that Magritte therefore reveals how the retinas function like mirrors which reflect what we see (1986:64).

Faux Miroir was created by Magritte in response to Paul Eluard's single line poem, 'Dans les yeux les plus sombres s'enferment les plus claires' (In the darkest eyes the brightest eyes have secluded themselves) (Hammacher 1986:64). In relation to the artwork, the poem seems to raise the question of how one employs the *False Mirror* or eye to view the world. According to Hammacher, Magritte detours from the active purpose of the eye – *looking* (1986:64). Instead the artist only portrays its function to reflect and depicts reflection in the corneas of the eye filled with sky and clouds. It could be said that

the eyes are mirrors (Smith 2005:33). Images are reflected inside one's eyes, which is how one comes to see. Unlike the mirror reflection which is static, the mirroring function of the eye or cornea interprets reflection. It is only inside the eye that the representation comes to life (Hammacher 1986:64).

2.3. Narcissus

The ancient Greek myth of Narcissus was named after the nymph Narcissus who was doomed to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water and in trying to gain it; he sank to the depths of the lake (Ades 1982:133).

The mirror warns of one's fate in the drowning of self-reflected preoccupations (Bartsch 2006:85). In her philosophical text, *The Mirror of the Self*, Shadi Bartsch proposes that, emphasis is placed on one's self-knowledge when looking at one's reflection in the mirror and this 'act of seeing leads to love' (2006:84). In other words, the mirror can be conceived as an object of introspection, with regards to looking *at* and looking *within* oneself. Narcissus comes to know who *he is* by looking in the mirror, but wrongly so with an erotic eye. The recurrent theme in antiquity of the mirror as a bearer of self-knowledge is apparent in Ovid (Bartsch 2006:85). Ovid is the author of what is considered to be the classical version of Narcissus, in his book three of *Metamorphoses* in 8 AD. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Tiresias the oracle, warns that Narcissus will live to an old age as long as 'he does not come to know himself' (Hamilton 1982:21). In the end, Narcissus comes to 'know himself' in the surface reflection of water and fulfils Tiresias' prophecy of death. It becomes evident from the myth of Narcissus that the mirror reflection becomes an object of consciousness; its non-individual aesthetic becomes a universal warning of self centeredness (Bartsch 2006:85).

Unlike Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in Conon's version, (Conon's version is considered a contemporary of Ovid), Narcissus attracts many male lovers and commits suicide by drowning himself in the water; as he will love no other but himself (Bartsch 2006:87). However, a century later in the travel writer Pausanias' variant, Narcissus never recognizes that the reflected image in the water is *himself* and dies of love (the credibility is questionable since Narcissus' mother is a water-nymph and he is son of a river god). In the second version of Pausanias' tale, Narcissus' reflection conjures his dead twin sister,

who was his only lover (Bartsch 2006:87). All the versions of the myth of Narcissus describe love and desire - whether it be incest, homosexual, heterosexual or self love, that is rooted in reflection. (Bartsch 2006:95)

It appears that no matter how many variations of the myth exist; Narcissus' fate always remains the same - death. The Narcissus myth provides an ideal merge of reality (Narcissus) and illusion (Narcissus' mirrored reflection). It is only possible through *death* that object and subject (reality and illusion) merge to become one, as Bartsch elaborates Narcissus 'gave himself the evil eye, falling prey to the fascinating power of his reflection. Both Medusa's mirror and Narcissus' have the same effect: paralysis and death' (2006:93). In other words, Narcissus' objectification of his reflection forms subject to become object, which results in conceitedness. This conceitedness can only be resolved by death. According to Milly Heyd, Narcissus' enchantment of his reflection in the water beckons his death (1984:128). Furthermore, the Narcissus myth is essentially Greek and one should note that the Greeks believed in spirits of the water. Heyd claims that water spirits could pull one's soul into the depths and leave behind a soulless shell (1984:128).

Bartsch argues that all variants of the myth of Narcissus ultimately end in death of Narcissus, but there still seems to be the question of whether Narcissus was naïve or aware? Did Narcissus know that it was his reflection? One could speculate that initially Narcissus was naïve when looking at his reflection, but later became aware - a *knowing* Narcissus when he died, as Tiresias foretold in Ovid's version - he would die when he came to 'know himself' (Bartsch 2006:88).

In 1914, Sigmund Freud re-translated the myth of Narcissus for modern psychoanalysis (Stoljar 1990:362). Freud used the term *narcissism* to explain, 'autoeroticism, an immature phase of the sexual drive in which the libido is fixed on the image of the self' (Stoljar 1990: 362). According to Stoljar, it is therefore important to note that Freudian narcissism is not necessarily self-centredness, but also interlaced with sexual drives (1990: 362).

At a primary level, narcissism can be defined as the love of oneself and one who possesses the trait of self-centeredness (Brown 1997:643). Frosh describes a narcissist as one who tries to maintain an unstable identity, by means of self adoration and through the

manipulation of others (1991:3). Therefore narcissism can be read as a defence strategy of survival for an individual (Frosh 1991:3).

Frosh emphasises that narcissists are said to generally avoid dependency and interpersonal relationships (1991:3). As in the myth for instance, Narcissus denied the interpersonal relationship of the nymph Echo- one of his many rejected suitors. Instead Narcissus fell in love with himself and as a result fell victim to the illusionary facet of the mirror (Frosh 1991:3).

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio illustrates the myth of Narcissus in *Narcissus* (c1600). In the artwork, Narcissus directly faces his own mirror reflection. Lomas maintains that the artwork appears to refer to the homoerotic desire of the myth - like Conon's version, when Narcissus denies his lover Ameinias (2000:183). The right knee appears awkwardly central to the image of Narcissus, to the extent that Lomas describes the knee as a protruding phallus (2000:183). The artwork differs from other depictions of Narcissus, as it focuses on a moment which is arrested in a pivotal time - just as Narcissus comes to see himself reflected in the water (Lomas 2000:184).

In contrast to Caravaggio's version, Nicolas Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* (1629-1630) employs three subjects. Narcissus appears sleeping beside the river bed, but the Narcissus flowers blooming around his head presage his death. Echo appears to fade into the rock on which she sits. For Milly Heyd, Poussin draws on the second Ovidian theme of Narcissus, when Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus causes Echo to slowly wither away and die, of which only her voice - an echo remains (1984:121). Cupid erects his torch, heralding Narcissus' self-love and Echo's unrequited love (Heyd 1984:121).

Yet for some artists, Narcissus is not the main protagonist, as in the artwork, *Echo* by Max Ernst, which solely illustrates Echo (1936). In Ernst's interpretation of the Narcissus theme, *Echo* disappears from her years of pining. Echo appears to undergo a form of metamorphosis, in which she organically intertwines with the forest that surrounds her (Heyd 1984:121).

From the myth of Narcissus, one gathers that the mirror motif can also be employed to symbolise narcissism. Like Max Ernst, a number of Surrealist artists drew inspiration

from and portrayed the myth of Narcissus. This is not surprising as narcissism relates to a host of metaphysical and psychological drives pertaining to Surrealism. The mirror did not only appeal to the Surrealists, by its relation to Narcissus and narcissism. To the Surrealists, the mirror also signified *beyond* appearances and in some cases reflected the soul or the unconscious (Herding 1982:471).

Surrealist artist, Salvador Dalí employs Ovidian themes in *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (1937). Lomas claims the artwork to have ‘immense popular appeal’ due to its mirror-like double imaging and *trompe l’oeil* devices (2000:178). The repetition or duplication of image is apparent and this ‘mirroring’ is essentially related to the Narcissus theme (Lomas 2000:173). Lomas proposes that the doubling of the finger and figure creates an interplay between illusion and reality, in this manner both viewer and Narcissus are seduced by illusion. (2000:173)

Elder Philostratus was a Greek writer in 3rd century AD (Lomas 2000:174). Elder Philostratus wrote *Imagines* (or Images), which consisted of short essays in poetic detail, mainly on myths. For Lomas, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* draws on *Imagines* which tactfully employs the notion of ‘doubling and redoubling of illusion’, in particular when Philostratus states:

As for you Narcissus, it is no painting that has deceived you, nor are you engrossed in a thing of pigments and wax; but you do not realise that the water represents you exactly as you are when you gaze upon it, nor do you see through the artifice of the pool.
(Lomas 2000:174).

Metamorphosis of Narcissus utilizes Philostratus’ ‘illusion of the eye’ device and like the mirror it mimetically reproduces and reflects the Narcissus’ condition for the viewer (Lomas 2000:174). The *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* goes beyond merely illustrating the myth; it involves the viewer on an essentially narcissistic level (Lomas 2000:174).

The background landscape acts as a mirror to Narcissus’ situation - on the mountain summit at the top right, is a small double of Narcissus, which can be interpreted as a metaphorical Echo or an *echo* of Narcissus beside his reflection (Lomas 2000:175).

For Heyd, the Narcissus myth revolves around self-absorption which usually develops from the ‘admiration of the beauty of the face’ in the mirror, but in Dalí’s *Metamorphosis*

of *Narcissus*, it is striking to see no face at all - only a faceless face, which could come to represent the universality of narcissism (1984:122).

Lomas describes death as clearly evoked in *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*. Initially the blooming narcissi signify Narcissus' presumed death as, 'Narcissus, we can say, is dead in advance of his dying; death resides within him as a kind of latency.' (Lomas 2000:175). Lomas goes on further to argue that the disputed Freudian theory of death drive also comes into play in *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* (2000:175).

The death drive, also known as *Todestrieb/e* was founded by Freud in an essay titled, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1927 (Lomas 2000:175). Freud often referred to it as the 'death instinct' as a drive which is counter-intuitive. The death drive is counter to Eros, which is a drive toward cohesion and unity. The death drive is described as a drive towards death, destruction and disregard (Lomas 2000:175). According to Freudian theory, one of the primary indicators of the death drive is the basic human impulse to repeat. Lomas asserts that this repetition is embodied in *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, by means of mimicry, such as the doubling of Narcissus, his reflection, the hand and even Echo (2000:175).

That which evokes repulsion or revolting, is another example of the death drive (McAfee 2004:35). Lomas affirms that *Metamorphosis of Narcissus* inherently adopts the death drive, as Narcissus is surrounded by excremental-like soil, which incites disgust (2000:176). The olive-grey tone of Narcissus' body is undoubtedly one of decay and rotting. The rapacious dog in the middle ground devours a cadaver, which we hope isn't human. All these attributes seem to arouse our disgust. Dalí draws on Aurel Kolnai's essay, *The Relation of Disgust to Life and Death* which notes that on an unconscious level our disgust or revulsion is 'a symbolic defence against the vertigo of the death drive' (Lomas 2000:176). According to Freud, the death drive is ultimately a propensity in life to find the return to early life - the state of rest in the inanimate (Lomas 2000:176).

2.4 The *mirror stage* in *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1934)

Jacques Lacan introduced the *mirror stage* or *Le stade du miroir* to psychoanalysis in 1936 (Frosh 1991:114). Initially Lacan proposed that the *mirror stage* is apparent in the formative years of infants. In the early years of 1950, Lacan resolved that the *mirror stage* is also a permanent structure of subjectivity (Frosh 1991:114). *The Imaginary order* is regarded as the state of the unconscious in the mind by Lacanians. In the realm of *The Imaginary order*, an individual is always fixed and obsessed by his or her own image. Lacan defined the notion of the *mirror stage* as the following:

The mirror stage is a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place; it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image. (Adams undated: 2)

Lacan posits that between six and eighteen months, an infant initially attains a sense of self, when the fragmented form of an infant is put together at the first instant of recognition of *self* in the mirror (Stoljar 1990:363). This sense of self-recognition is achieved when the whole body is visible and this enables the individual to create an understanding of reality (Stoljar 1990:363).

Stoljar emphasises that it is the mirror that brings about identity conflict or the *mirror stage* (1990:364). The *mirror stage* describes the establishment of the Ego by objectification; the Ego is defined by the fragmentedness between emotional reality and visual manifestation. In Lacan's view, the infant memory of a fragmented body still exists in the unconscious of adults and this sense of fragmentedness surfaces in dreams (for example) (Frosh 1991:114). The sense of self or identity is therefore not permanent, as it is liable to change and reformulate (Stoljar 1990:363). In her article, *Mirror and Self in Symbolist and Post-Symbolist Poetry*, Stoljar extends this notion, stating that, 'each new sight of one's image in the mirror is in a sense a repetition of the earliest moment of self-discovery, a fresh definition of the self' (1990:363).

According to Stephen Frosh, the *mirror stage* can only occur because the mirror provides a clear reflection of the self, without defect (1991:114). Kristeva concurs that the *mirror stage* establishes a sense of self, but goes further to suggest that the infant starts to differentiate itself well before the *mirror stage* (McAfee 2004:35). This earlier stage

occurs prior to the *mirror stage*, when an infant drives out what it finds distasteful from itself. Kristeva labels this drive *abjection* (McAfee 2004:35). Kristeva argues that the infant 'learn(s) the ways of the symbolic - of culture' from both mother and father, unlike Lacan's hypothesis which involves only the mother [italics inserted (McAfee 2004:35)].

Abjection is disgust and expulsion. As Kristeva states in her work titled, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982):

Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection...I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire... *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who poffer it. 'I' want none of that element... But since food is not an 'other' for 'me', who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*. [Ellipsis inserted (McAfee 2004:48)]

The term *abject* is used, rather than *repressed* because it does not all together die out from the conscious mind (McAfee 2004:46). According to Elizabeth Gross, the abject is an innate state of the subject, in which the subject expels or suppresses the abject in order to gain presence to the symbolic and to consequently gain a sense of *self*. (Fletcher and Benjamin 1990: 88-89).

Food, saliva, tears, faeces, urine, mucous, vomit - that which stimulates abjection belong to the body and its 'surfaces, hollows, crevices, orifices, which will later become erotogenic zones - mouth, eyes, anus, ears, genitals' (Fletcher and Benjamin 1990:88). Lacan refers to these areas being situated in developing what he terms the *rim*, which is the boundary between inside and outside (Fletcher and Benjamin 1990:88).

Lacan's *mirror stage* describes the ego ideal in which the infant establishes a sense of rivalry and compulsive hostility towards its reflection in the mirror (Frosh 1991:41). According to Lomas, Lacan's *mirror stage* hypothesis was significantly influenced by Alexandre Kojève, his lecturer. At a greater depth, Lacan's *mirror stage* extends to the need of destruction, as it is the *mirror stage* that brings about these initial senses - to destroy and hate. As Kojève illustrates in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1993), 'the I of Desire is an emptiness that receives a real positive content only by negating action

that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming and ‘assimilating’ the desired non-I.’ (Lomas 2000:158).

Kristeva’s notion of the *abject* does not only pertain to that which stimulates disgust, but also the lexis of abjection: rejection, compulsion, primitivism and of particular relevance to the following discussion, is death (McAfee 2004:47). Death constitutes a prime facet of *abjection*. The dead body is considered to be the ‘most sickening of wastes’ and death regarded as an infection upon life (McAfee 2004:47).

The notions of expulsion and death (associated with *mirror stage* and extended to Kristevian *abjection* within the domain of Lacanian paranoiac destruction) is seen to be predicted in *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1934) by Salvador Dalí. Lomas proclaims that in the etchings of plates from Come de Lautreamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, primary ideas contained within the subsequent notions of the *mirror stage* and the abject are strongly apparent (2000:156).

An anthropomorphic figure or entwined couple are staged on a slight plinth. While the plinth is reminiscent of a cheese board it also beckons scenes from a dissecting table. Lomas declares that the figures partake in a performance of sadistic eroticism (2000:158). The rabid figures mutually devour each other. The fork does not pierce food, but limbed-like organs on the chopping board. Dalí describes the Freudian death drive as ‘appétit du mort’ in relation to the artwork, in which the couples ferret and consume each other. According to Freud, ‘during the oral stage of organisation of the libido the act of attaining erotic mastery over an object coincides with that object’s destruction.’ (Lomas 2000:158). This sadistic eroticism which Freud speaks of seems to be evidently illustrated in the figures of *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1934). The figures provide us with a counter notion of a fleshy appetite: a story in the vacillation of the drives frequently used as a slaughter exercise by people - otherwise implicitly, as civil war. Untiring, relentless, the death drive gruesomely proceeds: as hands squeeze, pull and slice cannibal-helpings of food for, or rather of each other. (Lomas 2000:158-9)

Lomas parallels *Les Chants de Maldoror* to later theories of the *abject* and the *mirror stage* and also weaves another dimension of the Freudian death drive in relation to the artwork (2000:156). That which incites disgust, not only draws on the abject, but the death drive too (Lomas 2000:156).

Two years after the creation of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Lacan introduced the *mirror stage* hypothesis in 1936. Lomas states that *Les Chants de Maldoror* appears embody the notion of the Lacanian *mirror stage*, as the couple on the right strangling each other are virtually mirror doubles; a reflection of each other (Lomas 2000:156). Furthermore, Lomas likens the figures described in *Les Chants de Maldoror* to Lacan's *mirror stage*, because both subjects are female and apparently drawn from the case of the Papin sisters which occurred earlier in 1933. The otherwise timid Papin sisters were maids who brutally killed and mutilated their employer - a mother and daughter and 'had torn out their victim's eyes, slashed their throats, and mutilated the corpses with bare hands', which caused a media sensation at the time. During the formulation of his hypothesis, Lacan identified the Papin sisters as victims of a paranoia, (which was later recorded to be) rooted in the *mirror stage* (Lomas 2000:156-158).

2.5. Christine Dixie's Oedipal mirror motif

The Oedipus complex derives from the Thebian legend of the mythical character of Oedipus. According to the myth, the youth Oedipus in a matter of circumstance, unknowingly murders his father Liaus and marries his mother Jacosta (Hamilton 1982: 208). Hamilton speaks of how the myth is about 'an individual's search for personal identity' and 'of the deceptions and evasions which mar the lives of all...when knowledge is withheld, denied and obscured.' [Ellipsis inserted (Hamilton 1982:17)].

Hamilton's notion seems to focus on the myth's moralistic facet of one searching for knowledge and identity. Alternatively, Freud references the myth as one of parricide and incest, stating that,

His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours - because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse toward our mother and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so. (Freud 1965:296)

Psychoanalysts often draw on the Oedipus complex, arguing that individuals are drawn to partners by the very same characteristics of their parents of the opposite sex (Freud 1965:296).

The term Oedipus complex was first employed by Sigmund Freud in 1910 (Hamilton 1982:208). According to classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Oedipus complex is a repressed, unconscious drive to murder or destroy the detested father by the jealous son and possess the mother. The Oedipus complex mainly occurs between the ages of three to five years old (Lomas 2000:111).

Theorists such as Carl Jung find the Oedipus complex only applicable to males. According to Jungian theory, the female desires the father and is hostile towards the mother, which is termed the Electra complex (Hamilton 1982:233). Alternatively, Freudian theory also states that females first experience homosexual desire towards their mother (Hamilton 1982:233). Other contemporary analysts have extended the classical Freudian Oedipus complex, while others dismiss it as outdated and flawed because it varies according to individuals. However, a basic understanding of Oedipus complex is required, with regards to the *Thresholds* series (1997) of artworks by Christine Dixie.

According to Freud, the Oedipus complex is a universal phenomenon which is accountable for a child's unconscious guilt toward their same sex parent (Hamilton 1982:208). According to Lomas, in Dostoevsky's essay, Oedipal parricide 'is the principal and primal crime of humanity as well as of the individual. It is in any case the main source of the sense of guilt.' (2000:111). For instance, a child unconsciously experiences aggression towards their same sex parent and at the death of that parent, the child turned adult feels this unconscious remorse that is rooted in Oedipus complex (Lomas 2000:115).

Drawn from Freudian theory, the Oedipus complex is conveyed by the mirror motif in Christine Dixie's *In the Shattered Late Afternoon* and *In Gaps and Absences* from the *Thresholds* series of eleven prints (1997) (Schmahmann 2004:58).

In the Shattered Late Afternoon and *In Gaps and Absences* appear to illustrate a narrative in which the artist has arrested the most crucial moment. *In the Shattered Late Afternoon* portrays a mirror reflection of the artist - Christine Dixie who appears to enter at the corner of the doorway of a room while simultaneously discovering a pair of intimate lovers, whom we assume she knows from the expression on her face. (Schmahmann 2004:58)

This 'mirror echo' - the mirror symbolic doorway and the literal doorway, in which Dixie stands, is reflected in the mirror. According to Schmahmann, this heightens the drama of her discovery, as the artist has crossed the *threshold* or the boundary of one space into another (2004: 58). The crossing of threshold or boundary in this artwork is somewhat reminiscent of the fable entitled, *Through the Looking Glass* in which *Alice* steps through a doorway of the mirror. Although we are aware Dixie is quite far from the young, naïve fairy tale character *Alice*, Dixie like *Alice* steps *through the looking glass* and crosses the boundary from one world to discover another. Dixie offsets this expected notion from the viewer, relaying the interplay of 'mirror and doorway' with a more sardonic twist of events, laced with the primal act of incest and parricide (Schmahmann 2004: 58).

Located in the room, above the couple's bed, the woodcut print portrays the distinctive myth of Oedipus - a son discovering his mother in bed. Further extending the interplay between mirror and doorway in *Thresholds*, the wood block print becomes a 'false mirror', which re-reflects the Oedipal moment (Schmahmann 2004:63). Schmahmann identifies, this Oedipal plot depicted in the woodcut, by its placement, instigates the psychology by mirroring what the artist encounters before her (2004:63).

The interplay of mirror and artwork going beyond a *threshold* or the crossing of interior and exterior spaces is extended in *In Gaps and Absences*, the final work of Christine Dixie's *Thresholds* series (1997).

Again Dixie locates *In Gaps and Absences* in the interior of a bedroom. The artwork portrays a mirror reflecting the exterior veranda and a couple embracing at the far right - who are not quite cut out of the frame. At first glance, one becomes aware of the dog in the foreground. We note the canine's dark penetrating eyes looking beyond us - through the window. Schmahmann makes note of how the dog looks, off in a distance, as if to invoke the question, "What is the dog looking at?" and the mirror reveals the answer to us (2004:63). The interior mirror reflects a woman hanging from a rope with her macabre feet dangling in mid-air - the suicide of Oedipus' mother, Jacosta, when she discovers the true identity of her son (Schmahmann 2004:63).

Apart from the mirror motif revealing a third dimension of the narrative plot, the mirror also becomes a key device which heightens the Oedipal horrors of incest, parricide and

suicide in both artworks discussed. In both these examples the mirror motif also reflects the crossing of boundaries from one space and condition to another (Schmahmann 2004:63).

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AT THE MIRROR

3.1. Vanity

Translated from Latin, the term *vanitas* can be defined as emptiness. *Vanitas* was a form of metaphoric still-life art that flourished during the sixteenth and seventeenth-century (Schmahmann 2004:6). *Vanitas* art was predominant in northern Europe, such as the Netherlands and Flanders. The vanity of earthly life refers to the brevity of life on earth, which hinges on the inevitable factor of death. *Vanitas* paintings often warn of the afterlife, where physical and materialistic attributes amount to nothing. The mirror was recognised as an archetypal symbol for *vanitas* painting (Meskimmon 1996:2). There are numerous *vanitas* objects which symbolise the inevitability and suddenness of death, such as clocks, scales, human skulls, flowers shedding petals and smouldering candles. For Borzello, the mirror is a key motif in *vanitas* paintings, because it generally refers to vanity itself, the aging process and the lust of one's own erotic gaze at the mirror (1998:62).

The term *vanitas* evokes a similar meaning to the term *memento mori*. *Memento mori* paintings were initially apparent around the fifteenth century (Schmahmann 2004:6). *Memento mori* paintings are products of Christian art, as they were designed to have a moralizing purpose for the people (Phay-Vakalis 2001:28). *Memento mori* art served to remind Christian followers that they should desist from sin, for death is inevitable - after which it is decided whether the soul should enter heaven or hell. These paintings of death and decay also emphasise the meaninglessness of lustful indulgence (Borzello 1998:62). *Memento mori* art was often found in funeral art and architecture during the fifteenth century, which depicted the vanity of human life. (Schmahmann 2004:6)

Although *vanitas* and *memento mori* belong to different traditions, they often interrelate in art and in particular with regards to the mirror motif. Young women were often depicted in *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings. Women were portrayed for their beauty, which had a strong association to vanity. In her book, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth-Century*, Marsha Meskimmon posits that vanity is rooted in western art tradition, in which vanity was characterized by an image of a female gazing at her reflection in the mirror (1996:2). During the Renaissance, vanity was often represented in artworks by a reclining nude woman (Borzello 1998:62). Borzello states

that vanity was regarded as a sin pertaining mostly to women and like any other worldly pleasure - an empty pursuit. Empty pursuits of this nature were subject to death and decay (1998:62).

The female association to *vanitas* or vanity is apparent in Clara Peeters', *Vanitas Self-Portrait* (1610-20). Peeters appears amongst the opulent objects of her treasure, while holding a hand mirror which is echoed by a bubble that floats beside her head. Peeters' tangible worldly possessions appear in stark contrast to the precarious floating bubble, which seems about to burst at any second. Borzello notes that by echoing the bubble, the mirror further emphasises *vanitas* (1998:62). Keeping within the *vanitas* and *memento mori* practice, the bubble symbolises the fragile brevity of human life and beauty - implying that they can end at any moment (Borzello 1998:62).

In contrast to Peeters' *Vanitas Self-Portrait*, Lukas Furtenagel presents a more morbid *memento mori* portrait entitled, *The Painter Hans Burgkmair and His Wife Anna* (1527). Borzello points out the overall sombre atmosphere of the artwork, perhaps signalling the omnipresence of death (1998:62). The portrait illustrates the couple Hans and Anna Burgkmair who hold a convex mirror that reflects them as two skulls (Borzello 1998:62).

Two skull-like figures also appear in the mirror of *The Old Women* (1808 - 1812) by Francisco de Paula José Goya, which reflects mortality that is inevitable to all. This artwork could be read as a *vanitas* as well as a *memento mori* painting. In relation to its counter accompanying piece *The Young Ones* (1812-1814), the mirror in *The Old Women* posits beauty as vanity, serving to heighten their fate of decomposition and death (Licht 1980:206). Two old women appear in the foreground, one is a servant who holds a mirror to her mistress, enabling her to marvel at her reflection. Behind the object of their vanity - the mirror, the words '*Oue tal?*' (translated as '*Can this be me?*') appear (Myers 1968:36). The syphilitic servant in black has hideous features such as a snout-like nose. The skeletal mistress' beak-nose merges with her chin, while her red rheumatic eyes gaze intently at her reflection in the mirror (Licht 1980:206). Both the women are in ball gowns heavily adorned with jewels, such as rings and pearls. A diamond cupid arrow pieces the mistress' hair, which appears to be a bitter mockery of beauty and valentine romance. Their opulence appears repulsive, especially in contrast to their skull-like appearance (Myers 1968:36).

According to Myers, a winged man known as ‘Time’ or ‘Death’ personified, awaits with broom in hand, ready to sweep *The Old Women* away (1968:36). Perhaps *The Old Women* are more than just a moralizing image of Christianity. The two crones could present death beyond the consequences of sin. Death and decay is inevitable to everything, with or without Christian moral judgement (Licht 1980:207).

The interpretations of *The Old Women* may be dated, but its relevance is still current. For Licht, the corruption of human existence still lies in the certainty of our awareness of vanity and death (1980:207). Moreover, ‘there remains an unresolved element of tragedy, our repugnance for the ultimate end of physical beauty doesn’t make the loveliness of youth any the less desirable’ (Licht 1980: 207). Perhaps the Spanish title of this work, *Hasta la Muerte – Until Death* exposes the sardonic twist of the vanity of old age (Myers 1968:36).

The Old Women which adorn themselves with pearls were once young and desirable, like the young lady portrayed in the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665-66). Apart from the air of mystery which shrouds the popularized Johannes Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665-66), it is the interplay with the mirror motif which is of central concern. As indicated by Galligan, it was initially thought that the model wears pearl earrings as the title suggests, but in recent years it has been concluded that the earring that the girl wears is not a pearl, but a highly reflective bauble (1998:149). The model’s posture suggests that she is captured in an intimate moment of admiring herself in the mirror, just before turning away. Yet at the same time the model’s eyes suggest her gaze is more distant, perhaps directed at an external spectator beyond the picture frame. Wheelock describes the model’s bauble as highly reflective, acting as a convex mirror, which creates an interplay between reflection upon reflection in the mirror, which she admires herself in. Further embedded in the mirror and vanity thematic, the model is captured in the act of admiring herself while adorned with jewellery (Wheelock 1981:118). According to Galligan, the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is sometimes interpreted as a ‘nubile yet inaccessible virgin (as though she were turning toward her suitor)’ which could come to represent an erotic overtone of the gaze (1998: 149).

While subtle undertones of sexuality exist in the artwork – the girl is nonetheless shown as chaste (Wheelock 1981:118). Counter to this tradition, the image of Lady Lilith with a

mirror appears as a contrasting *femme fatale* (Pollock 1988:141). Lilith is a mythological woman who features in many different cultural legends of Hebrew, Kurdish, Arabic and Greek (Pollock 1988:144). With Lilith's diverse origins, she has different names. The most common name that Lilith is also known by is *Succubus* - a devil who seduces males, devours infants and sometimes is even regarded as a Screech owl (Pollock 141-5). Lilith apparently originated as a Mesopotamian devil, who operated by means of the wind, that spread disease and death. The earliest instances of Lilith were recorded at 4000 BC as *Lilitu* in Sumer. In Greek myth, Lilith was a goddess or mother of the dark moon, however today Lilith is regarded as a feminist symbol. (Pollock 1988:141-145)

As stated by Pollock, *Lady Lilith* (1828-1882) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti is an early example of the *woman and mirror* trope, but unlike the other virtuous and innocent women portrayed, Lilith was deemed a witch (144:1988). The interplay between the mirror and the gaze becomes evident in *Lady Lilith*, which creates the polarities between female object and male subject / voyeur (Pollock 1988:144).

Lady Lilith appears in luxury; she sits on her chair in a glamorous gown behind which roses and poppies bloom. She combs her long, gold hair while looking at herself in the mirror. Lilith's gaze at the mirror seems to be one of contemplative dreaminess.

According to Griselda Pollock, Lilith is a symbol of sexuality and danger - as one who does not love and is heartless (1988:143). A sonnet by the artist Rossetti entitled, *Body's Beauty* accompanies the artwork which further articulates Lilith's attributes:

And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
till heart and body and life are in its hold,
The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare?
Lo! As that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.
(Pollock 1988:144)

The term *witch* was used to define women who desisted from the norms of patriarchal order (Pollock 1988:145). Lilith is like Medusa, a *femme fatale*, whose beauty was considered the root of evil. Again, female beauty at the mirror is deemed evil but here it is

not only the sin of vanity which is a vice, but the seductive lures of female beauty. According to Pollock, 'the danger of her beauty is eternal' and was often deathly (Pollock 1988:144).

In the artwork, the mirror becomes more than a looking glass for Lilith, it serves to heighten and validate her erotic seduction of the male gaze, but also becomes an instrument of a witch who casts 'spell(s) through him' [brackets inserted (Pollock 1988:144)]. One could deduce from Lilith that the mirror becomes an object associated with that of witchcraft, spells and deceptive seduction. (Pollock 1988:144)

Lilith becomes a Dionysian witch, untamed by culture - a virile woman in control; she is not kept by any male, rather it is *she* who exploits and disposes of the male (Pollock 1988:143). One could speculate that when a female like Lilith was portrayed as a virile woman, unconstrained by the moral orders of society - it was because she was a witch *with* mirror, not a woman *at* the mirror.

3.2. Venus and the male gaze

A prevalent theme in western painting (dating around 15th to 19th centuries) is the female admiring herself in the mirror, while simultaneously inviting the viewer's gaze (Clark 1990:3). The male gaze is acutely apparent in the theme of the recumbent woman and is often merged with the reclining Venus trope (Clark 1990:3).

As much as the following principles of Meskimmon and Mulvey could fall under the previous the section 3.1 *Vanity*, it should be noted that vanity extends to the male gaze thematic. Venus is a recumbent nude that looks at herself vainly in the mirror enticing sexual desire (Meskimmon 1996:2). According to Meskimmon, it has been a western tradition to portray the sin of vanity by means of a woman admiring herself in the mirror and that 'this iconography was frequently built into representations of women both as an enticement to the spectator to join in this pleasurable viewing and as a warning about the sins of the flesh' (Meskimmon 1996:2). Meskimmon also states that nude women presented in artworks are often portrayed with mirrors and:

these mirrors indicate both that the woman is an appropriate object of specular consumption and that she colludes with this.. the

traditional representation of vanity (the female figure with a mirror) is implied.. and acts to legitimate our voyeuristic looking at the body of woman. [ellipsis inserted (Meskimmon 1996:2)]

One of the contributing texts to have established the notion of the male gaze was *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* by Laura Mulvey in 1975. Mulvey's essay expressed the concept of the male gaze being apparent in not only the subject matter of a text, but the *manner* in which a text is represented and the consequence it had on its spectators (Mulvey 1975:62).

As maintained by Mulvey, 'the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.. she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire.' [Ellipsis inserted (1975: 62)]. One can deduce from the extract of Mulvey's essay that an essential aspect of the male gaze is that the viewer is required to *look* in terms of a heterosexual male viewpoint - where the female is presented as an object for the male gaze. Often, the imagery of the female body is accentuated and mainly offered in reference to male response. In this manner the male gaze dismisses female perception and so visual consumption is divided between passive/female object and active/male subject (Mulvey 1975:62).

Schmahmann identifies that in art theory, the male gaze thematic operates on the level of the active subject, generally a clothed virile male creator and his passive subject: a nude passive female (Schmahmann 2004:6). The male gaze thematic of active male and passive female can be extended to the Apollonian (active male) and Dionysian (passive female) (Kaufmann 1959:207-8)

In many instances pre-modern theories deemed the active male to have Apollonian characteristics and Dionysian qualities to that of female. According to Kaufmann, Apollonian and Dionysian is a philosophical and literary concept of binary opposites deriving from the ancient Greek Gods, Apollo and Dionysius (1959:207). The term *Apollonian* comes from Apollo, the God of the sun, light, music and poetry. The term *Dionysian* originates from Dionysius, the God of wine, ecstasy and intoxication (Kaufmann 1959:207). The ancient Greeks did not perceive these two Gods to oppose

each other, but these Gods or rather the term Apollonian and Dionysian came to symbolise the opposites of male and female. The term Apollonian refers to wholeness, light, civilization and culture which versus the Dionysian which can be equated to individualism, darkness, primacy and nature (Kaufmann 1959:207) In western art theory the nude female model is usually associated with desire and Dionysius. Dionysius is in opposition to the cultured male artist or creator that is interpreted as Apollonian. Art, since the medieval age to modernist, has portrayed the female as Dionysian, one of desire and emotion which constitutes the 'left brain', while the male was associated with Apollonian and the 'right brain' - one of culture and calculated intelligence. (Kaufmann 1959:207-8)

Traditionally, artworks of the female created by the 'cultured' male artist often imply that *he* controls and owns the female model. Since the Renaissance, the reclining nude has been a key image in western painting (Chicago and Lucie-Smith 1999:100). Never more so has the male gaze been inherent than in the theme of the recumbent nude. It is in the manner of the recumbent nude that Venus has come to be an iconic figure of the male gaze (Chicago and Lucie-Smith 1999:100).

Venus is often portrayed nude with a mirror and facing her back to the viewer and artist. This makes Venus essentially depersonalised, which further contends her as an object of *looked-at-ness*. Venus' reflection in the mirror invites the male gaze and one could suggest that Venus, like Mulvey's female 'holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire' (Mulvey 1975:63). Judy Chicago makes the observation that the portrayed female generally partakes in an essentially personal female regime of her enhancing her beauty. It is under these circumstances that the male artist 'rightly' invades her privacy (Chicago and Lucie Smith 1999:150).

Venus is the ancient Roman deity of love, beauty and fertility. Venus is also known to the ancient Greeks as Aphrodite. In western art, Venus is often shown with her back facing the viewer, yet her reflected gaze (often from the mirror directed at her face) invites that of the viewer. Though numerous exceptions do exist, such as Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* (1555) in which Venus sits in an upright and frontal position to the viewer. Often Venus was rendered from behind, which was frequently employed in antiquity to covertly evoke a voyeuristic eroticism. In artworks, the mirror frequently accompanies Venus, which further heightens the eroticism of the Goddess of Love. This composition enabled post-

medieval realism to not defy the stringent rules of linear perspective. The mirror makes it possible to view the front of Venus, yet simultaneously the back, providing an alternate angle of perspective: 'The plane mirror has no 'intuition', but it is a means of 'circumspection' (Zucker 1962:245). This double perspective of the mirror is evident in *Venus and Cupid* also known as, *The Rokeby Venus* or *La Venus del Espejo* (1648-1651) by Diego de Velázquez, where Venus' face methodically appears for the viewer. The erotic accentuation of Venus' rear in *The Rokeby Venus* stems from the ancient Roman Hellenistic *Venus Kallipygos* (Chicago and Lucie-Smith 1999:101). *Venus Kallipygos'* pose provided immense appeal for the seventeenth and eighteenth century artists and became a prime model in western art. In particular, the *Rokeby Venus* embodies the *Borghese Hermaphrodite*, which is a copy of the Hellenistic original. Velazquez ordered a bronze cast of the *Borghese Hermaphrodite* from Madrid (Clark 1990:3).

In *The Rokeby Venus*, Venus' face is presented as a hazy reflection in the mirror, as this reality would appear to limit the beauty of Venus (Stratton-Pruitt 2002:142). According to Stratton-Pruitt, Quevedo's poem: *Las tres últimas musas castellanas* (1772) and *Venus and Cupid* are thematically alike. Stratton-Pruitt draws on the instance of a suitor who intends to create a portrait of his lover but can only obtain a mirror reflection as,

...her face, claims the lover, blinds poet-painter..
He cannot depict her, he defers to his lady and her mirror,
Where she can be, at the same time,
'model, painter, brush and copy' of herself.
[Ellipsis inserted (2002:142)].

Venus and her son Cupid appear to be isolated, even though they are placed together in the same scene. Even the face which the mirror reflects, does not seem to be that of Venus (Brown 1986:182). Although Velázquez' depiction of Venus is more graceful rather than coquettish, a sensual solicitation of the subject still exists. Peter Paul Rubens' *Venus at the Mirror* (1614–15) also traditionally depicts Venus from the back, sitting and gazing at the mirror with Cupid. Rubens portrays Venus in the customary manner of having blond curls and a voluptuous body. Velázquez' version of Venus is unusual as it differs from traditional representations, because this Venus has brunette hair and a more slender body. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century the subject of Venus was a conventional theme in which an erotic association remained as an almost constant result. For some, Venus is not intended to be a unique female nude or even Venus herself. Instead, she is to be

simply read as an icon of self-absorbed beauty (Brown 1986:182). Often Venus is portrayed as a mortal - with no halo and a wingless Cupid, without an arrow. Conversely, Venus can be read as a universal female who is aesthetically pleasing, in the logic of appreciation to beauty which evokes attraction and desire in love. Yet Venus is often visually consumable; the mirror exposes Venus' skin which heightens the viewer's voyeuristic gaze behind her back. The mirror becomes the catalyst of one's own erotic imagination, as the mirror reflection appears to be real like Venus, but in reality is just an illusion and so provokes the viewer's imagination (Brown 1986:182)

Venus is inextricably bound to the male gaze; because she is one of the earliest characters used for portraying vanity and in doing so also solicited the male gaze. Venus was one of the earliest instances in the formation of the male gaze thematic in western art. (Meskimmon 1996:2)

3.2.1 Subverting Venus and the *artist's studio* trope

This section of chapter 3 derives from the previous section, *Venus and the male gaze* which had located the establishment of the male gaze in relation to Venus. *Subverting Venus and the artist's studio Trope* extends the notion of the male gaze, developing into the *artist's studio* theme in western painting.

Schmahmann uses the term *artist's studio* which refers to the male artist at work, usually in a studio with his nude female model for display (Schmahmann 2004:9). In western art history, the male artist was a prime concern in the self-portrait genre. If the male artist was situated as 'object' he would also be 'subject' and the self-portrait usually portrayed him as one of authority and control. The *artist's studio* theme commonly incorporates a self-portrait of the artist. The *artist's studio* usually depicts fine art production equipment such as easels, paintbrushes, canvases and nude female models - the bodies of females who are displayed and regarded as another object of equipment. According to Schmahmann, the binaristic opposites of the male artist and female model are central to the *artist's studio* theme (Schmahmann 2004:9).

The *artist's studio* key traits are evident in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Self Portrait as Soldier* (1915) for example. In this metaphorical autobiography, Kirchner appears as a

heroic soldier and artist against the back drop of a nude model. The artwork comments on the brutalities of war and Kirchner's loss of earthly aesthetic pleasures - such as painting and the nude female (Gee 2003:661-2). The severed bloody hand of Kirchner not only signals his lost ability as an artist, but also conveys unease pertaining to his sense of maleness (Gee 2003:661-2).

The consumable nude female model appears counter to the clothed male in military regalia, which could emphasise the male as a subject in the position of power, whose virility is free from the moral confines of society. Further embedded in the *artist's studio* trope, Kirchner's paintbrush appears as a phallic echo in counter point to the nude model. This strategy of the *artist's studio* provides us with the binaristic opposites of the Dionysian nude female, verses the Apollonian - the clothed, cultured male. Schmahmann reinforces this notion further by stating that the,

mirror have also functioned as a way of associating the possession of subjectivity with masculinity. The artist, who is traditionally figured as male, orders reality by situating it within the defining frame of a painting- a frame analogous to that of the mirror. The object of his attention, disordered 'nature', is traditionally conceptualised as the female body: it is only through his controlling gaze and organisational capacities that her unruliness can be reconstituted into perfect form. (Schmahmann 2004:7).

According to Schmahmann, *Eye of the Beholder* (1953) is a self-portrait of sixty-six year old Dorothy Kay which 'unintentionally' raises alternate feminist readings (2004:4). *Eye of the Beholder* is a painting of a mirror reflection, which is made apparent from the mirror doubling of toiletry bottles in the foreground. With scissors in hand, Mr Schlump or 'Monsieur Charles' appears to be deeply concentrating on transforming Kay into a masterpiece (Reynolds 1989:262). Mr Schlump may be able to succeed in modelling Kay to be acceptable for social standards by means of a haircut, but Kay will still remain a sixty-six year old 'Venus' gazing at the mirror (Schmahmann 2004:4). Kay's head is bowed, but her eyes intently look at her face in the mirror and beyond, towards us - the viewer. A humorous overtone is created by Kay's two wet locks of uncut hair which hang in abundance over her right eye, ironically counter to the skilful Schlump's bald head (Schmahmann 2004:4).

Draped in a pink bib, Kay seems to beckon forth Venus, while staring at her own reflection in the mirror. Kay seems disguised as Venus, yet paradoxically appears to be other than that of Venus: with her aged bored eyes and skeletal face. Instead, Kay appears as an aged woman, reminiscent of the sixteenth century *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings. In Schmahmann's view, Kay looks at the mirror and we look at Kay with expectations of Venus, but Kay's expression appears banal and frank, as though knowing she does not equate to the Goddess of Love and couldn't care less (2004:7). In this manner, *Eye of the Beholder* can be interpreted as an *anti-Venus*, but it is also challenges the notion of the *artist's studio* theme. (Schmahmann 2004:6)

Apart from communicating a politically putrid and corrupt South Africa, *Melancholia* (1986) by Penelope Siopis extends its political inequalities to issues of gender (Schmahmann 2004:16). The mirror unobtrusively appears at the right of *Melancholia*, but dominates by its implication. Schmahmann suggests that through the illustration of the mirror, Siopis raises questions regarding females as artists and contends the male *artist's studio* trope. The mirror reflects a shadowed Siopis in front of the painting (the painting *Melancholia* which we view) with paint brush in hand before her easel. According to Schmahmann, the mirror reflection is reminiscent of Diego de Velázquez' *Las Meninas* (1656) (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four). Siopis, like Velázquez is positioned before the easel, but Velázquez is depicted parallel to the mirror image of the king and queen, which increases his authority and status in relation to them (Schmahmann 2004:16). Siopis becomes an ironic counterpoint in relation to *Las Meninas* as Siopis is less poignant, appearing in the mirror, unlike the *artist's studio* which portrays the male artist at the forefront, not as a reflection. Siopis then,

focuses on the uncertain subjectivity accorded to female painters. Although *Melancholia* represents her reflection, her features are rendered with the same emphatic tactility, the same avoidance of atmospheric illusionism, as the three-dimensional bodies around her. A parallel to the sculpture of a woman with her stomach stripped open to reveal a foetus (a three-dimensional rendition of a seventeenth-century medical illustration appearing on the left side of the painting), her spectre is also a component of a triumvirate including an adjacent statuette of the *Venus de Milo* and a replica of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*. Siopis is, as it were, wedged in an unstable space, neither outside nor inside the painting (Schmahmann 2004:16-17).

Therefore one could establish that Siopis is not presented in the tradition of a woman admiring herself vainly in the mirror (such as the earlier *woman at the mirror* tropes,) instead *she* is the artist. Schmahmann believes that one is reminded of Venus and *vanitas* by the grotesquely lavish display, that contains an excess of statuettes infinitely scattered across to the vanishing point of the painting, featuring mainly female figures such as Venus (2004:16). Rotting fruit is splayed and lavishly ornamental objects allude to the *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings, in which a woman's beauty was emphasised to be liable to death and decay, like the anthurium and lilies which appear at the centre of the artwork. Siopis is poised before a painting in the mirror reflection. According to Schmahmann, this inverts the mirror's former function to sustain the gaze and patriarchy and instead tilts the mirror to expose another *reality* which is inclusive of the 'other' gender: female. (2004:16-17)

Female artists, such as Dorothy Kay may not have intended a feminist interpretation of their work. Whether or not female artists intended a particular feminist reading, there still lies feminist connotations and suggestions (Schmahmann 2004:08).

3.3. Female beyond her role of reflective *Other*

This section of Chapter Three will mainly deal with female self-portraiture and the mirror. In some instances, female self-portraits directly mimic or draw upon male self-portraits in order to contest particular norms of patriarchy. Feminist principles and theories will be discussed, but only necessarily in relation to the mirror motif. Feminist artists, mainly from the late nineteenth century to post-1968 employ the mirror motif in their art. Many female artists regarded the mirror as an instrument that reflected another truth - a feminist perspective. (Borzello 1998:18)

The dissertation often employs the word 'feminism' or feminist. There are dynamic, complex and multiple variations of feminism and the term 'feminism' is a broad discourse. However, it is not within the focus of the dissertation to explore a full historical background and definition of the term feminism, as this would deter from the mirror motif genre. The notion 'feminism' in this dissertation is contextualised with regard to the exploration of the mirror motif's relation to the female image. It is the first wave and

second wave (post-1968) feminist artists which employ the mirror motif in their art, which will be referenced (Borzello 1998:18).

For Borzello, autobiographies in western culture aim to be as historically accurate as possible, when describing a person or their life (1998:18). One can assimilate self-portraiture to be an autobiography, which have to be accurate renditions of a person. The initial purpose of self-portraiture was to *mimic* or accurately reflect the 'likeness' of the person. The mirror is used to create self-portraits as it mimics reality - it copies, imitates and converts three-dimensional reality into its reflective two-dimensional surface (Meskimmon 1996:95). Self-portrait paintings were the equivalent to main stream photographic self-portraiture, which often served to record and document a person at a particular time and place. Meskimmon maintains that self-portraits were therefore judged according to its ability to accurately reflect a person, with mirror realism:

In western fine art, this is the tradition of naturalism, the idea that a visual image should show the correct likeness of the object represented. Rules of propriety in representation ensure the link between object and image which guarantees 'likeness'. This particular version of mimesis, which became the dominant understanding of the concept in art criticism by eighteenth-century.. For Plato, there could be mimetic truth in naming accurately, in rendering visual likeness there could only be imitations of imitations of truth. Thus, art objects could only ever hope to mimic appearance through learned modes of propriety and find their value through their accurate 'likeness'. [Ellipsis inserted (Meskimmon 1996:97)]

One could deduce that self portraits created out of the conventional norms of self-portraiture (realistic rendering) especially those of female artists, defy and contest this notion of 'truth' and the realistic rendition by means of mimicry. Female artists, such as Helen Chadwick, Sylvia Sleigh and Cindy Sherman operate in a later time period of a postmodern framework, (since the advent of the self-portraiture tradition), in which the definition of *self* is no longer regarded as a fixed and singular *I* (Meskimmon 1996:95). According to Meskimmon, these female artists therefore raise questions of the multiple and fragmented self. (1996:95)

Apart from the lack of female self-portraiture and documentation in history, Frances Borzello proposes that female artists often presented themselves as subdued and passive individuals in comparison to their male counterparts (Borzello 1998:18). Furthermore, self-portraits are understood according to the language of posture, facial expression, poise

and accessories (Borzello 1998:19). In a post-structuralist feminist stance, in which meaning is not fixed, the self-portrait 'explore(s) and express(es) ideas and emotions about perceptions and misconceptions of womanhood' [Brackets inserted] (Arnold 1996:121)]. If self-portraits can be interpreted as an art autobiography, this raises questions of the artist's identity in terms of negating themselves between both object and subject. Therefore the self-portrait is not merely a reflection of what an artist perceives in the mirror, it is a language in which painters make a statement, from a simple image of their appearance to complex underlying belief systems. (Borzello 1998:147)

Meskimmon situates self-portraiture in another context of interpretation because the 'trope of woman-as-object' has to be reinterpreted (1996:198). Meskimmon goes further to state that female self-portraits situate women as both subject and object (1996:198). It is for this purpose that 'gender binarisms of the traditional specular economy is shown to be an artificial construct which cannot be maintained' according to Meskimmon (1996:198). Therefore female self-portraiture could be seen to challenge the traditional modes of interpretation, enabling viewers to create new and alternate understandings of the female image (Meskimmon 1996:198).

The mirror was interpreted as an object of vanity from the since the early fifteenth-century (Bartsch 2006:17). Females were often strongly associated with vanity - a vice considered as sin. Phay-Vakalis also finds that *memento mori* and *vanitas* paintings of females at the mirror were created to warn Christian followers of this sin (2001:28). Moreover, this depiction of vanity evolved and the *woman and mirror* trope simultaneously offered 'woman as objects' for the male gaze (Phay-Vakalis 2001:28). For Pollock, forbidden *femme fatales*, like Lady Lilith were also depicted and linked with the mirror because of their beauty (1996:163). It is these associations of the female to the mirror that first wave and mainly second wave feminist artists sought to challenge, 'that very language of subject and object binarism can be exploded by revealing the 'vanity' as a construct and not a natural representation. An excessive repetition of the mirroring of 'woman' can denaturalise the language itself and all of its presuppositions' (Meskimmon 1996:198). Meskimmon talks of how feminist artworks prior to 1968 or during the late nineteenth-century covertly raised questions of the female's role in society (1996:11-12). Feminist artworks dating from 1968 onwards were usually more explicit about the role of women, feminist theories and politics (Meskimmon 1996:12). One could gather that feminist

artists dating from 1968 often operated within the western phallogentric language of art theory, but in doing so invert the male gaze, *woman and mirror* and the *artist's studio* tropes. Feminist artists such as Helen Chadwick masquerade within the language of western art tropes, but upset these tropes by means of pastiche and restaging (masculinist) traditions (Pollock 1996:3, 4, 163; Meskimmon 1996:11-12)

Meskimmon asserts that many of the feminist artists that disrupt the western phallogentric language of art theory make reference the notion of 'other' (1996:5). In order to better situate the feminist artists to be discussed in this section, we need to briefly refer to the concept of 'other' and its relation to the mirror motif.

Western art tradition offers precedence to seeing, which is ultimately linked with knowing (Bartsch 2006:42). Similarly, Meskimmon proposes that it was perceived that the presentation of the masculine was norm and any other understanding was considered 'other' or departure of that norm (1996:96). Feminists sought to challenge this western tradition of mimicry and *seeing* - in doing so, they disrupt the past representations of female 'other' (Meskimmon 1996:96).

According to Meskimmon, the *self*, in western knowledge systems, must be constituted as a whole in opposition to:

'others' in order to make sense of language and the society into which it is thrust. The privilege of sight, as and 'objective' sense through which we can 'objectively' understand the world, makes the logic of the mirror a cultural norm and is itself a gendered account. (1996:5)

If the mirror represented the vanity of women and traditions of male sexual authority - the male gaze and *artist's studio*, then it is feminists who question these traditions of 'other' and the mirror motif which undermines and restricts female authority. (Meskimmon 1996:5)

Simone de Beauvoir is author of *The Second Sex* (1949). Beauvoir critically argues the position of women in a patriarchal society, where female is 'other' to male. Beauvoir speaks of a binary opposition of self, which 'the one' who is male - 'first sex' and the 'other' or 'second sex' - female can only operate through the system of the 'first sex'

(Meskimmon 1996:6). So, the female 'other' can only be understood in terms of and in relation to male. One notes this when Beauvoir refers to the mirror motif when describing a female's role:

But all her life the woman is to find the magic of her mirror a tremendous help in her effort to project herself and then attain self-identification...Man, feeling and wishing himself active, subject, does not see himself in his fixed image; it has little attraction for him, since man's body does not seem to him an object of desire; while woman, knowing and making herself object, believes she really sees *herself* in the glass.

[Ellipsis inserted (Meskimmon 1996:6)]

Beauvoir's statement alerts us to the logic of the mirror and its tradition of visual understanding, which can be defined as the binary opposites of female object and male subject. (Meskimmon 1996:6)

Feminists have sought to contest the western norm of the female intending to be gazed at as object. It is therefore, because of male society, not (necessarily) a woman's biological characteristic that determines a woman as 'other' (Meskimmon 1996:7). Feminists counter the notion of the 'Venus female' and the mirror trope, by revising the western tradition of female 'object' and male 'subject' positions. By inverting the western mirror motif in art, feminists re-interpret and expose the art theories which support it. For Meskimmon, the female has been and sometimes still is understood and referred to as an 'other' to male (1996:7). Historically, a female's role was interpreted as a support to the male, she intensifies and reflects the male figure in art which is exemplified in the *artist's studio*, *Venus* and *woman at the mirror* tropes. (Meskimmon 1996:6)

Luce Irigaray contends with the male mirror trope in her text entitled, *Speculum of the Other Women* (1974). Feminist theorist, Elizabeth Grosz comments on Irigaray's notion of the female 'other' in relation to the mirror:

This may explain Irigaray's attraction to Alice, the character in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* and *Alice in Wonderland*. She acts as a metaphor for the woman who, like Irigaray (herself an A-Luce), steps beyond her role as the reflective other for man. She goes *through* the looking-glass, through, that is, the dichotomous structures of knowledge, the binary polarisations in which only man's primacy is reflected. On the other side is a land of wonder, a land that can be mapped, not by the flat mirror, but by the curved speculum. (Meskimmon 1996:6-7)

Irigaray re-interprets the fairytale character of Alice into a feminist heroine, extending the crossing through the mirror as a new take on the female position as 'other' in art.

Meskimmon emphasises that, Grosz, like other feminist artists, employ the mirror motif as a key symbol which historically reflects 'truth', to be reinterpreted into perceiving woman as 'subject' and not only as 'object' (1996:7).

Joan Semmel's *Me Without Mirrors* (1974) is a self-portrait which problematises the notion of self-representation and objectification of the female. Semmel presents her body from her own angle of vision, causing the viewer to question their angle of perspective.

We question whether we see through her eyes, a reflection or a reversed image?

According to Meskimmon, figurative painting was accredited according to its realism or its closeness to a mirror reflection in western art tradition (1996:97). Semmel's is a figurative artwork, which works through the traditional masculine art language of female as 'object'.

It is under the guise of Semmel's naturalism that she contests the traditional representations of women, as 'to deny the mirror in a painted likeness of the self is to defy convention in respect of the genre of self-portraiture' (Meskimmon 1996:1). Therefore Semmel defies the mirror motif *without mirrors* in this self-portrait, providing an alternate perspective, realism and presentation.

Me Without Mirrors challenges the *woman at the mirror* and female nude tropes (Meskimmon 1996:1). In the artwork, the body does not pose as an object for the gaze, instead it operates on the level of first person intimacy - we look through her eyes, not *at* her. The title of the artwork asserts that the nude model is that of the artist, Semmel. By implication, the title also provides a context of viewing - the nude is not an object produced by a cultured, distanced, male artist. According to Meskimmon, the self-portrait shows Semmel drying herself with a towel after bathing, drawing from the western genre of 'nude female bathing' or at 'her toilette', which are often represented with mirror (1996:3).

The mirror tends to validate the gaze and facilitate the female 'object' to be available for male consumption and suggest that the female is in secret agreement with this (Meskimmon 1996:3). As mentioned earlier by Meskimmon, it is the mirror in traditional western art representation of vanity – a *woman and mirror* that facilitated the male gaze (1996:11). *Me Without Mirrors* challenges this understanding by disrupting the mirror

motif of *woman and mirror* and male gaze as it shifts the connection between spectator and spectacle, therefore disrupting the binary polarisations of female object and male subject (Meskimmon 1996:3).

The *artist's studio* is but one of the many devices used in western art (Schmahmann 2004:7). According to Soko Phay-Vakalis on her article in Circa Art Magazine, *woman at the mirror* is a re-occurrent theme which exists in western art theory since the Middle Ages (2001:28). The *woman at the mirror* theme was mainly drawn from the female's relation to beauty, vanity and coquetry (Phay-Vakalis 2001:28).

Images of women and her mirror dating before the twentieth century seem to always draw on the objectification of the female model through the male gaze (Chicago 1999:51). This is apparent in Georges Seurat's *Young Woman Powdering Herself* (1880-90) for example. Beyond Seurat's Post Impressionist-pointillism and mathematical precision, the painting could fit into the *women and mirror* trope, which inherently becomes a moralising masterpiece of the vanity of women. At the same time the artwork provides an erotic viewing for the male artist and spectator. (Chicago 1999:50).

As though in direct opposition to Seurat's *The Young Woman Powdering Herself*, a more recent example which could parallel the *women and mirror* in regards to the gaze is Cindy Sherman's *Untitled* (1997) which reverses this vanity trope. Instead of a woman appearing passive beside the mirror, Sherman is active when she looks at her reflection in the mirror (Chicago 1999:151). Sherman seems to over exaggerate her pose, to the extent of artificialness. It could be suggested that Sherman seems to be aware of her narcissistic pose and we suspect her flippancy. As stated by Chicago, the photograph counters the manner in which women appear as 'helpless victims of their own vanity' in film and media - such as media advertisements (Chicago 1999:151). Sherman therefore works through the 'passive female in front of the mirror' trope, but by means of exaggeration, in which its familiar and ordinary meaning mutates into something vulgar and counter (Chicago 1999:151).

Not all paintings by female artists employed the mirror to critique 'object' and 'subject' representation, as did the surge of the first wave and mainly second wave feminists (Chicago 1999:154). Mary Cassatt's, *Antoinette at Her Dresser* (date undocumented) and

Berthe Morisot's *Young Woman Powdering Her Face* (1895) presented women's vanity in front of the mirror as a natural routine, by capturing the essence of the individual's moment (Chicago 1999:154). One could deduce that Morisot's model appears natural and less static to that of Seurat's *Young Woman Powdering Herself* (1880-90). Cassatt's painting presents two mirrors, one which the woman pensively gazes into a hand mirror and the other a large mirror, which reflects the back of her head that is cradled in a relaxed position. Morisot's sitter is captured in the moment of powdering her face while tilting the mirror for a better angle. Morisot's model does not appear to be conscious of our gaze (as some male artists create artworks of *woman at the mirror* which have a soliciting gaze at the viewer such as Venus). Morisot seems to have captured the essence of concentration in the woman's face. According to Chicago, Morisot and Cassatt's *women at the mirror* do not embody women as objects which belong to vanity, but rather one of female routine (1999:154). It is portrayed as a mundane act which females perform for social acceptability not only for herself, but for others (Chicago 1999:154).

Helen Chadwick reinterprets the tradition of *woman and mirror* and vanity in her self-portrait, *Vanity: The Oval Court Of Mutability* (1986) (Meskimmon 1996:196). In *Vanity: The Oval Court Of Mutability*, the mirror reflects the artist and her accompanying installation piece entitled, *The Oval Court*. The installation works through the traditional sixteen and seventeen-century language by utilizing baroque drapery and large golden orbs splayed across the floor (Meskimmon 1996:197). For Meskimmon, Chadwick appears to masquerade as Venus, nude in front of a mirror amongst her opulent surroundings of drapery, feathers and jewels (1996:96). One could claim that, reflected at a distance in the mirror, the golden orbs seem to transform into small pearls, in relative size counter to Chadwick's overlapping hand above them. Furthermore, these pearls appear reminiscent of Venus, who mythologically originates from an oyster shell, like the pearls. Key to Chadwick's parade as Venus is her gaze (Meskimmon 1996:197). Chadwick looks at herself only, unlike Venus, who looks at herself while simultaneously soliciting our gaze. Chadwick makes us aware of our voyeurism because she does not invite our gaze like Venus (Meskimmon 1996: 196).

Meskimmon identifies that Chadwick overtly challenges the western tradition of *woman and mirror* and vanity in art and contests the knowledge structures that support female as 'other' - in regarding her artwork *Vanity: The Oval Court Of Mutability*, Chadwick states,

Within each event, the position of things is given, but the emotive momentum is left hanging. It may be perceived literally as an outwardly manifest reality, a mirror, or experienced by the eye alone, but will only become palpably real if felt deep within the reflexive domain of introspection...Pleasure and pain are simultaneous in the illusory frame of this place, free from the dimension of shame and guilt... the boundaries have dissolved, between self and other, the living and the corpse. This is the threshold of representation, not quite real, not exactly alive but the conscious implicate depths of reflection. [Ellipsis inserted (Meskimmon 1996:196)]

Vanity: The Oval Court of Mutability employs the guise of *vanitas*, but also presents the female artist as ‘un-constructed’ and then ‘constructed’, to create a new paradigm of female being a separate entity, not an ‘other’ (Meskimmon 1996:198). The circular artwork does not necessarily frame off a segment, its form is ‘endless’ and provoking the infinite manner in which the artwork can be interpreted. One cannot clearly determine the ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of the artwork within the sphere which contains the circular mirror and in doing so, problematises the viewer’s objective reading of the artwork. Meskimmon claims that the work and its meanings are extended for interpretation and that the representation of female may be fixed and pre-established, but its context is *mutable* (1996:198).

While *Of Mutability* employs the guise of Venus and *vanitas*, Sylvia Sleigh seems to reverse the *artist’s studio* trope in her artwork *Philip Golub Reclining* (1971). Sleigh presents herself as a clothed artist in the background while painting her nude male model in the foreground. Sleigh accomplishes a visual re-take, as initially one assumes the model to be female. Ironically Philip Golub reclines across the foreground while looking at the mirror and simultaneously soliciting the viewer, *he* masquerades as the Goddess of Love – Venus (Borzello 1998:161). Sleigh appears as cultured, active and in control artist in contrast to her passive male muse - who is presented as an object for female consumption. Borzello believes that Sleigh thwarts one’s expectations of the female’s role in art (1998:161). Furthermore, the artwork does invert the *artist’s studio* trope, but it does not entirely complete this inversion. The *Philip Golub Reclining* is not over toned with female eroticism; Philip appears artificial and does not emerge as desirable as the females in the former traditions of the male *artist’s studio*. (Borzello 1998:161)

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore employ the mirror trope as a visual sign in a volume of artworks entitled, *Aveux non Avenus* (1930) which consists of ten photomontages. The montage consists of photographs, drawings, text - hand written and some on printed paper, which could imply the connection between the expressive motion of writing and drawing, between the mechanical – typed and printed pieces (Meskimmon 2003: 96). For Meskimmon, the montage raises questions about the volatile nature of female desire which is unfixed and the subject / object division (2003:96). Central to Cahun and Moore's *Moi-même* montage is the idea of looking, reflecting and portraying. *Moi-même II* montage represents the gaze of Cahun's *look* outward and her *looked-at-ness*. The artist's gaze confronts the viewer even though she appears in the mirror and eye that are depicted in the artwork (Meskimmon 2003: 96). From the title *Moi-même*, one questions whose self-portrait we look at, but we never quite reach a conclusive answer, as the title states *myself* or *self same* - Moore or Cahun? In the montage the mirror constantly revises and interplays between the notion of 'other' as 'object' because, 'the mirror does not adequately reflect or capture the body it seeks to reveal and the eye holds its subject inverted, as if in the lens of a camera' (Meskimmon 2003: 96). The mirror also heightens the exchange of lesbian desire, vision and connection between female and female, between Cahun and Moore. The mirror disrupts the gaze by blurring the margins between subject and object that has been constructed in heterosexual desire. (Meskimmon 2003:96-98)

The repetition of the circular concept of the mirror established the phenomenon produced by mirrors, which is a kaleidoscope (Zucker 1962:248). According to Zucker, a kaleidoscope has mirrors that are inclined at specific angles to double-reflect (1962:248). The optical toy has a peephole through which one can view infinite patterns. Meskimmon suggests that it is as though the viewer looks through this peephole to view Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's *N.O.N Montage IX* from *Aveux non Avex* (1930), which appears as a kaleidoscopic portrait (2003:96). The photographic self-portrait consists of two photographs, which are duplicated, multiplied, reversed and interlaid using the mirror, which results in a kaleidoscopic and volatile portrait of the artist. One expects a mirror or mimetic reproduction of the mirror when observing this portrait (such as a central figure, horizontal doubling of reflection and symmetry), but in *N.O.N. Aveux non Avex* the body is placed out of the confines of mimetic representation and reflection of the mirror, which posits the *I* as a construction. (Meskimmon 2003:96-98)

Paintings, like mirrors, are conventionally bound by frames in western art (Schmahmann 2004:6). One gathers that *N.O.N.* confronts the convention of the frame and mirror by separating the 'inside' from the 'outside' and defying object from subject. Most of the kaleidoscopic portrait is fragmented within the frame and the only coherent image of Cahun appears beyond the bounds of the frame of the artwork, she resides neither 'inside nor outside' the confines of our world (Meskimmon 2003:96). The montage operates within the tradition of the mirror and two-dimensional art, like the mirror it deceptively reflects the *self* or Cahun, yet it defies the traits of the mirror to mimic and frame. (Meskimmon 2003:96-98)

The *woman at the mirror* trope seems to have captivated painters over centuries. From the middle ages the mirror motif spread in western art as a means to convey notions of morality as defined by the Church (Phay-Vakalis 2001:28). In the seventeenth century, the mirror motif was then extended to include evocations of beauty and female coquetry, only to be revised by feminist artists around the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 4: ARCAINE FACETS OF THE LOOKING GLASS

The mirror's nature is often regarded as magical, because of its ability to reflect reality unlike any other object. Since antiquity, the mirror has been conceived as an aperture to the arcane (Zucker 1962: 242). This notion of the mirror is embodied by philosophical author, Maurice Merleau-Ponty in which he states,

It is no accident...that frequently in Dutch paintings (as in many others) an interior in which no one is present is 'digested' by the 'round eye of the mirror'...The mirror emerges because I am a visible see-er, because there is a reflexivity of the sensible; the mirror translates and reproduces that reflexivity. In it, my externality becomes complete. Everything that is most secret about me passes into that face, that flat, closed being of which I was already dimly aware, from having seen my reflection mirrored in water. [Ellipsis inserted (Smith 2005:29)].

It is also important to note that Merleau-Ponty's term 'closed being' corresponds to the mirror existing as an opposing surface, as though it were a portal to another dimension. (Smith 2005:29).

The mirror motif can draw from extreme polarities - from ancient myths, such as those of Medusa and Narcissus, to notions of reflecting the *psyche* or soul (Smith 2003:29).

Despite the three main subsections to follow in this chapter, interpretations of the mirror motif tend to intertwine at times.

4.1. Reflected observer and implied observer

The mirror motif is sometimes employed as a device that implicates the viewer (Smith 2003:30). According to Zucker, artworks which operate by this device, sometimes portray a mirror that 'reflects' beyond the boundary of the picture frame into the viewer's reality (1962:245). By reflecting the viewer space, the mirror at times implicates the viewer and the act of looking shifts inward. An ironic paradox between the actual observer and the implied observer is created and often the voyeurism of the observer is put into question (Zucker 1962:245).

Such ambiguities are reflected in *Bar at Folies-Bergère* (1881-2) by Edward Manet. In this artwork, the mirror reflects individuals whose existence is questionable in reality. One is automatically inclined to ask, 'Who does the mirror reflect?' (Courthion undated: 148).

According to George Mauner, *Bar at Folies-Bergère* is a key artwork in the western mirror motif genre (1975:161). The mirror features behind the barmaid, who intercepts its gold frame. We are certain that the plane behind the barmaid is a mirror (and not another space behind her), because it not only reflects the back of the barmaid, but also the bottles in front of it. Yet the mirror reflection is false. The bottles before the mirror are incongruent to its reflection in the mirror. The gilded frame of the mirror is horizontally straight and parallel to the bar table and the picture plane. If the barmaid stands in the centre of the scene, then her reflection should theoretically be directly behind her and not off to the right as she is depicted. (Adler 1986:227)

Richardson finds that artworks pertaining to the mirror motif before 1860 did not surpass the rules of linear perspective (1976:88). *Bar at Folies-Bergère* was significant because it dared to depict an incongruent reflection in the mirror. In other words, other depictions of the mirror conformed to the logic of the mirror reflection - to imply symbols and allegories of the mirror motif. *Bar at Folies-Bergère* may be visually cogent, but is more explicit to the mirror metaphor because of its incongruity of reflection (Richardson 1976:88).

The barmaid appears anonymous, apart from a hint of dreaminess that is evident in her eyes. If self-expression enables classification by others, then the barmaid's character is closed and unreadable to us. Fried notes that one cannot ascertain this barmaid's personality or level of social class (1996:286). The barmaid's bland visage reflects the anonymity of her modern existence - she is neither a part of, nor separate from the bourgeoisie. The 'anonymity and loneliness of modern life are clichés' in which the barmaid's remote expression seems to convey (Fried 1996:286).

In the mirror reflection, the barmaid appears more animated and sociable. We read this from her tilted head and body inclination toward the man in front of her. According to Fried, the barmaid appears eager in the mirror, to the extent that she even seems to solicit the mysterious man before her (1996:287). This seems to indicate to the viewer that she is addressing someone, if not the male customer. In reality, the man is not visible in front of

the barmaid, as the mirror angle would suggest – as we are not behind the man, otherwise we would be looking over his shoulder (Fried 1996:287). Perhaps we gaze through the man's eyes and see what he sees? Or does the mirror reveal the barmaid's imagination? As a result, the mirror becomes an indicator of transition between *reflected* observer and *implied* observer. It will remain a question as to whether or not the man really exists, but the key is that the mirror reveals an alternate reality at Folies-Bergère. (Fried 1996:287)

This alternate reality is otherwise hidden from our perspective, as the man is only visible in the mirror. Without the mirror, the man would not be visible to us (Adler 1986:227). Perhaps the mirror exposes the barmaid's sensual facet and possible seduction - unlike her actual frontal view [like Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror* (1932)]. The mirror may possibly be indicating the male's desired role of the barmaid. Furthermore, the viewer becomes implicated, as pointed out by Fried, we may be looking through the man's perspective (1996:287). This interpretation further emphasises the woman's contradictory role as a barmaid or an object of desire.

The mirror in *Bar at Folies-Bergère* not only provides a perspective of the environment and atmosphere behind the barmaid, but also offers a deeper insight of space. For Fried, the mirror is like a magical spyglass which reveals what is hidden to the eye and adds another dimension to the bland barmaid (1996:287). In *Bar at Folies-Bergère* we look at the mirror hoping to find answers, but our questions elicit further questions. The mirror could emphasise the open ended narrative of the *Bar at Folies-Bergère*. In doing so, the mirror presents a nature of polysemic truth - like the barmaid, who is open to expression and classification: with no single answer to offer us viewers (Fried 1996:286-7).

The mirror reflection creates further ambiguities of spectatorship in *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez (Stratton-Pruitt 2006:61). In the artwork, the mirror makes an appearance on the wall behind the painter Velázquez. Velázquez is shown momentarily arrested with paintbrush in hand, before his easel. King Philip IV and Queen Mariana are reflected in the mirror. Despite the small size of the mirror, the royal couple appear to dominate the scene. Stratton-Pruitt describes the mirror to be assimilated to the royal couple it reflects; who are silent observers, all powerful and omnipresent (2006:61). Yet simultaneously, the king and queen become visually disembodied by the mirror, not only because they appear small and hazy, but also due to their ghost-like presence in the mirror.

The mirror captures the timelessness and transient moment of the figures, despite their silent poses. Is the mirror then, like the powerful king and queen - omnipresent and ever watchful? (Stratton-Pruitt 2002:61).

The mirror reverses reality - left as right and right as left. The king and queen are reflected in the mirror. It is peculiar for the queen to appear on the left of the king, as court protocol demands that the queen to be on the king's left. (Kubler 1985:316)

The king and queen are posited as spectators, as well as a secular portrait in the mirror centred in the scene. The royal couple in the mirror create an air of mystery and paradox, as they see what we see, but also their own image in the mirror.

The equivocal experience of *Las Meninas*.. may be attributable to Velázquez' preserving the elevated status of the royal couple as it resides in its ultimate paragon- the mind's eye of the beholder. The mirror with the image of the royal couple may be said to embody the 'mind's eye' concept to the entire painting.
[Ellipsis inserted (Galligan 1998:156)].

We securely watch the king, queen and the event from our distant position, but soon realise it is the king and queen who watch us. The mirror paradoxically juggles the notion of perspective, between implied spectator and actual spectator (Muller 1976:220). It is in this mode that the mirror is the revealer, yet at the same time it also chooses what not to reveal. Here the mirror's reference to reality is vivid, yet opaque. Perhaps Velázquez indicates two dimensions of our visible reality: a tangible one we can see and touch and the other an illusion, which masquerades as the real, fooling our perceptions (Muller 1976:220).

In *Las Meninas* the mirror signals many questions referring to the concept of a 'painting of a painting' (Kubler 1985:316). For the viewer, does Velazquez paint the royal couple's portrait or the 'reflection' of the scene? (as though we look through the mirror which he paints from). Perhaps Velázquez' intention is to create his own self-portrait from a mirror? (Adler 1986:227). The painting could also simply be a portrait of *the maids of honour* as the title itself translates. On the face of it, *Las Meninas* is a portrait of the *Infanta* and her attendants. It is also logical that the king and queen oversee this sitting. So it is quite possible that the artist does not necessarily paint the royal couple, just as it is possible that Velázquez too, oversees from the middle of the scene. (Kubler 1985:316)

In the background a figure stands in the doorway. The male figure has one foot on a step inside and the other outside. It is as though he is about to impedingly walk away from the scene, instead of approach it, as the king and queen appear to do. This figure is the most distant to the viewer. Yet the figure in dark attire is highly distinct, due to the backlighting that irradiates around him in the framed doorway. According to Stratton-Pruitt, this man is the *aposeñador*, who schedules events, moves furniture, commissions artworks and creates passage through doors like the one he stands in (2002:62). Apparently the name of the *aposeñador* is also Velázquez (Stratton-Pruitt 2002:62). The *aposeñador* would most likely be aiding the queen in her arrangements for the group painting. Strangely enough, the *aposeñador* appears like a mirror-mimic of Velázquez in not only name, but also appearance. Apart from us nobody seems to look at the artist - Velázquez in the scene, except the *aposeñador* or *other* Velázquez. This tends evoke a sense of uncanniness in relation to the mirror. We are fully aware that it would be impossible for Velázquez to create this artwork or self portrait without a mirror. Velázquez looks at the mirror or viewer in an arrested moment, probably taking into account what he paints from in the mirror. Like the mirror, the *aposeñador* appears as an echo of Velázquez, mimicking the artist, but not entirely. (Stratton-Pruitt 2002:62).

One would expect the subjects in the foreground to be respectfully acknowledging the king and queen who they face. Instead they all appear arbitrarily concerned with their own matters, like their dog drifting into slumber. This inconsistency becomes distracting and tends to dominate the overall mood of the painting (Muller 1976:218). To a slight extent, the subjects in the foreground address the viewer - which they pose for, but their eyes are not as convincing, as Velázquez' (Muller 1976:218). This is not so for Velázquez. The artist seems to look directly at the viewer, who sees the scene beyond the picture plane. The notion of an ideally balanced composition of *Las Meninas* seems to also be mired by its participants. The figures in the foreground are placed together yet they all seem isolated. Apart from Velázquez, their eyes do not meet each other's or ours. Nobody's line of vision seems to meet another person's. All the participants seem to gaze into an undefined space. We will never know this space, yet we simultaneously occupy it. It would seem that only the artist who records the moment reflected in the mirror, knows of this space. (Muller 1976:218)

Muller states that human experience is primarily based on a visual way of life (1976:220). In the mirror the boundary between illusion and reality merge, which results in an uncanny fascination (Muller 1976:220). *Las Meninas* juggles this context- muddling our perceptions of the real and imaginary by interplay between mirror, reflection and spectator. Velázquez seems to paradoxically merge the real through spectatorship. According to Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, the mirror suggests that *Las Meninas* ‘serves to bring into the experience of viewing the picture an awareness of the area that lies between the canvas and the onlooker’ (2002:61)

While the mirror in *Las Meninas* tends to make one question the viewer’s space, the mirror in *Felix in Exile* (1994) and *History of the Main Complaint* (1996) appears to both reflect and implicate the viewer.

The mirror motif in *Felix in Exile* and *History of the Main Complaint* by William Kentridge creates a paradox between implied viewer and actual viewer. In these artworks the mirror is the object that is *looked at* and does not only reflect the main protagonist (Felix or Soho for example), but also the viewer. The ambiguous mirror becomes a visual trigger and as a consequence it implicates the otherwise silent observer into an active onlooker (Godby 1999:84).

Felix in Exile and *History of the Main Complaint* by Kentridge, is a part of a series of short animated films which centre on the characters Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum in Johannesburg. Soho Eckstein, who frequently appears in a pin-striped suit, is a major property developer, mine owner and capitaliser that masquerades as a humanitarian. Contrary to the greedy exploiter Soho, is the dreamer Felix Teitlebaum (Godby 1999:84). Felix appears to resemble the artist, Kentridge and usually appears naked. Felix is rendered as a romantic, emphatic and sympathetic character. The film narrates Soho’s rise to power due to his involvement in the establishment of mining and developing in the town of Johannesburg. It also portrays the resulting upheaval of the land and its people (Godby 1999:84). While Felix feels compassion for the victims’ trauma, Soho exploits the situation by extorting money and power endlessly. In other words, the binary opposite character, Soho, observes the stars in the sky, while Felix observes the stock exchange (Godby 1999:84).

Felix in Exile was created recently after the South African elections, which marked the end of apartheid. According to Godby, Kentridge seems to present the question of the connection between individual and collective guilt in this drawing (1999:83). The mirror makes an appearance on Felix's hotel room wall in *Felix in Exile* and could perhaps metaphorically reflect upon South Africa's past of tumult before democracy. The mirror reflects South Africa's ills of apartheid to Felix (Godby 1999:84). Subsequently, the mirror is poised amongst the myriad of oblique frames toward the end of the scene.

Felix is shown in his regular appearance: alone and naked, while contemplating Nandi's drawings. The character Nandi, is the land surveyor, who draws surveys of the bloodied victims of slaughter which are shown to be eventually swallowed by the earth. It is important to note that Felix is only able to see the massacre and protests through Nandi's eyes and not directly by himself (Abate 2004:84). It is only from Nandi's drawings – her eyes that he sees the brutalities in the land. Felix sees through Nandi's eyes and it is in the mirror that Nandi's face emerges out of Felix's slowly vanishing face in the second sequence. While Felix shaves his face at the hotel room sink, he 'shaves-off' or erases the reflection of his face in the mirror, which Nandi's face then replaces. 'Nandi.. *is* on the other side of the membrane between art and reality represented by the mirror' and when she is shot, water overflows through the mirror while she is dying [ellipsis inserted (Abate 2004:84)]. Water from the mirror floods the room, while Felix hopelessly gazes upon the empty land. Felix and Nandi interact between the mirror - together they both look into the mirror, which performs as two-sided telescope. (Abate 2004:83-4)

To some extent in *Felix in Exile*, Nandi is the actual observer while Felix is the implied viewer, who emphatically watches Nandi die, yet he cannot help her (Godby 1999:84).

History of the Main Complaint (1996) portrays Soho Eckstein who becomes sick and bedridden in hospital. The film tells of Soho's identification and guilt of those who suffered in apartheid South Africa. In Soho's process of recognition, the viewers see the narrative by 'passing through' his body while he is in a coma (Abate 2004:84).

The viewer is offered Soho's recollection as a detached onlooker to savage violence against black South Africans. The viewer also sees the images of Soho's memory or dream of his car knocking down a man on the road. (In his coma) We, the viewers are

given a perspective from behind Soho, as though we were sitting in the back seat of his car. The looking-glass in the *History of the Main Complaint* appears as a rear-view mirror. The mirror does not seem to reflect only the eyes of the driver, but also ours - the spectators of the film. According to Abate, the mirror operates on two levels, the first as a reflector of Soho's eyes and secondly it includes and implicates the spectator (2004:85). The viewer is somewhat forced to participate in the driver's accident of the onslaught or 'incident' (as the driver might think of it). (Abate 2004:85)

The eyes on the rear-view mirror whether ours, Soho's or both, functions as a visual trigger. It could alert viewers to the idea that if we *see*, then we too, are obliged to partake in the brutal events that unfold before Soho. If we are disengaged onlookers like Soho, we support the perpetrator's crimes. 'The image thus slips through both time and reality, from the time of the fictive event represented to the time each spectator confronts his or her own participation in history' (Abate 2004:84). The accusing, yet intent eyes, reflected in the rear-view mirror, renders the viewer uncomfortable. It makes the 'silent observer' think – as Soho seems to, not what he did in apartheid, but what he failed to do. When Soho hits his head against the windscreen due to the impact of the crash, he wakes up from unconsciousness in his hospital bed. The hospital bed transforms into a paper piled office desk and with this we wonder if his trip of recognition and guilt ever happened. (Abate 2004:85)

The mirror device in *History of the Main Complaint* reflects the gaze of ambiguous eyes which implicates the viewer in the crime. The actual observer Soho elicits us into the incident; consequently we too are implied observers. (Abate 2004:85)

While the mirror in *Felix in Exile* and *History of the Main Complaint* complicates observation by implicating the viewer, it does so too in *Foreign Affairs* by Siopis, but on a far more chilling note.

In *Foreign Affairs (Arutma)* (1994) by Penelope Siopis, one sees the illusion of the mirror extend beyond its flat surface, where faces appear to float in a space beyond the plane of the mirror. Siopis evokes an eerie sentiment by methodically scratching away the mirror substrate, so that the artist's haunted images ascend to the surface (Smith 2005:29). In some areas the mirror captures morbid reflections of faces which become fixed in time.

Other areas reflect and capture light as a normal mirror would (where the artist has not scratched the silver substrate surface away) (Smith 2005:29).

In *Foreign Affairs*, the convex mirror intercepts the central point of the artwork. According to Collin Richards, this interception heralds the mirror from the myth of *Medusa*, when Perseus used a mirror to shield himself from Medusa's lethal vision. The eyes of the *femme fatale* – Medusa are somehow counter to Sarah Baartman's closed eyes in *Foreign Affairs* (Smith 2005:29). Baartman's eyes are closed-up in her death-cast, somewhat elevating her role as a powerless victim. The artist took photographs of Baartman's death-mask in 1988, Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Baartman's dead eyes lay permanently closed, which emerges through a convex mirror (Smith 2005:29). It is as though the viewer becomes captivated, as the moment appears frozen in a mirror, yet a mirror surface is usually anything but frozen. The mirror is a surface which temporarily captures ephemeral moments and light, but this transience is paradoxically frozen in *Foreign Affairs (Arutma)* because of Baartman's still and silent eyes, as though in an eternal sleep. (Smith 2005:30)

The mirror surface is conflicting in nature, as it reflects yet captures, is transient yet frozen (Stoljar 1990:366). Most importantly the mirror's illusory specular space is limitless in reflection. Siopis develops her exploration of these qualities of the mirror in the installation *Permanent Collection* (1994) (Smith 2005:30). In this work she covers the back wall of a cupboard with mirrors. The cupboard's mirror reflects the objects in it and the world outside it. The mirror also reflects: the sugared lattice, spiced body pieces, the viewer and the space between the viewer and the installation. (Smith 2005:30)

A light switch had to be pressed in order for the cupboard to be lit up and viewed. The light switch would then automatically switch off after an estimated viewing session. According to Smith, this approach causes the viewer to press the light switch in order to view the installation – as a consequence, the viewer becomes apart of the installation itself (2003:30). The wall mirror in the cupboard subsequently reflects the illuminated viewer, making the viewer aware of their intrusion. (Smith 2005:30)

One often forgets the delicate, thin, silver film which becomes camouflaged by the almost magical nature of reflection, as Merleau-Ponty maintains that mirrors are, 'instruments of a

universal magic that convert things into spectacle, spectacle into things, myself into another, and another into myself.’ (Smith 2005:30). The mirror replicates our three-dimensional world to precision in its flat two-dimensional surface.

Siopis interplays the polarities of the mirror – such as the precision and distortion of reflection. *Hush Hush: Collaborator* (1994) explores dualities of inside / outside, pain / pleasure and self / other in the context of the ties between South African women (Smith 2005:31). The installation is composed of a doll’s torso and a mirror, which both feature inside a four-sided box coated with a layer of hair. The sheared head of the Caucasian doll stares at the mirror - perhaps not at her own reflection, but at Saartjie Baartman’s who appears lifeless in the mirror substrate. *Hush Hush: Collaborator* creates a site where a white doll *reflects* on herself in the mirror, but also sees Baartman – the victim of a shameful history of South African gender and racial extortion, interspersed with hers. Like *Hush Hush: Collaborator*, the artwork *Display: Sarah Baartman* (1992) also has silver substrate removed in areas, creating a transparency. Again a photograph of Baartman emerges from the mirror, jeopardizing the notion of a transient reflection. (Smith 2005:31).

This static incision of the photograph behind the otherwise highly reflective mirror is also evident in Siopis’ *Blood River (Seën, Siestog, Soen)* (1992-3). A mirror is included amongst sugar-covered objects. Behind the mirror surface a photograph of an infant is perceptible. Likewise, in *Trauma* and *Arutma* the mirror is positioned on the abdomen of sprinting bodies in a red field. In these mirrors, photographs of infants appear with their identity document text: ‘*te jonk om te teken; too young to sign*’. An expected adorable photograph of a baby is inverted into something macabre (Smith 2005:31). The faces appear to drift to the mirror membrane, which conjures a haunted allusion of cadaverous drifting bodies that have been arrested in time. The areas of silver membrane that are untouched, initially appears ordinary. But later these permanent images intersperse, providing the viewer with an underlying sense of discomfort. If the prime function of a mirror is to reflect, then why does the mirror in this artwork only reflect some areas, why are we reflected in this mirror and why do these ghostly images float amongst us? Once again the spectator’s involvement is questioned by the artist’s use of the mirror. (Smith 2005:32)

While the mirror in Siopis's works elicits questions of spectatorship and the dark South African history, history too is reflected in the mirror by Marion Arnold, but in reference to her own personal identity in apartheid history.

The mirror reflects the artist in *Some Kind of Whole Made of Shivering Fragments* (1992) and *Portrait of a Woman from Africa* (2003) by Marion Arnold. *Portrait of a Woman from Africa* depicts a mirror fragment that is pegged on to a string like a laundry-line. Along with the mirror fragment, other objects like curio-shop souvenirs of places appear, such as a beaded doll, a mat and postcards. The mirror shard aids in communicating Arnold's idea of 'home' in the artwork. *Portrait of a Woman from Africa* speaks of Arnold, who was born in England, raised in Zimbabwe, relocated to South Africa and now lives in England. Arnold raises issues of how her different homes have shaped her different identities. If nationalism is a belonging to a single country, *Portrait of a Woman from Africa* jeopardises this notion, due to Arnold's multiple identities in relation to her homes (Schmahmann 2004:36).

According to Schmahmann, *Portrait of a Woman from Africa* illustrates the manner in which identities are formed or influenced by locales and how the meaning of *self* constantly redefines itself. In reference to the painting, Arnold states the objects are of,

a time-map of different lives lived in different spaces and ages...My mental slide show obeys no sequence. It thrusts the remembered against the observed as collisions of past and present. My fragments, the components of a portrait of a woman from Africa, carry traces of lives lived in Harare, called Salisbury when I lived there, and Pretoria, called the apartheid capital when I lived there, and Cape Town, called the mother city when I lived there. Where was 'home'? The woman from Africa was also a woman from Europe, schooled in a culture transplanted into a colony that was different to the motherland and to the land south of the Limpopo. The woman went to live in England, remembering the lives lived in Africa. Now, in East Anglia, the mental slide show plays in different sequences. [Ellipsis inserted (Schmahmann 2004:39)]

Portrait of a Woman from Africa becomes an index for Arnold's various homes. Apart from the other souvenirs, a fragment of a mirror pegged on the line reflects the artist. Arnold's face is not reflected as though standing in front of the artwork she creates. Instead Arnold's reflection in the mirror is *part* of the painting (Schmahmann 2004:39). Theoretically, the mirror shard reflects the artist. But the artworks employ a multiple

perspective due to the stylized rock and animal frame edging the artwork. Arnold is not placed as the masterful artist who views from a distance with the mirror (as in the *artist's studio*) trope, which divides *observer* and *observed-at*. Instead, Arnold is a part of the artwork - often females were associated or portrayed with the mirror inviting the male gaze. In *Portrait of a Woman from Africa*, Schmahmann suggests that Arnold does not invite our gaze like Venus, instead her dark sunglasses repels her *looked-at-ness* (2004:39). According to Schmahmann, Arnold's sunglasses implies the act of observation and how *seeing* implicates the viewer. Arnold's sunglasses also confound the idea of human adaptation to an environment, such as the harsh South African sun which burns her 'alien' skin. (Schmahmann 2004:39)

The mirror which reflects Arnold's face is also found in *Some Kind of Whole Made of Shivering Fragments* (1992) made over a decade before *Portrait of a Woman from Africa*. *Some Kind of Whole Made of Shivering Fragments* employs the mirror motif in a similar manner as *Portrait of a Woman from Africa* (Schmahmann 2004:39). In *Portrait of a Woman from Africa*, Arnold appears close up to the mirror as she fills its reflection. By positioning herself close to the mirror, Arnold does not become a distanced viewer, but rather *apart* of the painting. In this manner the artwork comments on vision, viewpoints, looking and *looked-at-ness* which are not entirely polar opposites. (Schmahmann 2004:38-9)

4.2. Mirroring the Psyche

The mirror motif has been portrayed as a powerful metaphor for revealing and exploring the psyche (Gottlieb 1966:510). Gottlieb claims that during the nineteenth century the mirror was called the *psyche*, *psiche* and *psiquis* in French, Italian and Spanish respectively (1966:510). The word translates as 'soul'. For example the words *psychosis*, *psychology* and *psychoanalysis* developed from the word *psyche*. The mirror stemmed from the word *psyche*, which was established from the widespread belief that the looking-glass does not simply reflect the outer reflection of a person, but also their soul (Gottlieb 1966:510).

Early depictions of the mirror motif have portrayed man's first encounter with their reflection in the mirror. For example, Narcissus' initial discovery of his reflection was

illustrated in a wall painting as early as 14-62 A.D in Pompeii (Heyd 1984:124). In other words, the mirror has long been seen as an instrument in which man comes to know himself; it unveils hidden truths and provides a sense of revelation to its viewer. This ‘awakening to awareness of the self... is a powerful, shocking experience in man’s life’ and it is with this intensity that Pablo Picasso’s *Girl at the Mirror* (1932) characterizes this notion (Ellipsis and italics inserted) (Gottlieb 1966:509).

The mirror may reflect the soul, but there are many different interpretations of the word *soul*. For example, an Atheist or Catholic may read soul in a very different context. So, the word *soul* that is referred to here, is simply the spirit and the intellectual inner part of a human which is intangible (Gottlieb 1966:511). For instance when the sitter in Picasso’s *Girl at the Mirror* looks at her *psyche* (mirror), she actually glances at her soul (Gottlieb 1966:510). Artist Berthe Morisot further embodies this notion in the title of her artwork *Devant la psyche* (1876), translated as *in front of the soul*. Morisot’s depiction of a woman at her toilet conforms to the nineteenth century logic of positivist ideals – there are no analogies, metaphors or hidden meanings intended. It simply is a girl looking at her self in the mirror (although today, the title could unintentionally suggest otherwise). Unlike Morisot’s nineteenth century girl before her mirror, Picasso’s twentieth-century version is abstracted and loaded with symbols pertaining to the mirror motif (Gottlieb 1966:510).

In *Girl at the Mirror*, the sitter faces the mirror with her side profile facing toward the viewer. Her pose and face seem to express her naivety. One initially notes that the girl is young: with her large intent eyes, nimble lips, flat stomach and defined buttocks. Her body appears constricted in a horizontal striped-like corset (Lomas 2000:96). Lomas describes the girl in terms of left and right (200:96). The girl on the left-hand side is portrayed in a light and whimsical manner, that of a pre-pubescent girl. The model appears as a girl in reality, but as a woman in the mirror reflection. In the mirror on the right, the girl is dark and in shadow, as though a separate being and reality. The shadowed right-hand side presents the girl’s reflection in the mirror in a frontal position, unlike her side view in the ‘light left’. In the reflection, the girl is presented in deeper tones: her face is made up of sensuous planes of crimson and a vibrant green on her forehead. The left-hand side of her face and even her reflection on the left is roughly hewn. In the mirror, her eyes appear as dark, mysterious voids and her lips and cheeks are as decadent as the rest of her body. The girl’s reflection appears more voluptuous than in reality. The girl at the left

looks at her reflection in the mirror on the right. On the left, appears an etiquette and innocent girl. The right portrays a dark and sensual woman. (Lomas 2000:96).

Gottlieb interprets the girl on the left as ‘the physical likeness of a beholder; the shadow (and left) side is a projection of her hidden, inner world: her conscious, suppressed desires have been given shape’ in the mirror [quoted with brackets (Gottlieb 1966:511)]. The ‘left light side’ of the girl represents the façade she presents to society. The ‘right shadow side’ in the mirror is the hidden soul of the girl. The mirror reveals the girl’s hidden *psyche* (Gottlieb 1966:511).

The girl’s back is turned away from the viewer and her reflection in the mirror confronts us, revealing her sexual organs which visually vacillate mutably from feminine to masculine – perhaps suggesting the ambiguous nature of sexuality present in both genders. (Lomas 2000:97).

The mirror reflection in *Girl at the Mirror* is uncanny as it is both shocking and appealing (Lomas 2000:96). The reflection has vibrancy, a primal instinctiveness due to colour and form that is aesthetically pleasing. The symmetrical quality of the mirror in which the girl is reflected also creates this sense of uncanniness. The mirror reflection evokes a mystery of mimicry that parallels an uncanny effect, as Kristeva states that the mirror is, ‘an alien double, uncanny and demonical’ (Lomas 2000:97). One is left to assume that the stranger in the mirror belongs to the *self*, as the girl lifts her left hand to touch her reflection as if in the process of trying to recognise herself in the mirror. Lomas suggests the dress’ lace border represents an ideology or veil which she transiently lifts (2000:97). Moreover, the veil invokes the perception of the girl looking *through* the lens from which she interprets the world. The girl does not look *at* the mirror, but looks *through* the mirror or lace veil. According to Lomas, the girl goes beyond the boundary of the veil to the indefinite state of life after death (2000:97).

‘Girl at the mirror’ is one of the reoccurrent themes in Picasso’s artworks; however *Girl before a Mirror* is different to its counterparts. In the other artworks by Picasso, the mirror is usually held by a maid, in which the mirror is smaller and unobtrusive, such as *La Toilette* by Picasso (1906) (unlike *Girl before a Mirror* in which the mirror dominates the

half the scene). *La Toilette* is a serene depiction of a nude woman combing her hair while her attendant holds a mirror for her (Gottlieb 1966:516; Lieberman 1954: 6).

Some look to the mirror to *see* their soul, yet it is the eye which is like a mirror (Stoljar 1990:366). The mirror and eye share many qualities, such as reproducing a surface visibly. For instance when a person looks into an eye, his face appears in it, like a mirror. Like the miniature of the person who looks into it, it is called a pupil (Bartsch 2006:48). Frantz Fanon interprets *mirror* and *eye* in terms of reflection and distortion. Fanon declares the ‘eye is not merely a mirror, but a correcting mirror. The eye should make it possible for us to correct cultural errors’ (Smith 2005:33).

Eyes are replaced by mirrors in the artwork from the series, *Who is Pinky Pinky? Pinky Pinky: Mirror Eyes* (2002) by Penny Siopis. *Mirror Eyes* renders two glass beads which indicate where eyes have been ripped out of their sockets and a torn trail of skin leads to crystal tears. Pinky Pinky’s eye become a gateway, or as Patrick Trevor-Roper describes it as ‘the passage of entry and exit for the soul’ (Smith 2005:33). The eye and mirror are alike, as they act like reflective portals. In the instance of *Pinky Pinky: Mirror Eyes*, the eye resembles a gateway to the soul and when the soul weeps, it is tears that appear in the eye. It has been often said, that eyes are the mirror of the soul (Bartsch 2006:21). If one can see the ‘truth’ or the soul from looking at one’s eyes, then it is looking at the mirror that reflects one’s *psyche* (Smith 2005: 33). In an ancient novel by Achilles Tatius, the hero character, Clitophon stated that, ‘it does not seem correct to me to say that the mind is entirely invisible: it reveals itself, as if in a mirror, on the face.’ (Bartsch 2006:21).

4.3. The mirror as a tool of God or Devil

During the fifteenth-century, the convex mirror was an important functional object for a family, but later on in the nineteenth-century it came to have a more ornamental and decorative function (Zucker 1962:250). In later years, the convex mirror had become an instrument in which to look at others without being seen. Mirrors were often used in war, not only to communicate in code (by intercepting reflected sunlight), but also to discover enemies without being seen, in trenches for example. Zucker states that in Germany it was referred to as the *spy* and *Judas mirror* in England. Nowadays, the convex mirror aids vision in concealed driveways and exposes shoplifters in supermarkets. The evolution of

the convex mirror's function is somewhat ironic - from the omnipresent and validating eye of God to the *Judas mirror* for voyeuristic eyes (Zucker 1962:245). For Bartsch, the mirror is more assigned to the negative: 'in the end the implications of the mirror remained negative.. when a human presence was there to give it a false semblance of reality. In truth, it was the equivalent of a sign with no referent. Seductive but empty, it had less to do with self-knowledge than self-deception.' [Ellipsis inserted (Bartsch 2006:40)].

As 'God's instrument', the mirror can be extended as a tool of good, because its reflection can prompt morality. Self awareness is considered to be the understanding of the soul that is pure or to, 'identify with the self that is divine' (Bartsch 2006:51). It is in this logic that the mirror can be interpreted as an instrument for self-improvement (Bartsch 2006:16-17). The mirror initiates this self *reflection*. Many have regarded the mirror as key to self-introspection, because it is before the mirror that the beholder searches for self awareness (Bartsch 2006:51).

According to Bartsch, the way you appear in the mirror is the way others perceive you (2006:20). So the mirror can then be equated to society's judging eyes. In some cases, the mirror exists for self-improvement and ethical behaviour, in regard to society's judgement of one's outer appearance. One's reflection in the mirror usually prompts one to alter their moral behaviour in order that, 'you won't ruin your good looks with rotten deeds, *or* you can overcome that face of yours by your good character.' [*italics* inserted (Bartsch 2006:20)]. The mirror is not only a tool which converts its *beholder* into the *judging other*, but also drives one to either uphold or alleviate judgement by society.

Ancient Philosopher, Lucius Annaeus Seneca claimed that one's anger or rage could be instantly cured by looking at themselves in the mirror, during their state of madness. When persons in rage look at themselves in the mirror, they see their sheer disfigurement from anger. This awakens the angry person, because they no longer recognise themselves (their reflection) and this horror causes them realise their error. This is one of the reasons why the mirror is paralleled to God, because it promotes purity of ethical behaviour (Bartsch 2006:21).

During the Renaissance period, the mirror's mathematical precision and linear perspectivism was considered so flawless, that it was equalled to the supremacy of God's

own vision (Bartsch 2006:15). Dated 1434, *The Arnolfini Marriage* seems to straddle the late middle ages and the early Renaissance. *The Arnolfini Marriage* also supports its medieval tradition at the time, which posited the mirror as a symbol of unbiased truth and virtue. This section will explore *The Arnolfini Marriage* regarding the convex mirror that is referred to as the omnipresent eye of God. (Ward 1983:682)

The convex wall mirror in *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434) by Jan Van Eyck becomes the central reference to which all actions of the scene converge and oscillate. The convex mirror is more than compositionally central and observant to the scene, as the mirror also has a vital spiritual relation. The convex mirror is set in golden brass with ten *Stations of the Cross* around it, which seems to locate the mirror within a religious meaning. The tiny convex mirror captures the entire marriage ceremony within itself and replicates it in tiny, meticulous detail. The convex mirror employs a deep sense of preciousness while still rooted in religiousness (Ward 1983:682).

The ten, small medallions with the *Stations of the Cross* represent the *Passion of Jesus Christ* from the *Agony in the Garden* to the *Resurrection* (Zucker 1962:242). This creates a picture within a picture, in which the medallions act as a mirror within a mirror. The convex mirror conveys the bridal couple from the back and the 'Divine Presence fills the mirror reflection of the room as well as the room itself.' (Zucker 1962:240). The marriage ceremony is therefore verified in the convex mirror, as though it were a narrative inside a narrative (Zucker 1962:240).

The mirror reflects two witnesses which are not visible in the painting, because like the witnesses, we stand in the same position and perspective (Zucker 1962:241). We share the same space as the witnesses; therefore we too, are witnesses to the ceremony. The mirror becomes a visual trigger that alerts us to the painting's timelessness, which employs the viewers to become witnesses. In the convex mirror, one of the witnesses wears light blue- it is the artist Van Eyck (Zucker 1962:241). The painting records the ceremony and the mirror strangely records the very presence of the witnesses- one being Van Eyck. The reflection in the convex mirror is therefore more accurate and inclusive than reality itself. Apart from revealing the two unseen witnesses, the convex mirror also acts as a watchful eye. The space between the mirror and the witness heightens our understanding in which we, the *observers* find ourselves *observed* by the watchful eye or convex mirror (Zucker

1962:241). The painting is more than a portrait of the bridal couple; it is a record that ratifies the marriage ceremony by the artist. (Galligan 1998:141).

The mirror proposes another reality, as the witnesses will exit the back door and the wedded couple remain at home. The mirror appears to have an ambivalent nature, it precisely reflects the scene before it, yet its strong convexity distorts the reality it reflects (Galligan 1998:141).

The legitimacy of the artist, who features in his own painting, 'like his mirror, the artist is a reflector by which the world becomes more real than it is in its worldliness.' (Zucker 1962:241).

The objects filling the scene are coded from the joined hands in the centre that indicate concord, to the domesticity prompted by the dog and shoes in the foreground (Galligan 1998:141). The large window that admits light becomes highly distorted in the reflection of the mirror. There seems to be an apparent interplay between mirror and window. While the mirror suggests a double reality, the window seems to provide a doorway to an alternate reality. Both these framed motifs compete and interlay with the notion of reality. (Galligan 1998:141)

The positive aspects of the mirror, such as a tool for self-introspection, prompting virtue and a precise reflector equalled to God's vision, co-exist with its counter duality of the negative: vanity, falseness and decay. The mirror may prompt virtue, just as it equally incites vice:

Then came other evils from the earth, whose smoothness presented a reflected image to men otherwise occupied, an image which one man saw in a goblet, another in bronze bought for other uses...later, when luxury now ruled supreme over everything, full-size mirrors were chased in gold and silver, then adorned with gems....Little by little, luxury has developed for the worse, invited by wealth itself, and vices have enjoyed a huge growth, and everything has become so indiscriminate through assorted practices that whatever used to be a female's cosmetic-kit is now the toiletry of a man. Is the mirror used now for the sake of ornament alone? For every single vice, it's a necessity. (From Seneca's *Natural Questions*)
[Ellipsis inserted (Bartsch 2006:34)]

The mirror appears as an accurate reflector of reality. One could suggest the mirror uncannily duplicates reality without defect and flawless exception, to an unnatural extent. At the same time the mirror is deceptive, because it distorts reality by reflecting the opposite. Is the mimetic nature of the mirror reflection a demonic double? According to Wolfgang Zucker, in the late medieval Europe it was believed that the devil intercepted earth by presenting itself as something spectacular and one of its magical tools was the mirror (1962:240). The mirror operates through systems of deception like the devil: it is a master of trickery as it reflects right as left and left as right. In many cultures evil is understood to be the binaristic opposite of God, such that God is associated with light and darkness equated to evil. Therefore the Devil is the opposite of God, like negative and positive. Is the mirror's reflection of reality not the opposite of reality because it reflects the negative: left and right as opposite? If left / right is reversed in the mirror, why is up / down not reversed too? Although a logical answer exists for this reversal, this question provides a different light of understanding as to how the mirror operates in terms of negative reflection. (The rules of reflection operate on a perpendicular plane of the mirror, as *up* and *down* is not parasitic.) (Locke 1977:14) The mirror is like an instrument of trickery; it masquerades as a precise reflector of reality, but deceitfully reflects an opposite reality: illusion. (Zucker 1962:240)

If the mirror is an object of vanity, then it is to be associated with the devil as vanity is a vice. In Christian belief, vanity is considered to be a result of pride, which is one of the seven deadly sins (De Tolnay 1965:58).

The mirror is a tool of vanity in Hieronymus Bosch's *Seven Deadly Sins* (1485), which derived from the medieval system of virtues. In the artwork a segment portrays vanity, with a bourgeois woman admiring herself in the mirror, with her back to the viewer. Notably, the mirror is held up by the hand of an almost hidden devil, perhaps indicating the mirror's subjection to the principles that are moulded by the devil's hand. (De Tolnay 1965:58)

The devil appears as an animal, hardly recognisable as it camouflages with the cupboard it hides behind. The devil's hand seems awkwardly bent around the side of the cupboard. Even today, when viewing this segment of the painting, it lucratively cautions us about the evil of conceit, born in the mirror (De Tolnay 1965:58). Even though the artwork adheres

to its period of idealistic art, it is still effective in creating a sense of hauntedness, because the devil is present as though it were part of the furniture. For Bosch the mirror is an instrument of vanity, which is rooted in evil (De Tolnay 1965:58).

The mirror can be connected with the positive – as God's divine sphere of splendour, or the negative – as the devil's deceiving instrument of demonic mimicry (De Tolnay 1965:58).

CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to explore the significance of the mirror motif in western and South African artwork.

While endeavouring to address issues and raise questions surrounding the mirror motif in art, three prevalent themes emerged that were reflected in each chapter. These were the concept of the mirror motif in relation to the unconscious; the reflected female image and the mirror as a reflector of the arcane.

The mirror motif's link to the unconscious has been explored in Chapter 2: *Unconscious Drives of the Mirror*, in relation to Surrealism, Narcissism, the Oedipus complex and *mirror stage* utilizing psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan amongst others. Employing psychoanalytic theories when necessary, the chapter aimed to form a connection between the mirror motif in art and the unconscious by referring to selected artworks by artists such as Magritte, Dalí and Christine Dixie.

Being not only a reflector of the unconscious, the mirror motif also pertains to the reflected female image. Chapter 3, entitled *Women at the Mirror* explored how the mirror motif in western art diffused since the Middle Ages, prompted by the Church to warn against sins of the flesh and vanity – sins which women were associated with. Chapter 3 then considered how the mirror motif in the seventeenth century extended or evolved to feature evocations of beauty and female coquetry – such as Venus, only to be revised by feminist artists around the twentieth century.

The mirror motif's role was also found to extend itself as an aperture to the arcane. Chapter 4: *Arcane Facets of the Looking Glass* referred to the mirror motif as an instrument that prompts *looking*: by implicating an observer, reflecting the psyche and as a tool attributable to the divine or evil.

The intention of this dissertation was not to push the mirror motif into the service of art theory. It has been to explore, as far as possible, an awareness and understanding, from the vantage-point of the present to probe the complexities, ambiguities and limitations of

the mirror motif in art. In this context, the exploration has focussed on critically engaging with the artwork that specifically employ the mirror motif.

The 'meaning' of the mirror motif in painting is an evolving process, which constantly redefines itself in relation to its history in art. The issues addressed and the questions raised bring to light issues of the mirror motif in art for further research.

While at first glance, the mirror motif in an artwork may appear as any other object, within the work, on closer inspection its potential to evoke meaning is vast. As indicated in this study the mirror motif is tied to many themes such as psychoanalysis, female image and the arcane. The mirror motif in art is a long established trope and it continues to develop and create new themes and tropes. It is hoped that by foregrounding the mirror motif in western and South African art, that this will contribute to a better understanding of the mirror.

Research on the mirror motif educates one, especially in the field of painting of the evolution of the mirror motif. This study investigates the journey as to how an artwork's success was judged according to its ability to *mirror* reality. It further documents how paintings today no longer mirror reality, but are rather mirrors themselves - an illusion of an alternate reality on a flat two-dimensional surface, bound by frames. It is hoped that this motivates one to have an alternate perspective: to look *through* the looking glass and not *at* the looking glass.

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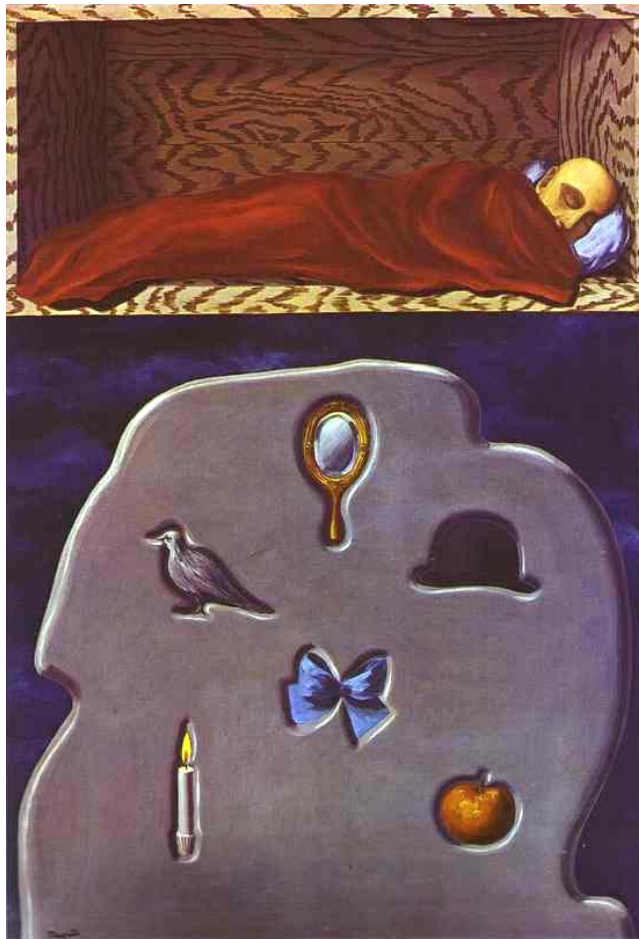
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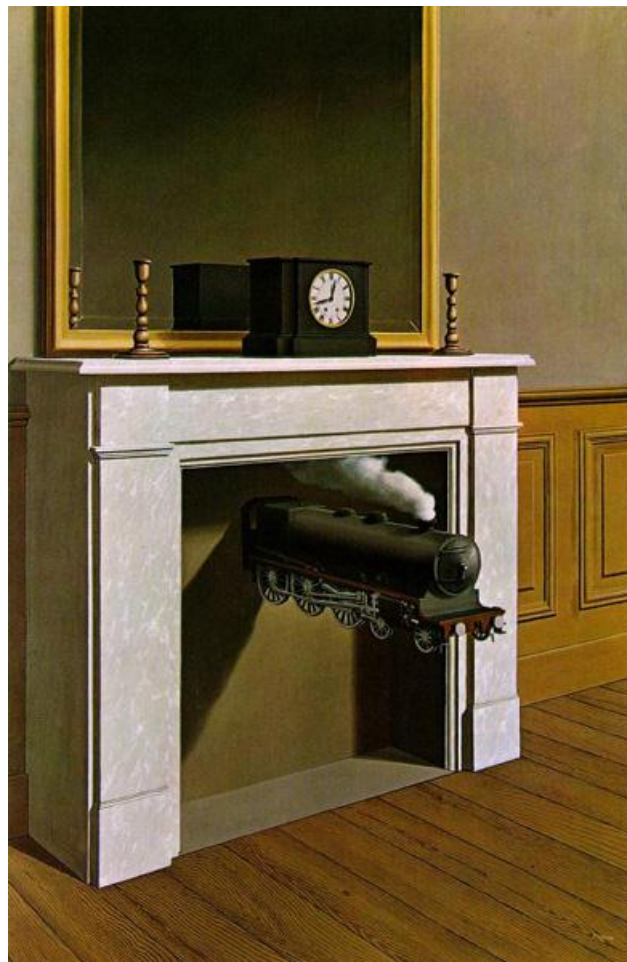
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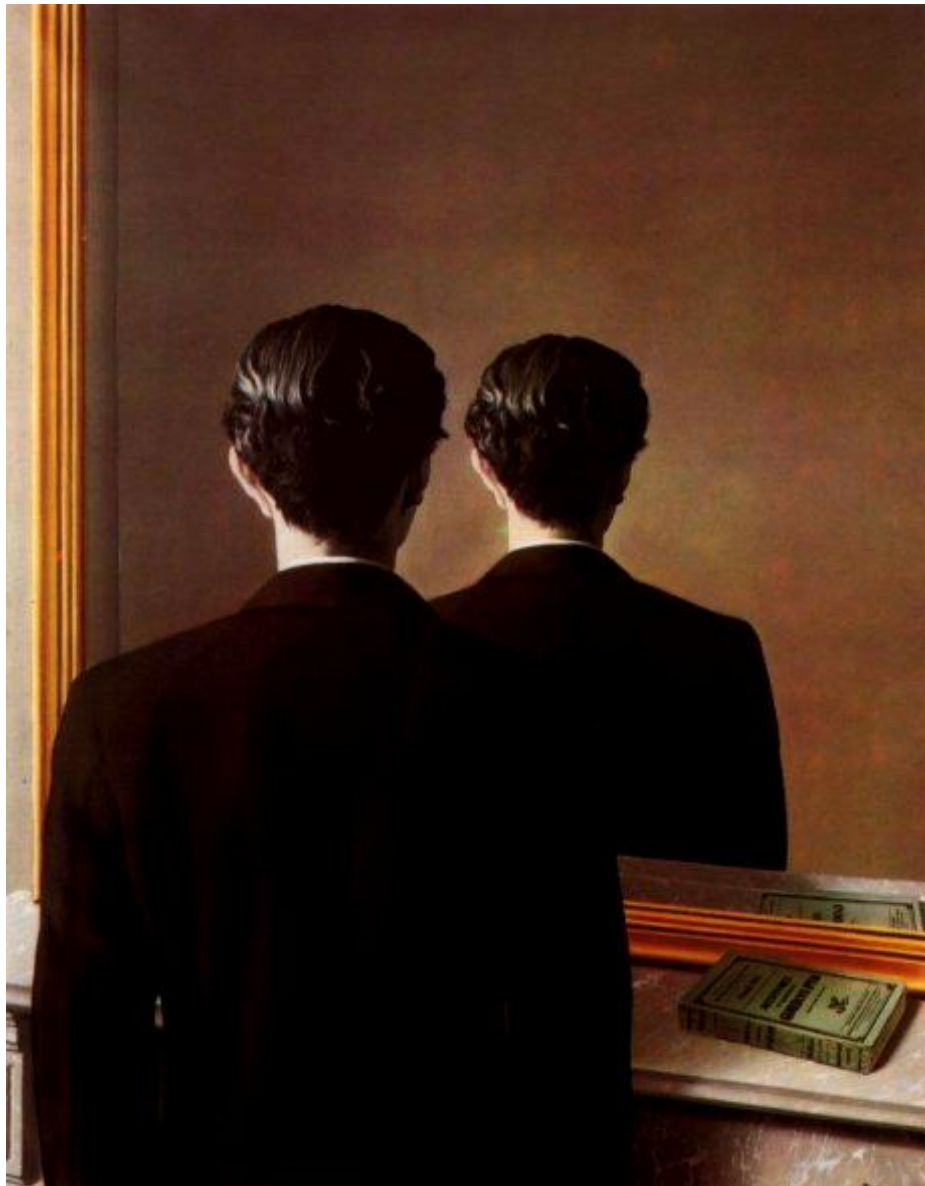
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René Magritte. *Reproduction Interdite (Portrait of Mr James)*. 1937.



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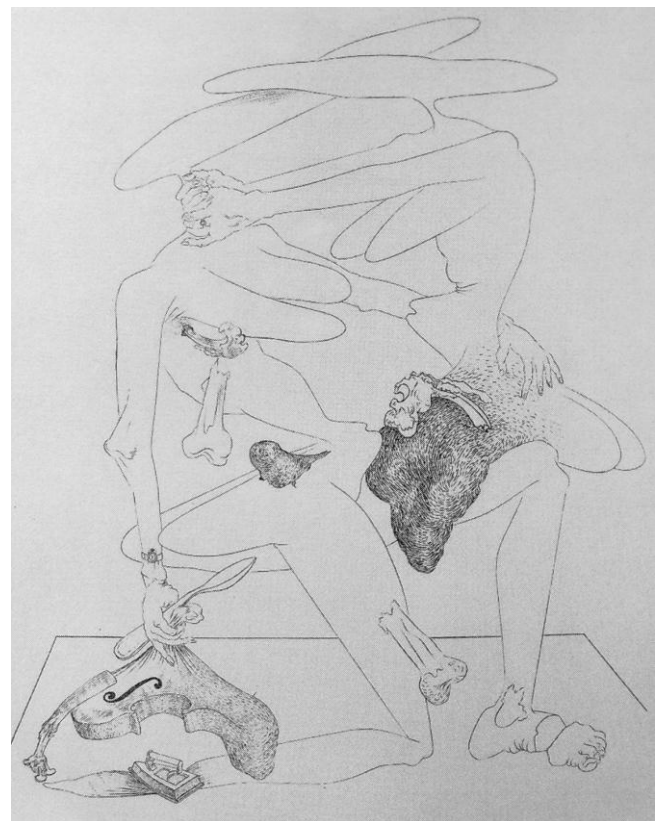
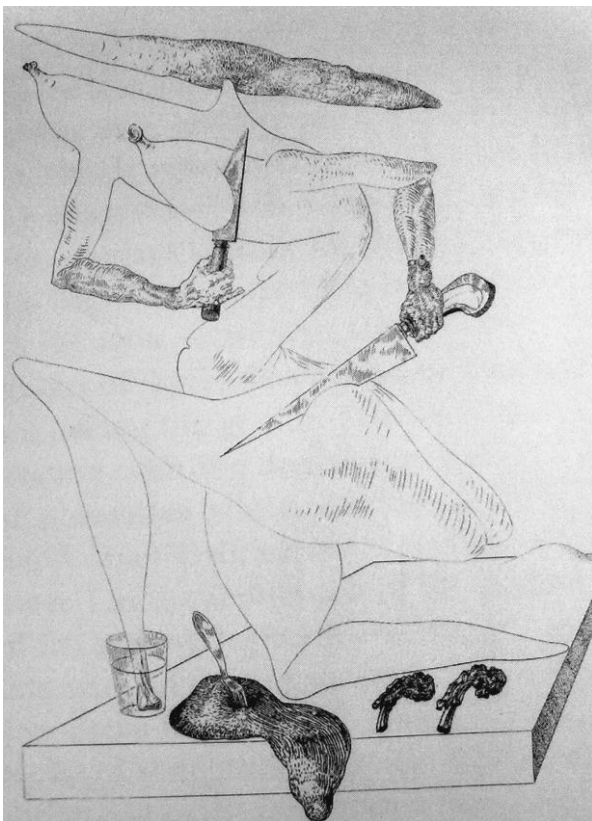
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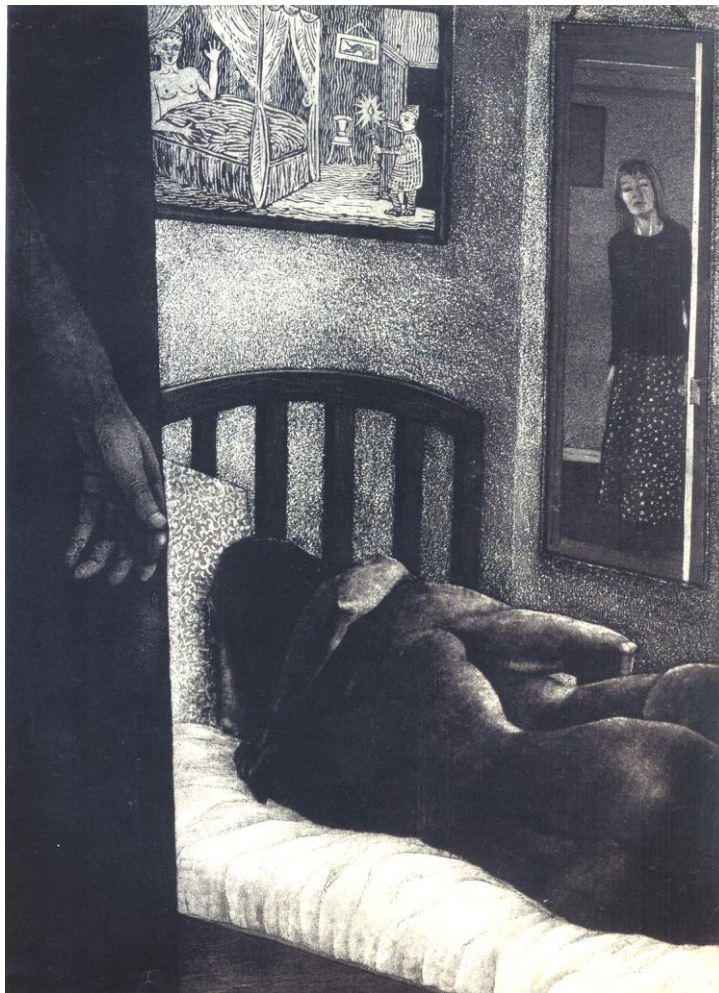
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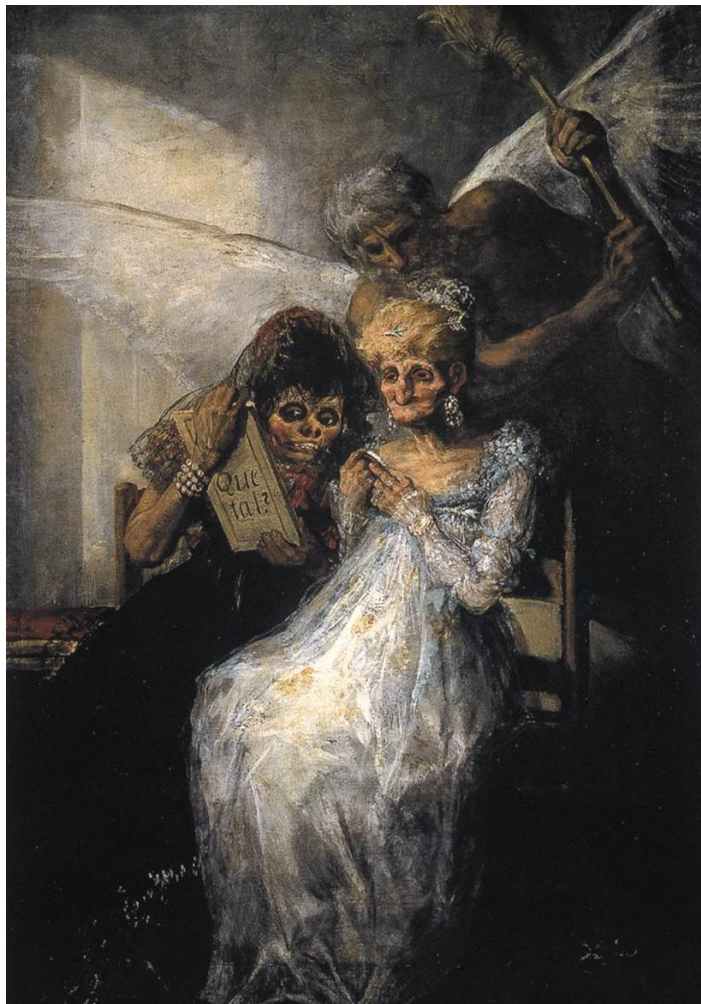
Christine Dixie. *In Gaps and Absences* from *Thresholds*. 1997



Clara Peeters. *Vanitas Self-Portrait*. 1610-20.



Lukas Furtenagel. *The Painter Hans Burgkmair and His Wife Anna*. 1527.



Francisco de Paula José Goya. *The Old Women*. 1808–1812



Francisco de Paula José Goya. *The Young Ones*. 1812-1814



Johannes Vermeer. *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. 1665-66



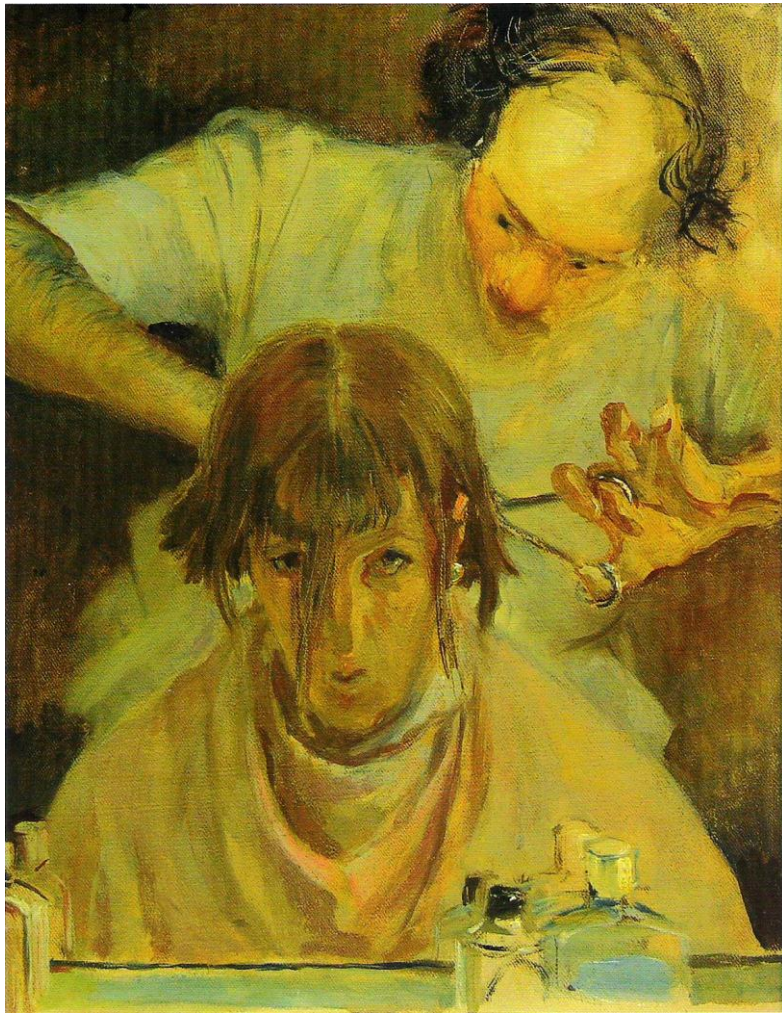
Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Lady Lilith*. 1828-1882



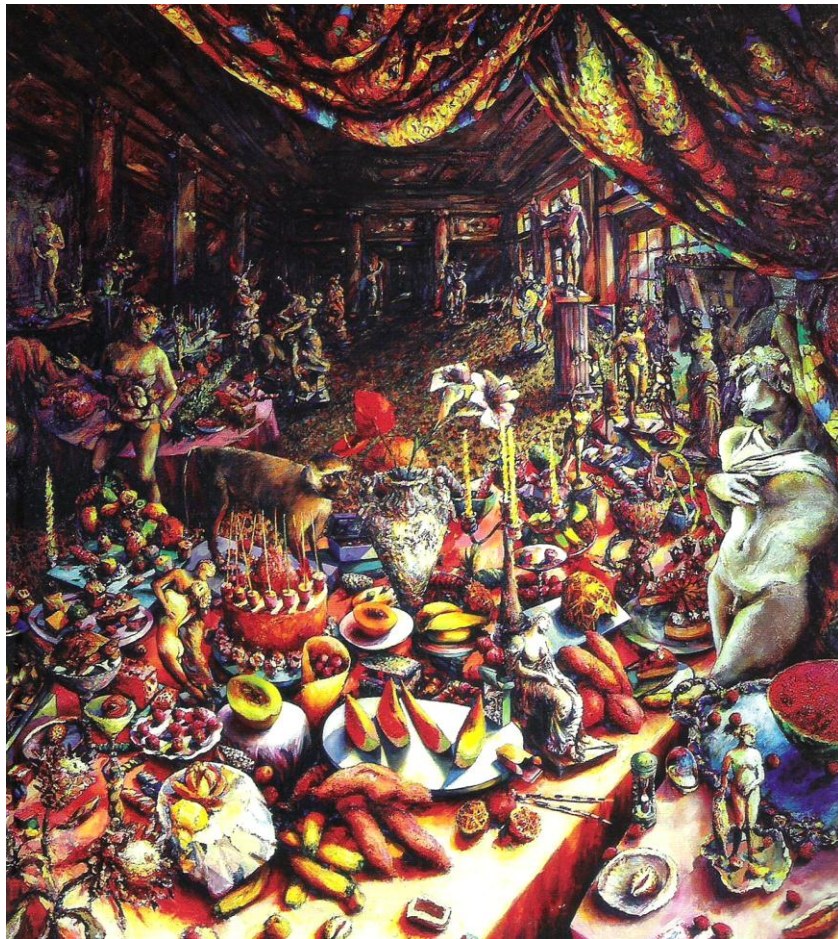
Titian. *Venus with a Mirror*. 1555



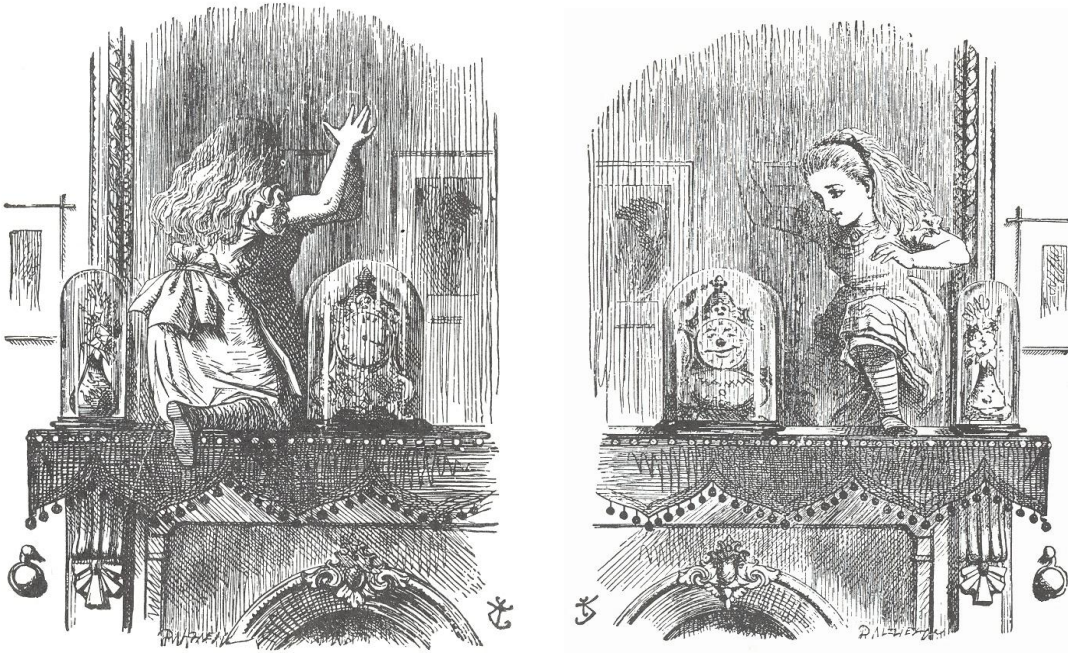
Diego de Velázquez. *The Rokeby Venus*. 1647-1651



Dorothy Kay. *Eye of the Beholder*. 1935



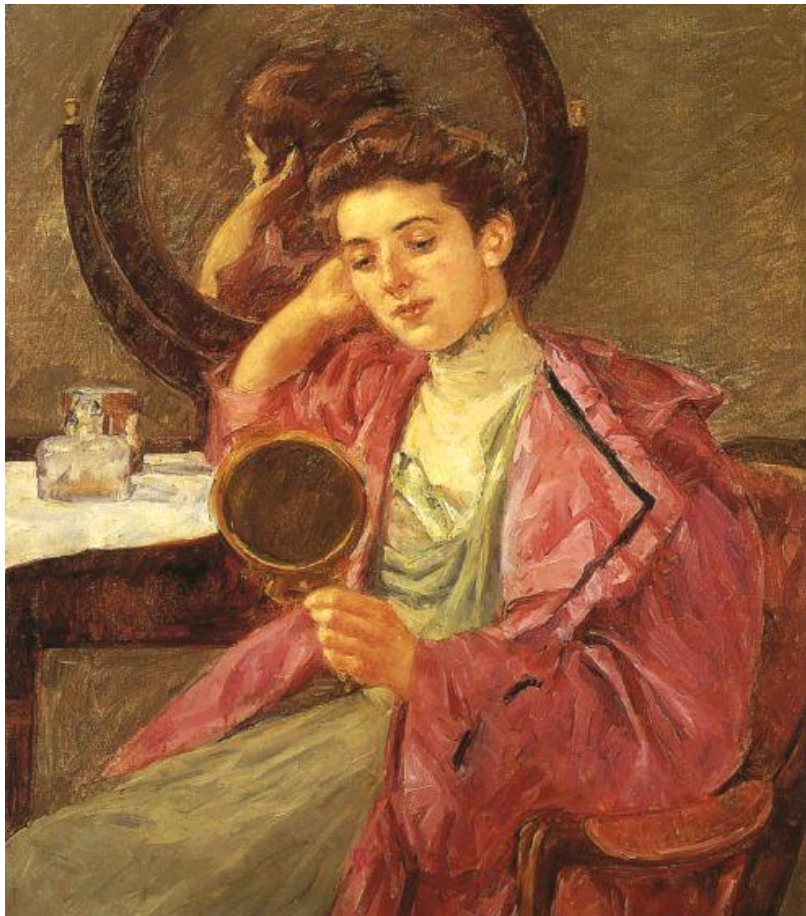
Penny Siopis. *Melancholia*. 1986



Michael Hancher. Drawings of *Alice in Wonderland*- from Lewis Carroll. 1885



Joan Semmel. *Me Without Mirrors*. 1974



Mary Cassatt. *Antoinette at Her Dresser*. (date undocumented)



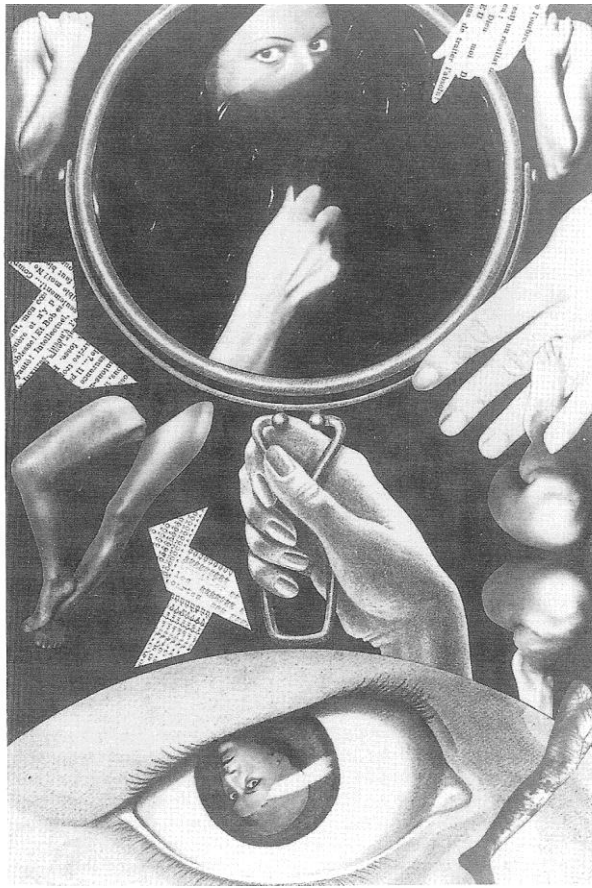
Berthe Morisot. *Young Woman Powdering Her Face*. 1895



Helen Chadwick. *Vanity: The Oval Court Of Mutability*. 1986



Sylvia Sleigh. *Philip Golub Reclining*. 1971.



Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. *Moi-même, Montage II*, from *Avex non Avenus*. 1930



Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. 'N.O.N.', *Montage IX*, from *Avex non Avenus*. 1930.



Edouard Manet. Bar at *Bar at Folies-Bergère*. 1881-2



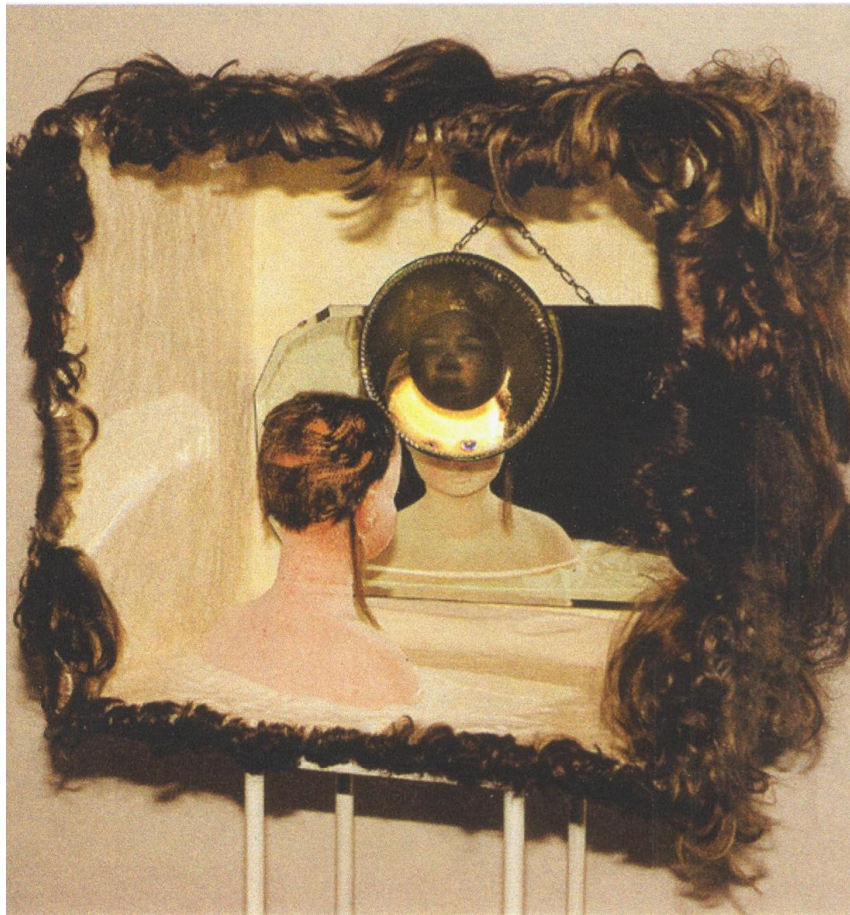
Diego Velázquez. *Las Meninas*. 1656



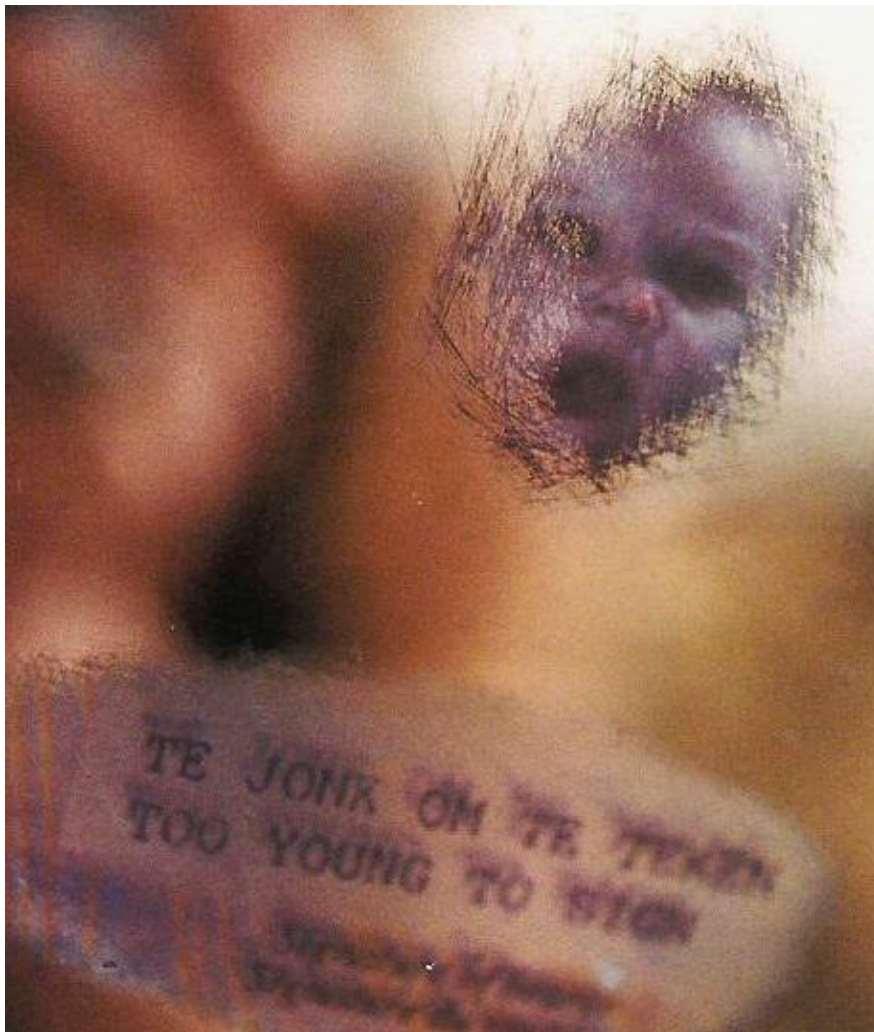
William Kentridge. Stills from *Felix in Exile*. 1994



William Kentridge. Still from *History of the Main Complaint*. 1996



Penny Siopis. *Hush-Hush: Collaborator*, tableau of found objects. 1994



Penny Siopis. *Arutma* (detail). 1995



Marion Arnold. *Some kind of whole made of shivering fragments*. 1992



Marion Arnold. *Portrait of a Woman from Africa*. 2003



Pablo Picasso's *Girl at the Mirror*. 1932



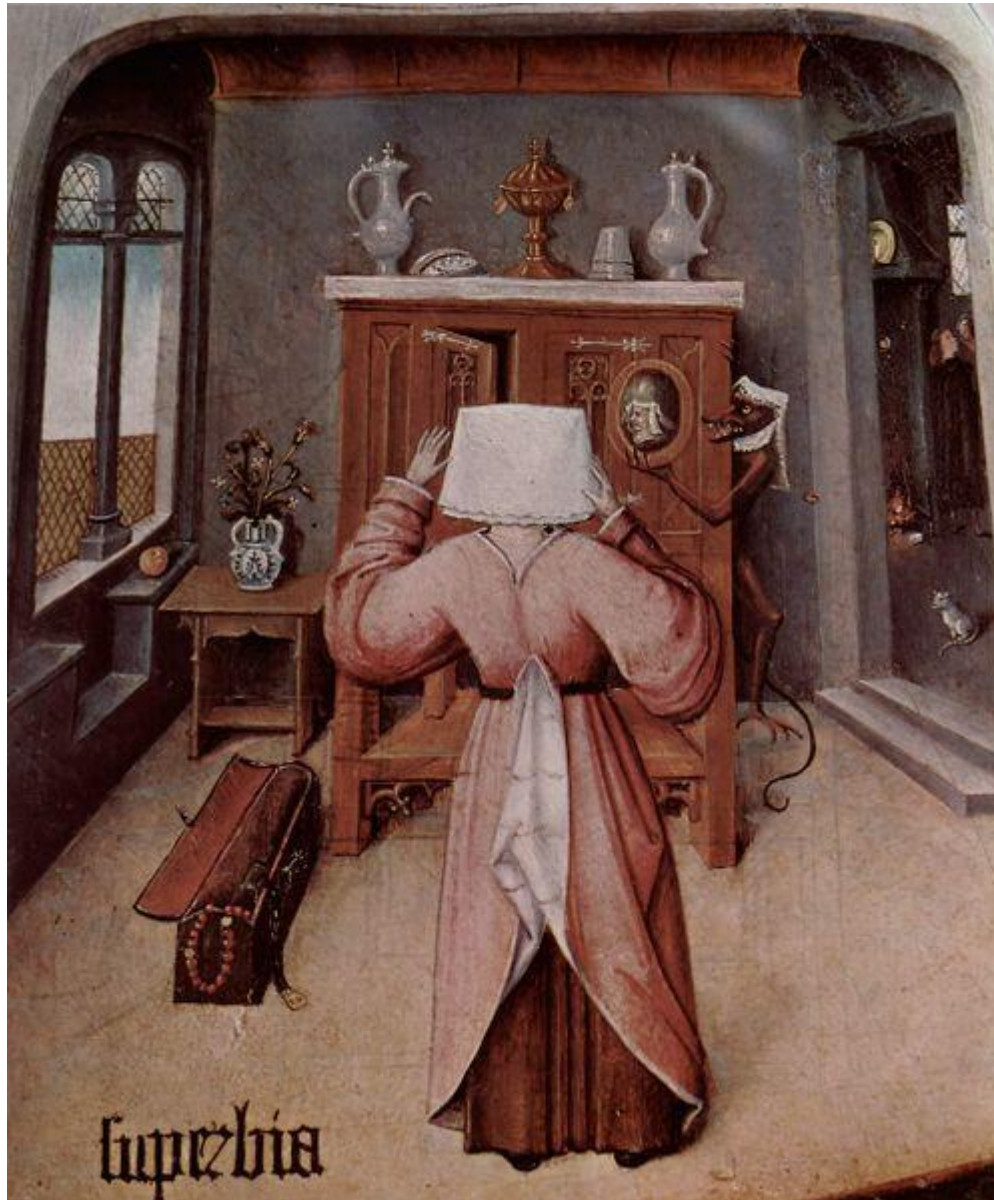
Penny Siopis. *Pinky Pinky: Mirror Eyes - Who is Pinky Pinky.* 2002



Jan Van Eyck. Detail of the convex mirror in *The Arnolfini Marriage*. 1434



Jan Van Eyck. *The Arnolfini Marriage*. 1434



Hieronymus Bosch, *Seven Deadly Sins* (detail). 1485.