Richardt Strydom

Fokofwitman?

Graphic Design, School for Communication Studies, North-West University

What does one do if the truth abandons you? What do you do with words that lost their meaning, and others then can never again be articulated?

Wat maak mens as die waarheid jou verlaat? Wat doen jy met woorde wat hul betekenis verloor het, en ander wat nooit weer geuiter kan word nie?

If there is a crisis of representation for the Afrikaner male, it is the inability to speak. Not the inability to speak using words, or language, but to speak in an authentic tongue — the inability to orate a folklore that a next generation may treasure, or at the very least find meaningful.

In a manner of speaking, language is the albatross around the Afrikaner's neck. Afrikaans, the eighteenth-century Cape Fanagalore, although a bastard pidgin patois, was close enough to Dutch for a then semi-literate band of colonists to command. The semantics of power remained in check. So we, the white men, staked our claims and took possession by naming that which was already named, and renaming those under our spell — most now renamed.

The Afrikaner myth of superiority spun its yarns through violence and discrimination. It was recorded in doublespeak in history books — all now rewritten.

In the end, what remained was the rhetoric of hate.

The bias, discrimination and violence of the Apartheid ideology did not allow

for Afrikaners to establish an authentic identity – its main legacy being a sense of ethnic guilt underlined by cultural masochism. The book *Ad Hominem* posits that the symbolic masochism of the Afrikaner stems from the frustration or inability to establish an authentic identity that is free of a hegemonically constructed myth – an identity that is not at odds with current reality. A sense of entitlement, after all, is not equivalent to a sense of belonging. In this context there is an internal masochistic conflict between belonging and dissent – and between the self and its own *Other*-side.

Cultural masochism stems from an active hatred toward cultural institutions, which are often perceived to be inescapable. Much of this hatred stems from the acknowledged powerlessness against the machinations of hegemonic cultural practices. In order to subvert hegemonic norms, a person may appeal to the sympathies or attention of others by means of public and private transgression. In this identity performance the shadow of the other, as well as the self as *Other* and *other,* looms large. The projection of self becomes a mirror reflection – or a negative.

This form of identity performance is of course not unproblematic, especially considering the political history of the Afrikaner. The Afrikaner as victim is in an unacceptable subject position. In *Ad Hominem*, it is suggested that the Afrikaner is a victim, not of others, but of *himself*. In certain psychological conditions like schizophrenia, for example, the notion of self and other may collapse into each other. In light of this, the intension is not to answer questions but rather to pose them in an effort to deconstruct the projected

reflection of self, and thus problematise the boundaries between *self* and *Other/other*.

In this body of work the notion of cultural masochism as a step towards symbolic self-mortification becomes a hall of mirrors by reflecting the reflection of the projected image of self. The image of self becomes lost in a myriad of displays – often distorted, grotesque or vain.

The violence that is portrayed is self-inflicted. The scars and injuries represent psychological scars that manifest physically and may be perceived as both metaphorical and real.

It is popularly held that the "culture of violence" endemic to South Africa has become a normative characteristic of our society, and that violence is often seen as an appropriate means to an end.

Furthermore, Smith (1993) states that: "individuals, feeling powerless or helpless in the face of dramatic social and economic upheaval, frequently symbolically reassert their power through violence in those dimensions of their lives in which they still feel they hold sway. This results in much aggression which, although social or political at root, is expressed through displaced violence within the family and in the home".

Similarly, in the double self-portrait entitled *Violator II,* the violence is directed at the *Self* by its own violent *Other*-side, while at the same time playing on what Valji *et al*.[1] (2004) describes as, "the mythology that whites are the primary targets [of violent crime] merely because of their race"[II].

In spite of the fact that European colonialism and Apartheid were the causes of the

most horrific violence in South African history (and no doubt major contributors of the current 'culture of violence'), many white South Africans today often claim victim status based on a false sense of persecution. Thus, the shadow behind that of the perpetrator-self is that of the victim-self and vice versa, suggesting that these two sides of the *Self's* psyche are squaring off face-to-face. The almost serene expression of the victim-self alludes to the fact that he may be a willing accomplice to this violent performance.

Another image from the book that deals with self-directed violence is *Waiting for the night.* The title refers to both Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* It represents an *Endgame*[IV] journey of the *Self*.

Beckett's play is centred on two protagonists who are waiting for the arrival of someone named Godot (popularly seen as a reference to God). In spite of the fact that both protagonists claim Godot as an acquaintance, they hardly know him – both admitting that they would not recognise him face-to-face. In their frustration, they while away the time by sleeping, arguing, and at one point even contemplating suicide – all in an effort "to hold the terrible silence at bay". The reference to *Waiting for Godot* takes into account the many interpretations of this text, including Freudian, Jungian[IV] and Existentialist ones. The reference to *Heart of Darkness* is based on Achebe's interpretation thereof.

The work is further informed by Regina Schwartz's book, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (1997). The main argument of this text is that the biblical legacy

of monotheism is responsible for a great number of Western civilization's historical and modern sins. These include: fundamentalism, patriarchy, authoritarianism, intolerance, misogyny, ill treatment of minorities, xenophobic nationalism — in general, violence against the *Other*.

Schwartz states that identity forged over or against others is violent, because the *other* is always conceived as despicable. She shows how the covenantal invention of identity can be violent. However, in the work *Waiting for the night* the shadow of the *Other* looms over a ritual of mortification — one in which the ego inflicts violence onto the *other-Self*.

> Ons almal kak die reëls uit waaraan ons almal verstik het, vernietig jouself.
>
>   - Fokofpolisiekar

> [We all crapout the rules in which all of us have choked, destroy yourself.]
>
>   - Fokofpolisiekar

Endnotes

I. *Nahla Valji and Bronwyn Harris are Researchers and Graeme Simpson is the Executive Director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. These excerpts are taken from an article from the SA Reconciliation Barometer that appeared in the Sunday Independent on 4 July 2004.*

II. *Valji et al. continue: "In the post-1994 context of rainbow nationalism, race appears to be commonly coded into everyday conversation. For example, 'the hijacker' frequently means 'the young, black, male criminal' in white suburbia. A further consequence of the fear of crime has been an accelerating retreat of middle-class communities behind high walls and private security, prompting a withdrawal from public space and pre-empting the possibility of relationship-building."*

III. *Endgame, by Samuel Beckett, is a one-act play. It was originally written in French, entitled Fin de partie. The protagonists of the play are Hamm, an aged master who is blind and not able to stand up, and his servant Clov, who cannot sit down. They live in a tiny house by the sea, although the dialogue suggests that there is nothing left outside—no sea, no sun, no clouds. The two characters, mutually dependent, have been fighting for years and continue to do so as the play progresses.*

IV. *"The four archetypal personalities or the four aspects of the soul are grouped in two pairs: the ego and the shadow, the persona and the soul's image (animus or anima). The shadow is the container of all our despised emotions repressed by the ego. The shadow serves as the polar opposite of the egocentric prototype of prosperous mediocrity, who incessantly controls and persecutes his subordinate, thus symbolising the oppression of the unconscious shadow by the despotic ego.*