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Diane Victor and Paul Emmanuel: Lost Men Lost Wor(l)ds.

Gender and South African Art in African Arts, MIT Press Journals, Cambridge, MA, USA.
Volume 45, No. 4, October 2012, pp 34-45.
ISSN 0001-9933

According to theories of sexuality and gender by Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam and others, one's gender is in constant flux throughout the course of a given lifetime, (Butler, 1993).[i] In their recent work, South African artists Paul Emmanuel (b. 1969) and Diane Victor (b. 1964) explore the vicissitudes of gender for (predominantly) white South Africans, as this population is caught in the maelstrom of changing social forces. Both artists use portraiture to personify the individual in a state of extreme vulnerability, as the categories gender and racial identity, and their established hierarchies, are in flux. Both offer highly tactile engagement with the physical bodies represented while inventing visual means to dissolve the solidity of the flesh, presenting it as in passing from one state into another. Both use labor-intensive processes both to fix a moment and to suggest the transitory nature of human life. In Emmanuel's the digital video, "*3SAI: A Rite of Passage*" (2008; part of the installation project *Transitions*), and Victor's *Transcend* and *Lost Words* series (2009; 2010), identity is unstable and gender indeterminate, potentially subject to irretrievable loss. Each series is a requiem, an invocation to meditation and mourning, but ultimately as well a path to transcendence via the shedding of embodied stereotypes.

This paper will explore how each artist addresses gender concerns within specific South African contexts. The purpose of comparing the artists' works for the first time is as follows: within the field gender studies broadly, a split still exists in academic writing between masculinity studies and women's studies. Bringing together Emmanuel's work, which deals almost exclusively with issues of masculine identity, with Victor's, which explodes conventional ideas of both femininity and masculinity in the context of a patriarchal culture, provides an opportunity to help bridge that gap. If Emmanuel's work aligns closely with current theories of masculinity, Victor, could be considered an outlier in terms of the parameters of feminist discourse, as she offers both male and female equal opprobrium; neither gender is considered morally superior or suffering from greater oppression. However, as white artists highly attuned to the legacies of the apartheid era, both artists link gender and racial identities to highly vulnerable situations--the military or the aging, infirm body—and in so doing testing cultural norms of gender. In the works under discussion (the major series by both artists from 2008-11), Emmanuel has depicted males exclusively and Victor males predominantly, suggesting that for both artists masculinity is an especially pressing topic in South African culture today. The differences between their work is telling, however. Emmanuel's work is oblique and poetic, whereas Victor's is stark and confrontational; one might argue that their very aesthetics deny gender stereotypes.

Introduction: the artists' references to South African history

Although current theories of gender identification by scholars in the west are not irrelevant to the work of either artist, both root their investigations in South African history, with its sometimes perverse intersections of gender and race. In her earlier work, Diane Victor has made whiteness visible, so that its continued areas of dominance and its relationship to aspects of gender identity can be interrogated. By contrast, Emmanuel represented the white male through absence in his earlier work before foregrounding the male subject in the recent *Transitions* series.[ii] Even though both race and gender are now understood in academic literature as fluid categories, no longer tethered to biology, these identities continue to be politically contained within rigid boxes, which must be checked off to confirm one's eligibility for various benefits of citizenship. Gender is thus absolutely inseparable from any discussion of social relations in South African society today. The representational strategies of both artists must be understood in the context of South Africa's racialized definitions of gender, or to borrow Sarah Nuttall's more evocative term, the entanglement of race and gender, that continues from the apartheid era until today, (Nuttall, 2009).

From the time the Afrikaner-controlled National Party came to power in 1948 until the transition that began in 1990, the legal definition of whiteness, the basis of the system of apartheid, determined not only one's social status, but the very trajectory of one's life—where you could live, what work you

could do, whom you could marry. In his 2009 essay “Sexuality as Constitutive of Whiteness in South Africa,” Prof. Kopano Ratele demonstrated that apartheid’s rigid political armature was erected around a legal definition of a White person that was ludicrously subjective and vague. According to the Population Registration Act of 1950, a white was “…a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a White person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a White person, is generally accepted as a Coloured person” (Rotele, 2009:166). To build a system on this shaky logic, he argues, apartheid had to be supported by laws that prevented “…any European male from having carnal intercourse with a Native female.” From this, Ratele concludes that the laws against inter-racial coupling were in this interpretation part of the “…politico-legal manufacture of whiteness as morally and sexually, not only racially, distinct from those regarded as belonging to other groups.” (Rotele 2009: 170). Not only did carnal relations between white men and black women have to be outlawed, but by implication, white women’s ‘purity’ had to be protected from black men. One outcome of these laws was that black women’s labor was ‘owned’ by whites, while the dominant patriarchal order infantilized white women. (Epstein 1998: 49-55). Given that entangled history, it is small wonder that received notions of race and gender remain ‘unsettled’ at present, eighteen years into democratic rule.

1. Haircut on a troopship en route to East Africa, World War II., Courtesy South African Department of Defense Documentation Centre,, accession number 851-72, photographer unknown.

The unstable system of apartheid could only be sustained through military force, which became one focus of Emmanuel’s Transitions project. For example, in preparation for creating his film *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* in 2004, Emmanuel undertook preliminary research the National Military Archives in Pretoria. Among the treasures he unearthed was a propaganda film from the 1960s narrated by the first State President of South Africa, The Honorable Charles Robberts Swart, which became the “…starting point for me for the production of *Transitions*.”[iii] Sitting under a tree in bucolic agricultural setting complete with grazing sheep and an innocent young white girl, Swart praises the beauty of ‘our country’; then, over a montage of black ‘terrorists’ with AK47s, Swart launches into a tirade against communism and terrorism. In a rationale redolent of the ‘war on terror’ in the U.S. today, Swart exhorts his (white) audience: “That is why we send men into the bush to fend off this onslaught…[they are] the protectors of these borders which are our own.” Another nugget Emmanuel unearthed was a pamphlet, which according to the artist’s website, “was handed to white matric boys before being conscripted into the National Service during the 1980s.” [Military service was mandatory]. The opening words of the pamphlet read, “You are about to step out of the shoes of a child, into the shoes of a man….” The transition from childhood to manhood, along with the requisite increase in ‘shoe’ size, was documented by the many images of head shaving Emmanuel also located in the archives, (fig. 1). With these latter photographs, he found the image around which to

structure his exploration of “how the military influenced and perpetuated notions of masculinity in South Africa.” (Art Source South Africa 2008/2010: n.p.)

In the National Museum of African Art’s exhibition brochure for *Transitions*, Emmanuel has commented on the contrast between the old South African Defence force (SADF) and the newly integrated, volunteer SANDF (South African National Defence Force) he encountered on his first visit to the Third South African Infantry Battalion (3SAI) base at Kimberly in 2005. Emmanuel recounted that the artist’s elder brother and friends, who had served in the SADF in the 1980s, had spoken of “…feeling dehumanized, lots of shouting, indifference, bigotry and fear. Instead, I found a very different setting...quiet lawns with well-tended flowerbeds…lines of recruits waiting patiently…No evidence of the violent breaking down of the human spirit. Compared with the horror stories related to South Africa’s past, the equanimity of the scene was arresting.” (Art Source South Africa 2008/2010: n.p.). Despite the challenge to his preconceptions, he retained the key motif of head shaving, an historical anachronism but a visually dramatic one, as the metaphor for a specifically masculine experience of a rite of passage. Although confining his military rite of passage exclusively to males may misrepresent on a literal level the army’s current gender balance, it is fair to argue that the ‘military man’ remains a pervasive type, and that combat remains “the ultimate test of masculinity,” whether or not women participate. (Cock 1993: 233-234)[iv] How does one become a combat-ready male? What notions of masculinity are perpetuated or transformed in the current South African armed forces, as opposed to the old SADF? Needless to say, Emmanuel refuses clichéd answers: there is not a Rambo in sight in *3SAI*, (fig. 2).

2. Paul Emmanuel
Still (white male recruit) from *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* (2008), Single channel, high definition digital video, stereo soundtrack, 14 minutes
Photo: courtesy Format Digital Production and Art Source South Africa, © Paul Emmanuel

A comparison of the earlier work of Emmanuel and Victor confirms that both shatter the apartheid-era stereotypes of the ‘pure white woman’ defended by the ‘militaristic white male’. Victor’s representations of the sexualized, white female body deliberately challenge any remaining associations of whiteness with moral virtue, in effect clearing the ground for her current ash drawings. In *Give a Dog a Bad Name and Hang It*, (fig. 3), a charcoal and pastel from the year of political change, 1994, the body is displayed as sexual, rather than erotic, something raw and instinctual that must be contained, by violence if necessary. The equation of the white female body with perversity is one manifestation of whiteness in South African art: its collective guilt at white rule’s perversion of ‘western’ values of human rights and rule of law into state-enforced violence and oppression.[v]

3. Diane Victor
Give a Dog a Bad Name and Hang It (1994), Charcoal and pastel on paper, 150 x 80 cm

Victor's work, unlike Emmanuel's, has often commented directly on contemporary South African politics, and its tone of moral outrage has its roots in German Expressionism, as does the work of compatriots such as William Kentridge and Robert Hodgins. The overt references to European modernism are also a means of acknowledging the tradition in which, as white artists who were able to enjoy the privilege of a university education, they were trained. But perhaps more to the point, the hard labor required to produce Victor's and Emmanuel's print editions continues the association of unrelenting work with virtue that J.M. Coetzee has identified as a central moral value to the colonial settlers. (Coetzee 1988: Ch. 1). Thus, by extension, Victor's obsessive process serves to position her as a contemporary white artist, just as her use of the iconography of western art history situates her within a European tradition that she both references and pointedly disrupts.

An etching and lithograph, *Fall From Grace* (1994; fig. 4) further exemplifies the entanglement of race, gender and politics in Victor's earlier work. In the midst of the euphoria surrounding the realization of the dream of the Rainbow Nation, Victor chose to image its fall out. No matter how layered with allegory, Victor's depictions often operate on an almost literal level, and so I want to argue that this work witnesses the changing status of white women in that decisive moment in South African history. Falling through a trap door in the heavenly realm in which she has resided, and still robed in colonial garments, the white woman appears oblivious to the certainty of her crash landing into an alien landscape she once no doubt assumed she controlled through ownership. (Central to white privilege, after all, has been its identification of land with property.) The very opposite of the euphoric mood of that seminal year, her pose is in fact an inverted rainbow, a black-clad raven-oracle of the potentially disastrous consequences of a refusal on the part of whites to face up to the implications of the change. Even though many South African whites do, in fact, retain social status and economic privilege, nonetheless, the image suggests some of the narratives of loss that according to Melissa Stejn, whites have told themselves subsequent to 1994: loss of home, loss of autonomy and control, loss of a sense of relevance, loss of guaranteed legitimacy, and loss of face. (Stejn 2001: 155-60).

4. Diane Victor
Falling from Grace (1994), Etching and lithograph, 50 x 35 cm

If Victor's work can be aggressive, even strident, Emmanuel's work is understated, even oblique in its concern with two aspects of masculinity: the sacrificial loss of life in war and, in other social arenas, the loss of potential, less stereotyped avenues of 'maleness.'[vi] In Emmanuel's drawings, prints and installations these issues have been expressed through imagery that references the surface of the skin, the porous boundary between self and non-self. Either his own body or abandoned clothing can signal the absence of a person or persons, as well as the fragile presence of memories of them. As Irene Bronner has written, "In all his work, Emmanuel seeks to represent 'the person without the person', the body that actively disappears." (Bronner 2011: 4). Appropriately enough, the title of one of his ongoing series is "*Lost Men*."

5. Paul Emmanuel
The Lost Men Grahamstown II (2004), Installation on Monument Hill, Grahamstown, South Africa, pigment printed photographs on voile, silk, steel, aluminium, 21 x 5 m
Photo: Andrew Meintjes © Paul Emmanuel

In his installation, *The Lost Men (Grahamstown II*), (2004; fig. 5), Emmanuel had the names of men of all races lost in the Xhosa wars and the subsequent Civil Wars in the 19th century cast in lead type, which he then embossed on his skin.[vii] Photographs of parts of his naked body, now a living grave marker, were transferred to the delicate, skin-like surface of voile and silk organza, and hung from lines of wire installed near the 1820 Settler's National Monument in Grahamstown, which honors the arrival of the English in the Eastern Cape. Although this work, like Victor's, examines the South African body in relation to the landscape, Emmanuel's transparent images suggest dissolution rather than crash landing. A South African Flanders Fields, the fragile, delicate, wind-blown fabric is a counter-monument, a dirge to suffering and loss, and a whispered insistence that heroism is a myth to which countless men have needlessly offered their lives. Tossing accepted ideals of masculine bravery to the wind, he seems to be echoing sociologist Debbie Epstein's argument that post-1994, "Formations of new versions of masculinity are…a key part of reshaping South Africa." (Epstein 1998: 50).

It is in the *Lost Men* series that Emmanuel's concerns with the uprooting of conventional ideas of masculine identity most closely intersect with Victor's. For both, masculinity is so vulnerable, so intangible, that it can be blown away by changing cultural currents in the air. In 2004, while teaching drawing at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, Victor was invited to participate in an exhibit on the subject of HIV/Aids. Using patients at the local Saint Raphael center as models, Victor limned their portraits by drawing in candle smoke. The resulting series of smoke heads, a searing testament to the fragility of human life, continues today. In 2007, she enlarged the drawings to full length, but found that drawing in smoke did not work well at that scale. In the *Shades: Corporate Businesses I, II, III* series that followed in 2008, she used ash from braai fires as a medium for the first time to create life-sized portraits of older Afrikaner men, commenting that "…somehow men fading to ash and dust seemed just the right thing." (email, 3 January 2011). As Karen von Veh has noted in the current monograph on Victor: "The subject of white South African men grew from Victor's awareness of their current loss of relevance…in the post-apartheid corporate milieu. A similar series of aging white Afrikaans men, entitled *Fader* (2010), refers to both the Afrikaans word for Father (denoting the strong patriarchal figure) and, again, the incremental fading away of relevance and status. Braai ash is also an appropriate medium in this context as the braai is traditionally the recreational domain of the white Afrikaans male." (von Veh 2012, n.p.)[viii]

Gender and the Aging Body

Victor's depiction of the decline of white male privilege led logically to the subject of the physical decline of aging. In the subsequent *Transcend* and *Lost Words* series (2009-2010), Victor used ashes from burnt books to create life-sized drawings of naked residents of nursing homes. Victor found that the ash from smoke drawings that had come too close to the flame and had burned was not only beautiful, but when it 'hit the paper' closely resembled the mottled quality of aged skin.[ix] In these fragile depictions, moral failings have transmogrified into the frailties of the flesh, and moral approbation has given way to mortality, the end point of all humans, whether good or evil. If the deeply-bitten lines of her prints permanently etch the evidence of human corruption and venality into the viewer's mind, her recent drawings in book ash and charcoal refer, in her words, to the "ephemeral and transient aspects of human mortality." (email 3 January 2011). Arguably, as both the Angel of the hearth, preserving morality—that is, the virtuous "housekeeper of the male soul" (Dijkstra 1986: 8) and, as well, official mourner of death (Havelock in Broude and Garrard 1982: 52), Victor assumes via her art the social roles traditionally assigned to women; however, she strips these conventional 'Victorian' tasks bare of clichés and reinvents them. In these ambitious drawings, the residents of frail care facilities stand exposed before us as examples of what remains of gender identity in the liminal period between life and death. Each body is differentiated by male and female body parts, which permit us to designate their sex/gender without being able to fix its meanings. As she has stated:

The ash drawings were made of old age pensioners and frail care inhabitants, predominantly white, and male, burned out, expired and redundant both as physical bodies and also of the information that are receptacles of - ashes to ashes. I am interested in the loss of accumulated information, wisdom and narrative that occurs when someone dies- to mis-quote – "it's like an entire library burning down"- - and it was that idea that initiated the idea of doing the drawings in the ash of the burned books. Books suggested by the person I was drawing, that if could access, afford or find were burned then ground up and became the raw material of the work. (email 16 December 2010).

The *Transcend* series consists of six life-sized portraits in ash and charcoal of residents in a frail care facility in Turffontein, working from photographs she made 'after much negotiation.'[x] The images, which threaten to blow off their paper supports at the slightest exhalation of breath, give visibility to a demographic that is growing so rapidly that it cannot be wished away. In South Africa, where the retirement age has been set at 60 years, the numbers of individuals who become 'useless' or 'redundant' is steadily increasing, and according to South Africa's Senior Service website, the waiting lists for retirement villages, step-down (assisted care) facilities, rehabilitation centres and frail care homes, are long. The last facility on the list, frail care, is where one goes to wait to die, and the place from which Victor drew her subjects. Obviously, the very adjective 'frail' suggests the weaknesses and the decline in human self-sufficiency that is the warning sign that death is eminent.




(From left to right)
6. Diane Victor, *Jan Transcend* series (2010), ash and charcoal/paper, 150 x 95 cm
7. Diane Victor*, Norman Transcend* series (2010), ash and charcoal/paper, 151 x 100 cm
8. Diane Victor*, Liz Transcend series* (2010), ash and charcoal/paper, 151 x 100 cm
9. Diane Victor, *Adolf Lost Words* series (2011), ash on paper; 150 x 90 cm

The images in *Transcend* do in fact confront those stereotypes by dispelling a number of visual

conventions into which society has confined the elderly. Frail they may be, but they are individuals, and exhibit a range of personalities, as expressed through their very specific physiognomies and body types. One imagines that *Jan*, (fig. 6), striding with confidence and vigor to the left, may have been the ringleader who convinced his colleagues to cooperate with Victor's unusual request that they display their naked flesh. In contrast *Norman*, (fig. 7), turns his back on the viewer; his 'wasted body' with the 'bones showing though' (Schmahmann 16 October 2011) conveys a rather pitiable, resigned personality. At the same time, as these images sear themselves indelibly in the mind, they simultaneously visualize the truncated futures of the persons portrayed, and force us to assume that at the time of our viewing, they may well no longer be living. But as the viewer internally narrates what she imagines to be their life's arc, there is some reassurance, or at least mild relief, to be found in the fact that all are still standing. Or are they? The two women from this series--*Liz* (fig. 8) and *Granny Ray*--, both have swollen, gnarled feet that appear incapable of supporting them, and on closer inspection, it becomes evident that Victor had to photograph both of them lying down. As we mentally recline these 'floating' bodies from their vertical orientation to prone, we enact their progression toward death. As in Emmanuel's *Lost Men* works, the figures are allegories of loss, memento mori.

As Victor stated, the sitters she sought out for the two series are predominantly male and white, despite the fact that women inmates were likely to be in the majority. From birth on, the naked body provides visual evidence of gender, and the viewer's likely first conditioned response to the aged body is the same as at the birth of an infant: is it a boy or a girl? The gender of each of Victor's sitters is clear from their depicted body parts, but its relevance is put into question. At the end of life, these bodies seem to challenge us to ask: what is the difference? In what way does gender matter to "…that tattered coat upon a stick, the ageing body?" (Waters in Blaikie 1999: 138). The female, *Liz*, has had one sign of her gender ripped from her through a mastectomy, as evidenced from her harsh scar. However, that is not her only wound. Her knees are bound, as are her ankles, and her nether regions are garbed in hospital issue underpants, as if the process of wrapping the body in winding sheets has begun even before death. The woman's exposure is discomforting, but her damaged flesh evokes neither pity nor revulsion. Rather, the figure seems to avow that she no longer has the luxury of assuming that death exists elsewhere, at a distance from her own body. The body that once survived trauma now is 'barely' able to stand.

The fact that we dress corpses before burial is surely in part to deny the unbearable vulnerability we see expressed in these bodies. According to one sociologist, "Culture provides us with almost no images of the aging body unclothed, so when we do encounter the reality of such, it comes as a visual shock…[and] older people thus experience their bodies in the context of a profound cultural silence." (Twigg 2000 in Faircloth 2003: 115). Although they retain their individual stances and expressions, they are stripped, not just of clothing, but of context: the network of family, friends and colleagues that support a sense of self and weave the fabric of identity. Their reality is invisible in popular culture, and Victor's effort is a rare example of presenting that reality publically. Within that reality, (the liminal period between life and death), the conventional meanings attached to their gender are suspended.

The body has been a major subject for contemporary art, and specifically feminist performance art, for decades, but Victor is one of a surprisingly small group of women artists who have depicted the naked aging body. (Freuh 1994: 266).[xi] Yet presumably a major agenda in American and English feminist art since the 1970s has been addressing just those topics considered 'uninteresting' by a male-dominated artworld. In noting the absence of the aging woman's body in American feminist art, Kathleen Woodward argues that "Ageism pervades our culture; and feminism in all its forms…has not been exempt from it." (Woodward 2006: 162). The subject of "The Body," or embodiment, in feminist art has been inextricable from sexuality/sexual orientation, and arguably our culture in general does not perceive the elderly body as gendered, much less sexual. (Woodward 2006: 164). One of the most remarkable aspects of this ground-breaking series is the empathy with which Victor depicts these frail beings whose flesh is literally turning to ash. Assuming the traditional feminine role as caretaker, she is acutely aware of the body's decline, but tactful in its presentation. There is no sense of exploitation or sensationalism, no exaggeration of bodily weaknesses for comic or grotesque effect.

Ashes to ashes. To return to the material from which these immaterial figures are constructed, recall that these specters are made from the ashes of books Victor deliberately burned, containing the "words that were important to them in their lives." (Schmahman 16 October 2011). According to the announcement of Victor's exhibition at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg in April, 2011, the 'old'

books were the venerable classics of Western European literature: Ulysses, War and Peace, and Great Expectations. Indeed, according to Victor, Liz "…was one of our university models who formerly worked at a book shop – and we often had long talks about books while waiting for the students to have break- she stark naked." (email 23 November 2011). Is there an implication here that the traditional academic standard of literacy, based on the knowledge acquired through the 'Great Books' of Western Civilization, dying with the generation depicted in Transcend? If no one reads these 'classic' books any more, does it matter whether or not they are immolated, any more than that the elderly, fragile beings before us may shortly be cremated? Both the books and the bodies contain histories—but, when discarded, what of them will be retained? What will we, the residents of a global, electronic culture, rebuild from the husks of the old ideas in which our bodies and minds are contained?

Victor faces this issue head on in the *Lost Words* series from 2011. According to the artist, the four men in the series are 'all ex-academics and Afrikaners and the books burned all Afrikaans…my aim was to try to source texts they had written as source ash, not just books they suggested, but just could not find them in time [for an exhibition at Grinnell College in the United States]."(email 23 November 2011).[xii] Appropriately enough, all but one of the former professors from the University of South Africa (Unisa), wear glasses, as if to underscore their past status as academics. However, the life of the mind they have lived in their professional careers is now visibly absent, and with it the patriarchal authority that accompanied what had been for the better part of their careers a male-dominated profession. The brains of Prof. Adolf Theron, (fig. 9), former head of the Pro Arte School, appear to explode from his head. Former professor of industrial psychology and registrar, Prof. Ricky Mauer scratches his head in confusion while an alert-looking face, the self of a moment ago, hovers behind him: he has forgotten what he was going to say. And former state librarian and professor of librarianship, Prof. Reg Zaaiman, opening his fuzzy, non-academic robe to expose himself with a smirk, appears demented. Again these men represent the loss of status, power and privilege traditionally accorded to males: they are all 'former,' ghosts from the past. As a group they also represent one's worst fears about aging: the loss of mental capacity to senility or to the widespread scourge of Alzheimer's. The body-mind duality, however surpassed in current theory, is brought here into sharp relief: the 'tattered coat' of the body appears insignificant in comparison to the shattered mind.

Of all the masculinities that currently jostle for position within South African society, the status of Afrikaner white male academics, those who once determined what constituted 'knowledge,' is especially unsettled at present. Victor, who taught for many years at various Afrikaner-founded academic institutions, often uses Afrikaans titles for her work, surely in part to reference its conflicted history. If the demand to teach all classes for secondary students in Afrikaans led to the 1976 Soweto uprisings, "…in 2002 the government decided that no university may teach only in Afrikaans." (Giliomee 2004: 50). Ironically, 'the language of the oppressor' is now spoken predominantly by coloureds, and the dominant language—"the symbol of prestige, advancement [and] the medium of business, finance, science and the internet…of government, education, broadcasting and the press," is English, "the mother tongue of just 8% of the people." (The Economist 2011: 58). Indeed, ANC leaders have been referred to sarcastically as "Afro-Saxons." (Giliomee 2004: 40). If the figures in the *Transcend* and *Lost Words* series appear to embody a declining tradition of the transmission of culture through the written word, the culture represented by English language speakers is hardly in jeopardy. Language structures thought, and in a country where a top priority is the education of previously disadvantaged citizens to assume professional careers, education in English results in a neo-colonialism of the mind. To quote Antjie Krog, who writes in both her native Afrikaans and in English: "English has become the language that confirms and judges our existence…But…this is absolutely the problem: English cannot tell the truth of South Africa…"(Krog 2009: 101).[xiii] The "Lost Words" of the Afrikaners, or 'Afrikaanses' (whites + coloureds), like those of the nine official tribal languages, are vanishing into the 'Anglosphere.' The 'Lost Words' –the life of the mind of these white Afrikaner men--may be in effect their last words, as their texts die with them.

Emmanuel: fixing and unfixing masculinity

If Victor uses the stripped body to expose the radical instability of concepts of gender generally, as well as the losses involved in the death of white, patriarchal, Afrikaner culture specifically, Paul Emmanuel uses the stripped head to examine the efforts by the patriarchal mindset to impose and fix gender identity through ritual. Rites of passage are life's markers, public street signs signaling the

beginnings of a new direction in life, whether puberty, marriage or a change in social status. The phrase suggests a moving forward, a transition to a new and presumably more stable identity. The South African military is now integrated and requires that formerly disparate racial and ethnic masculinities become 'uniform.' The experimental video, *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* (2008; 14 min.) turns the conventional connotations of the phrase on its head—quite literally. While induction into the new South African military, the South African National Defence Force, may offer a stable career and a more secure social status for its recruits, Emmanuel elects to highlight what is lost. The accompanying rituals—primarily the requisite head shaving for males prior to induction, but also collective actions such as marching, waiting in line, or eating mess en masse in a refectory-- are depicted not in terms of esoteric teaching but as mind-numbing routines.

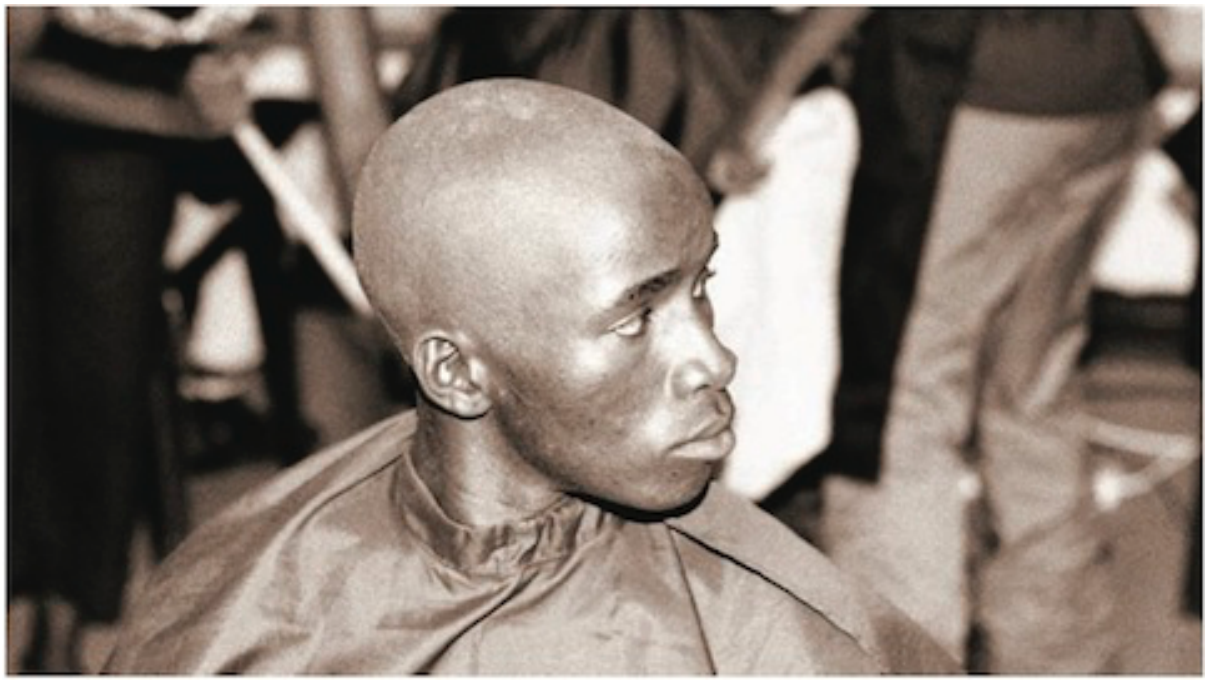
10. Paul Emmanuel
Still (establishing shot: Gariep Dam) from *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* (2008), single channel, high-definition digital video, stereo soundtrack, 14 minutes
Photo: courtesy Format Digital Production and Art Source South Africa © Paul Emmanuel

From the opening sequence of this first of his works in film/video, Emmanuel unsettles our expectations of a comprehensible, objective documentary. The establishing shot is not set at the army base, but in a sepia-toned landscape consisting of an open expanse of water, lacking a stabilizing foreground shoreline, and bounded at the horizon by treeless, black, pyramidal hills (fig. 10).[xiv] In this mirage-like setting, a wind forms rivulets across the water's surface. Because we are not informed that this is the Gariep dam, the site appears primordial, if not hallucinatory. The water resembles blowing sand and the hills beyond could be either man-made or natural, (Kaganof: 10 June 2010).[xv] Familiar categories are suspended, and the landscape itself is 'liminal', in transition.

The second sequence shocks us out of our disassociated reverie. In an extreme match cut accompanied by an (in)human shout, the pyramidal hills become triangular tents which the new recruits are marching past. As they turn, we plunge precipitously into the thick of this herd of singing anonymous men, whose awkward attempts to march in line alternate with crosscuts to rows of backpacks, a table with an officer reviewing a list of names, and close-ups of electric razors being cleaned. Like it or not, we will be bodily inserted into this group from time to time, even as at others, we are teased with a transitory sense of objective distance that documentary provides. A brief traveling shot of a line of quiescent, seated men permits us to see the men's faces for the first time, and prepares us for the portrait sequences to follow.

A total of ten men will have their heads shaved over the course of the film. These individual portraits are at the heart of the artwork, as it is from this status as a civilian with a unique personality that the transition to soldier begins.[xvi] The first to sit in the barber chair and have the haircutting cape tied around his neck (significantly isolating his head from his body) is a young black man who rather

nervously, if passively, submits to having his hair shaved off. After a pregnant pause, with a metronome-like ticking on the sound track, the buzzing razor begins to plow the surface of his skull. (We see only the hands of the barbers; never their faces). When he is about 1/3 shorn a series of crosscuts take us back and forth from the individual to his new identity as “state property with an assigned force number,” in Emmanuel’s words. (Art Source South Africa 2008/2010). We move alternately from the stripping of his head to a close-up of recruits’ hands holding empty coffee cups and a long shot of an empty refectory: by metonymy, his head is the empty vessel that the institutional structure will mold, deeply imprinting it over time. After each crosscut, the recruit’s face returns in ever-tighter focus, isolating him from the initial medium close-ups that include other men being shaved, and bringing us, the viewers, into face-to-face contact in extreme close-up. Just as we make eye-contact with the sensitively recorded visage before us, Emmanuel abruptly and shockingly stops the action, and with it the evolving narrative, to insert a black and white still of the newly-bald male looking hesitantly away from the viewer. With the inserted still photograph, motion, the transition from one state to another, becomes stasis (fig. 11). Having undergone the Samson-like castration of the shaving of his locks, his former identity, as embodied in his hair, is now discarded, and his future, as a participant in a life structured by rigidly-maintained, collective routines, is secured. When the next recruit, a shaggy-haired blonde, (fig. 2), is shorn, it becomes clear that one of the institution’s goals in the gratuitous head shaving must be the muting of the signs of racial/ethnic identity.



11. Paul Emmanuel
Still (black male recruit) from *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* (2008), single channel, high-definition digital video, stereo soundtrack, 14 minutes
Photo: courtesy Format Digital Production and Art Source South Africa © Paul Emmanuel

That countless others will share his fate is confirmed in the following sequences, where the shaving process is increasingly abbreviated and the crosscuts speeded up. We are permitted no more than few seconds of empathic engagement with each additional recruit’s portrait, as our imaginary interaction/identification is blocked not only by the fast pace, but by the relentless white noise of the razor, the implacable instrument of institutional control. Our visual rapport stymied, we rely instead on what Laura U. Marks has termed ‘haptic visuality’. The inexorable motion of the anonymous hands over the surfaces of the ten craniums elicits in the viewer a tactile response to the systematic hair removal, a counterpart to the recruits’ visceral emotional experiences. According to Marks, “Haptic cinema does not invite identification with a figure…so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image…it is not proper to speak of the object of a haptic look as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image.” (Marks 2000: 164).[xvii] The ambiguity and partiality of the visual elements and the lack of verbal dialogue in the film force us to sense its meanings through our bodies, suspending our own gender identification in the process. Because the interpretative process is sense-based rather than conceptual, there can be no resolution of dichotomies. The central motif, the laying on of hands, is frequently the means by which spiritual

power is transferred to an initiate by a priest or elder in traditional rites of passage. These hands, however, hold a vibrating, cutting machine, so that the spiritual conversion is layered with intimations of violence and torture.

12. Paul Emmanuel
The Lightweights (2007), Installation, Topfontein Farm, Free State, 1000 tea-stained cotton t-shirts, clothes pegs, steel; 100 x 300 m
Photo: courtesy Art Source South Africa

During these fast shaving sequences, the cross-cuts to the institution are replaced by cross-cuts to *The Lightweights*(2007; fig. 12), an ambitious installation Emmanuel created specifically for the filming of *3SAI*. On Topfontein farm in the Free State, Emmanuel assembled an army of one thousand white T-shirts, of the type worn by the inductees, and hung them on ten lines, each 100 meters long and spreading over 2.5 acres of field. Each head thus becomes a 'handscape,' twinned with the mindscapes/landscapes with which it is increasingly double-exposed. While the shaving sequences emphasize the de-humanizing, assembly-line nature of the process, *The Lightweights* T-shirts, surrogates for the recruits' hidden bodies, begin to tremble and finally to blow wildly in the wind: they are 'lost souls.' The pace of indoctrination negates individual agency; the recruit is at the mercy of forces that have the power of life and death over him. Then, as the eighth man, a white, begins his 'portrait sitting,' the pace abruptly shifts, and the strands of falling hair falling in slow motion are crosscut with the farm's waving grasses and the distant sound of children's voices (lost childhood). A traveling shot of the rows of T-shirts follows, accompanied by sounds of distant horns and tolling bells (lost lives). Increasingly, the delicate grasses and fine strands of hair become interchangeable, evoking the words from I Peter 1:24 in Brahms' Requiem: "For all flesh is as grass."

After a final aerial shot of the parallel rows of t-shirts, a white male head re-appears, shot from the rear and isolated from the mise-en-scène of the military base.[xviii] Identifiable as Emmanuel's own from his *Lost Men* series, the artist negates cinematic distance by inserting himself into a variant of the now-familiar head-shaving process (fig. 13). Because of the subtlety with which Emmanuel has implicated the viewers (no matter what their gender) into his contemplation of indoctrination into military masculinity, his own participation is critical. In his case, however, the naked head is stroked and massaged in extreme close-up by black hands. In this stunning image, the 'castration' metaphor is replaced by the barber's sensual massage, a clear reference to the underlying homoeroticism in the process of male bonding in the armed forces.

13. Paul Emmanuel
Still (close-up, head and hands) from *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* (2008), single channel, high definition digital video, stereo soundtrack, 14 minutes
Photo: courtesy Format Digital Production and Art Source South Africa © Paul Emmanuel

As Marks argues, “The ideal relationship between viewer and image in haptic visuality is one of mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image…When vision is like touch, the object’s touch back may be like a caress, though it may also be violent…Haptic visuality imples a tension between viewer and image, then, because this violent potential is always there. Haptic visuality implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing.” (Marks 2000:184-185). Just as our tactile response to the piled ashes on the surface of Victor’s portraits force us to acknowledge our own mortality, so we cannot assume a masculinist position of control and mastery when viewing these haptic images. The centrality of touch in this film permits Emmanuel to position the life forces of eroticism and death right below the surface of his depictions of repetitive routines, rendering the viewer as vulnerable as the recruits with their naked, skinned, heads.

A parallel process of merging of the tactile and the visual occurs in the five sequences of five drawings in Emmanuel’s *Transitions* project. By incising photographic developing paper’s exposed black surface, the depicted male bodies undergoing the rituals of circumcision, military induction, marriage and a birthday toast emerge from a dense web of tiny marks resembling the reticulated patterns of human skin, (fig. 14). As a result, the images seem literally born from the ‘skin of the film,’ as they transition from one state of (individuated) masculinity to another, socially-sanctioned one.[xix]

14. Paul Emmanuel
Detail (4th image) from the *Transitions* drawing entitled *(3)* (2007), incised drawing on exposed photographic paper, 480 x 480 cm
Photo: courtesy Spier Contemporary Collection and Art Source South Africa

In his discussion of the liminal state, the "Betwixt and Between" of initiation rites, anthropologist Victor Turner has argued that this period of marginality, of transition from one state to another, is marked first by symbols of death and decay and then by symbols of parturition or birth. (Turner 1967/1989: 96). Following Arnold Van Gennep, Turner identifies three phases in traditional rites of passage: separation, margin (or limen) and aggregation, or assimilation into a group. (Turner: 94). In *3SAI* we do not see the third phase—the recruits functioning as solders with assigned duties--which, of course, is the whole point of the ritual. Instead, by incorporating *Lightweights* into the film, Emmanuel exposes the fundamental truth that the future of every artillery soldier, putatively, is death. He is trained to shoot and be shot at. That we come to understand that fact through Emmanuel's visual poetry makes the film all that much more powerful politically, as the myth of the heroic soldier in uniform is replaced by the reality of the vulnerable young man whose body is 'on the line'.

While engaged with the film itself, our range of knowledge is only slightly broader than that of the protagonists. Our position is one of intimacy. The discomfort we feel along with them as their identities are stripped bare is not so much the fear of death, but the inability to imagine what the future holds. "Betwixt and Between," their status as not-civilian, not-soldier is the source of their anxiety and ours. We cannot know what is gained by this making of a military man, as Emmanuel chooses to visualize instead the lost potential of other ways of performing gender, the loss of the expansive possibilities of gender's 'wide arc'. (Corbett 2011: 459).

In their riveting portraits, both Emmanuel and Victor investigate gender as it is situated in social customs and institutions. Both suspend conventional concepts of gender in order to visualize its process of change within a given place and time, that of South Africa, post-1994. Victor's hovering specters and Emmanuel's passive volunteers exist in limbo, a space between the death of the life that has been and the life that, in being determined for them, constitutes a death of future possibilities. These losses are visualized primarily not through absence, but rather through the fragile presence of the tactile media with which they work: ash that is physically accumulated on the surface of paper, or the powerful illusion of touch in the visual medium of film. This tactile, bodily engagement with the media insures that in turn the viewer receives the work on a visceral level.

In the end, it is on this level that individuals come perceive their own gender as it is repeatedly modeled over time. Victor and Emmanuel point to the genuine trauma and loss that are experienced

when concepts of gender, as codified in a culture's institutions, leak outside given boundaries. Our very skin becomes porous, susceptible to unfamiliar and unstable identities. What does black/white/coloured/ male/female mean at present? Emmanuel and Victor are resolute in their insistence that despite former and current legal designations, gender is a matter of continual, often painful, renegotiation. But in neither artist's work is the refusal to fix gender entirely a matter of loss. Achille Mbembe has argued that "…postcolonial thinking stresses humanity-in-the-making, the humanity that will emerge once the colonial figures of the inhuman and of racial difference have been swept away…" (Mongin et al., 2010). The era represented by white males in frail care or the former NADF may be passing, but there is work to be done to transform what remains of worth in their histories so that it may be of use in constructing a post-racial, or even a post-gender, society.

Notes

[i] According to Butler, "…'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms." Butler, J. 1993, 1-2.

[ii] His decision to represent the male as an absent, silent figure is interesting in the light of Lacanian-influenced feminist writings, which have argued that within a patriarchal system it is the woman is a 'silent image…[a] bearer, not a maker, of meaning." Mulvey, L. 1975."Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," reprinted in Mulvey, L. 1989. Visual and Other Pleasures. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 15.

[iii] The film is 3 min. 26 seconds, and according to Emmanuel's commentary, the film "was shown to white Matric boys during the eighties at the height of the apartheid." Emmanuel has uploaded this background research onto his website. "Video Material" and "More Research Material," Transitions book FTP webpage, www.paulemmanuel.net/media. accessed April 12, 2010

[iv] According to news reports, women do not accommodate all that easily to military life. "In a research paper – "From the SADF to the SANDF: safeguarding South Africa for a better life for all?" – Noel Stott reflects on the nature of violence, in particular in the SANDF. He says the new legislation introduced to deal with gender related issues highlights the broader constitutional concerns regarding equality and also the role the military played in creating a "macho and militarised masculine identity. That in the militarised society gender issues relate as much to masculinity as to femininity". Quoted in "South Africa: SA Women: Hard Time in Military," Dispatch online, November 24, 2010. http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=2454&type=news.

[v] For a discussion of white guilt, see van der Watt, L. 2005, "Witnessing Trauma in Post-Apartheid South Africa: the Question of Generational Responsibility," African Arts 38/3, 26-35+93.

[vi] This is a concern for most theorists of masculinity. See, for example, Corbett, K. 2009. Boyhoods: Rethinking Masculinities, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

[vii] Other installations include The Lost Men Mozambique (Maputo, 2007) and Sylt, Germany (2010). In 2012, Emmanuel received a four-month residency at the Paris Institut Français Pour La Création, to do research for Lost Men France, a 100-year commemoration of World War I and specifically the horrific battles of Verdun, Normandy and Delville Wood.

[viii] The four drawings in the series are "Fader," "Shadow Boxer," "Shadow Dancer," and "Dust Man."

[ix] Schmahmann, B. Interview with Diane Victor on 16 October 2011 in preparation for dvd footage that Paul Mills was shooting on request from David Krut, and which was intended to be included as documentation in Diane Victor's exhibition at the art gallery at University of Johannesburg in 2011-2012.

[x] Email 16 December 2010. Victor also mentioned that she did "try extensively to persuade black elderly people to pose—all refused absolutely." Given white control over black bodies in the past, this is hardly surprising.

[xi] See also: Jones, A. 1998. Body Art: Performing the Subject. Minneapolis and London: University

of Minnesota Press.

[xii] Victor taught drawing and printmaking at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria Technikon and Technikon Witwatersrand between 1991-2007, and was acquainted with these men through her teaching. Until 1994, the classes at these institutions were taught primarily in Afrikaans. The four drawings were first shown in "Of Fables and Folly: Diane Victor, Recent Work," in the Faulconer Gallery at Grinnell College in Iowa from January 28 – April 17, 2011. The catalogue is available online: www.grinnell.edu/faulconergallery.

[xiii] Krog, A. 2009: 101. The insistence that a population rarely proficient in English when entering the system, not only speak but write standard English in order to obtain an academic degree exemplifies an impregnable bastion of white power—to which the 'other whites', the Afrikaners, and indeed the entire 92% of South Africans, are subject.

[xiv] Emmanuel has used this landscape in his drawings and prints as well, for example Air on the Skin (2002).

[xv] Emmanuel has commented to Aryan Kaganof that he was drawn to the Karoo landscape because it lets us "…see most things as being in a constant state of transition." The ambiguity of the Gariep dam was also appealing because it is "…an ochre brown colour, and at certain times of day looks almost like moving sand dunes." http://kaganof.com/kagablog/?s=3SAI. Accessed 5/12/11

[xvi] Sebastian Junger and the late Tim Hetherington's documentary about American soldiers fighting in Afghanistan, Restrepo, (2010), also uses this device of the individual portrait in order picture the human cost of war.

[xvii] Marks 2000: 164. Marks makes a distinction between haptic and tactile that is not pertinent here. For the purposes of this essay, I am treating the two terms as synonymous.

[xviii] The sequence was shot in 35 mm. at Sturrock Park at the University of Johannesburg.

[xix] See Allara, P. 2011. "Paul Emmanuel's Transitions: The White South African Male in Process." Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art 28: 58-66.

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Figures.

1. head shaving, photograph, National Military Archives, Pretoria, date?

2. Paul Emmanuel, still from 3SAI: A Rite of Passage, 2008. High-definition film, color, 14 min. edition of 10 “blondie”

3. Diane Victor, Give a Dog a Bad Name and Hang It. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 1994, size.?

4. Diane Victor, Fall from Grace. Etching and lithograph, 1994

5. Paul Emmanuel, Lost Men Grahamstown II. Installation on Monument Hill, 2004. Pigment printed photographs on voile, silk, steel, aluminium. Photograph: Andrew Meintjes

6. Diane Victor, Jan, ash and charcoal/paper, 2010, 151x100 cm(?)

7. Diane Victor, Norman, ash and charcoal/paper, 2010

8. Diane Victor, Liz, ash and charcoal/paper, 2010

9. Diane Victor, Lost Words series, 2011: Prof. Adolf Theron, ash and charcoal/paper.

10. Paul Emmanuel, still from 3SAI: A Rite of Passage: establishing shot: Gariep Dam.

11. Paul Emmanuel, still from 3SAI: A Rite of Passage: shaved male looking right

12. Paul Emmanuel, Lightweights, installation, Topfontein farm, Free State, 2007. 1000 tea stained cotton t-shirts, clothes pegs, steel, 100 x 300 m.

13. Paul Emmanuel, still from 35 mm. sequence, 3SAI: (head and hands).

14. Paul Emmanuel, Transitions (detail: marriage), 2005-2008. Incised drawing on exposed photographic paper.