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LOCATING THE AURATIC: AN INVESTIGATION OF VISUAL TRANSLATIONS BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHIC SOURCE MATERIAL AND SELECTED PORTRAIT PAINTINGS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
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FACULTY OF ART, DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE
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Supervisor: David Paton

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, which I submit in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Technologiae (Fine Art) in the Department of Visual Art, Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg, is, apart from the acknowledged assistance, and unless otherwise indicated, my own work, and has not been submitted by me to another institution to obtain a research diploma or degree.

Jenny Pomeroy

__________________
Date

__________________
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study is to conduct an investigation of the location of auratic moments in specific portrait paintings. I investigate the process of painting from photographic source material and the translation of physicalities (such as brushmark, texture, saturation of colour, and line) from the photographic source material to the painting. The transformation process itself is also investigated, where the image depicted moves from the photographic source material to the painting. I attempt to locate how these resulting physical translations, which are transgressive and transcend the photographic source image, embody auratic elements within selected paintings by Marlene Dumas. As a figural and expressive painter, who employs photographs as source material in my painting process, I investigate the visual translations in materiality that take place from photographic source materials to paintings in an explication of my own practical component of work.

Walter Benjamin’s notion of the aura in terms of works of art and photography constitutes a central focus in my study. Benjamin (2008:5) describes the aura as: “the here and now of the work of art - its unique existence in the place where it is at that moment.” He also maintains that, “[i]t is no accident not at all, that portrait forms the centrepiece of early photography (2008:14).” I draw on Benjamin’s concepts regarding the aura, as well as conduct analyses of writings by theorists who have contributed to an understanding of the auratic and the relationship between the aura and photography, in order to investigate, and locate auratic moments within specific portrait paintings by Dumas.

My study is positioned within a post-structuralist paradigm, within which semiology and phenomenology are employed as strategic frames, facilitating the location of auratic elements in specific portrait paintings. Semiology is employed to assist in operationalising the index and indexicality which is evident in the painterly translation from photographic source material to specific portrait paintings in my study, while phenomenology presents a bodily experiential comprehension of these paintings.

Key words:
Auratic, aura, portrait painting, photography, translation, transgression, transcendence, semiology, phenomenology, Marlene Dumas.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Context of the study

As an expressive figural painter who employs photographic source material as the starting point in my painting process, I am interested in investigating the physical, material-based translations that occur when painting from photographs. The relationship between painting and photography has a long history in visual practices. The invention of the camera had an important effect on art, and, in particular, on the visual characteristics of painting in the 19th century, where Impressionist painters used the ‘snapshot’, with its accidental blurrings, unusual juxtapositions, and cropping of figures, to create a sense of spontaneity. While the Impressionists used the camera as a tool to depict a sense of reality and movement, the camera released modernist painters from the compulsion to depict reality, resulting in expressive works, and a move away from realism. Walter Benjamin (2008:11) highlights the influence of photography in visual art practices as follows: “[W]ith the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, namely photography, […] art felt a crisis approaching that after a further century became unmistakable, it reacted with the theory of ‘l’art pour l’art’ [‘art for art’s sake’], which constitutes a theology of art.”

My purpose in this study is to investigate the process of painting portraits\(^1\) from photographs as source material, and the translation of physicalities from the photographic source material to the portrait painting. These physicalities include formal elements as they are presented as painterly indexical marks, such as texture, line, colour, the presence of brushstroke on the canvas, and the liminal space where paint becomes the equivalent of something else, such as flesh, yet remains paint on the surface, hairs of the paintbrush which have been caught in the paint’s surface (which are indexical of the fact that a brush has been used), the aesthetic value gained from the uniqueness of the painterly gesture, or artist’s ‘signature’, as well as the context of the painting. All these aspects demonstrate potentially auratic behaviours, due to their material transcendence from the flat photographic image. For the purposes of my study, I argue that the auratic\(^2\) is identified through particular indices of \textit{presence} or \textit{atmosphere} within a work of art or its individual parts. These auratic moments and perceptions are

\(^1\) Throughout my study, I aim to problematise the notion of portraiture and, hence, any fixed and faithful notion of portraiture needs to be held at bay. I aim to demonstrate that the notion of portraiture is more complex and more nuanced than a mere naturalistic representation of the visual appearance of a sitter. I will show this in chapter 2 through an exposition of the writings of Goodman, Mearleau-Ponty, and Ficacci.

\(^2\) This is also true for the terms “aura”, “auratic perceptions”, and “auratic moments”, which I use throughout my study.
subjective, as their reception relies on each individual’s frame of reference, experience, history, and perspective. As an introductory and investigative analysis into this translation process, I examine the degrees of difference inherent in the translation from the photographic source material to selected portrait paintings by Jenny Saville and Francis Bacon. This introductory investigation facilitates an in-depth analysis of the location of auratic moments in specific portrait paintings by Marlene Dumas. The location of auratic moments in the work of Dumas is carried out by identifying at what point these differences become what I term “degrees of transgressiveness”, which, in turn, facilitate transcendence in the translation from photographic source material to the portrait paintings. This complex process of transformation, and the location of respective auratic moments, is investigated in terms of how the image depicted moves from one thing (the photographic source material) to something else (the painting). I argue that physical translations, which are transgressive and transcend the photographic source image, embody auratic moments within selected paintings of Dumas. My analyses are conducted by means of two theoretical frames: semiology (particularly indexicality) and phenomenology (with particular emphasis on embodiment). I explore the relationship between representation and the auratic, and I investigate degrees of mimesis, resemblance, and likeness in relation to auratic perceptions, as well as in terms of iconic and indexical elements of difference between photographs and paintings. I examine how much visual information is sufficient to identify the source yet to allow the materiality of the painting to be liberated beyond the role of mimicry, becoming something other, and how the portrait paintings hold a link to the body through visual translations in material. As a figural and expressive painter, who employs photographs as source material in my own painting process, I also investigate the visual translations in materiality that take place when I translate photographic source material into a painting in the practical component of my work.

Benjamin’s notion of the aura in terms of works of art and photography contextualises my study. It is difficult to define the notion of the aura, as there is no clear-cut, textbook definition of the phenomenon. There are, however, a few key components to Benjamin’s notion of the aura which help me to establish the premise for locating auratic moments in specific portrait paintings. The first component is that a work of art must be authentic in order to have an aura or be auratic. Benjamin (2008:7) comments on the loss of the aura through reproduction of the original by stating “what shrinks in an age where the work of art can be reproduced by technological means is its aura.” The second component is that an

3 Later in this introduction I delimit and contextualise the term “transgressiveness” as a self-conscious alteration towards an inaccurate translation, and therefore a liberation from mimicry.
4 I define “transcendence” as a purposeful and transgressive surpassing of, or moving away from, one thing in order to attain another thing, and I argue that this is auratic due to the affective presence it holds.
aura is retained through mechanical reproduction in portrait photography. Benjamin (2008:14) maintains that "[i]t is no accident, not at all, that the portrait forms the centrepiece of early photography" and argues, in his essay *Little history of photography* (1999), that an aura was captured in early photographs through the medium of photography. The third component is the distance between the viewer and the work of art, which Benjamin (2008:9) defines as "a unique manifestation of a remoteness, however close it may be." The forth component is the spatial and temporal aspect of a work of art, which Benjamin (2008:5) describes as "the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in the place where it is at that moment". I thus draw on Benjamin’s concepts pertaining to the relationship between the aura, photography, and portraiture, in order to investigate, interrogate, and locate auratic moments within specific portrait paintings by Dumas.

My study provokes an attempt to locate auratic moments through critical and personal interpretations, considerations and judgements of what, in fact, constitute auratic moments. It is a process of constant revealing, concealing, and camouflaging, of glancing and gazing. I have thus conducted my study with a degree of suspicion, treating seemingly auratic ‘sightings’ as unfixed and subject to slippages, which are inherent in this type of visual analysis of paintings. The slippages to which I refer are inherent due to the fact that my analyses are characteristically (and intentionally) subjective, but my analyses are supported by the artists’ statements about, and critical responses to, such ‘sightings’. Any auratic elements that I identify are according to the ‘presence’ that I argue a work possesses, and not a physical or tangible ‘thing’. In order to stay clear of a quixotic, sentimental, or romantic idea of the aura, my investigation is an interpretive one, drawing on Benjamin’s notion of the auratic, underpinned by theories of photography, indexicality and embodiment, and notions of mimesis and representation. From a phenomenological perspective, the aura relies on the perception and receptiveness of the viewer of the artwork (for instance, a painting that I identify as having a ‘presence’ may not hold the same ‘presence’ for someone else), and, as a result, I thus also rely on statements of similar perceptions and receptiveness found in the literature which support my analyses.

If it can be assumed that translations in materiality take place in the process of painting from photographic sources, I speculate on how these resulting elements of transformation may embody particular auratic moments. Moreover, if it is understood that visual translations in the materiality of the image depicted give rise to auratic moments I therefore explore what these auratic elements might be, and under what circumstances they might appear. Given that my study is an investigation of visual translations between photographic source material and paintings, a central focus in my research is
therefore the identification of transcendent moments within artworks. The degrees of difference between any photographic source material and the resulting portrait painting are operational and include indexical mark and trace. This translation demonstrates a move away from the original source, from a semiological viewpoint, indexed by thickness of paint, enlarged scale, colour transformations, and gesture of brushstroke.

The diagram below (see Figure 1.1) illustrates the stages of visual translation from photographic source material to painting, demonstrating the path taken from perfunctory translation of factual evidence to affective transcendence thereof, giving rise to the auratic. The translation from the photograph to the painting is demonstrated as a given. The degrees of difference between these two may, however, be measured. The degrees of difference between the photograph and the painting do not necessarily facilitate transcendence, as they are not necessarily an infringement or violation of the boundaries of mimicry. The degrees of difference, if radical enough, could however, feed into the degrees of transgression, where purposeful shifts take place from the photographic source, which liberate the painting from its act of mimicry. These degrees of transgressiveness facilitate the transcendence of the painting from its photographic source material, where the painting surpasses or moves away from the photograph. It is within this transcendence that I argue that the auratic is located, and therefore I see transcendent elements as evidence for auratic moments within paintings as this transcendence leads to the recognition of something emotive, affective, and phenomenologically perceived.

Figure 1.1: Jenny Pomeroy, Visual translations from photograph to painting as evidence for the auratic, 2014. Vector diagram (unpublished).
Since the perception of the auratic is by its nature affective, it is important for me to quantify and justify my position, which is purposefully subjective. In order for me to justify affective readings within paintings, I argue for levels of transcendence, which are able to be supported by textual and close visual analyses of my selected paintings. If I am able to identify transcendent moments, which embody transgressive physical and material translations within the selected artworks, I am thus able to identify auratic moments and relationships within the artworks. The terms “translation”, “transgression”, and “transcendence” are used throughout my study to describe visual shifts, changes, alterations and degrees of difference in the process of painting from a photograph. These three terms have critical differences in meaning for my study. A translation refers to the transformation of one thing (the photograph) to another thing (the painting), and is therefore a given in my investigation of paintings mediated by photographic source material. Translations, however, are not necessarily transgressive or transcendent by nature, as they may be unemotional, perfunctory, or merely technical. Transgression indicates the degrees of indexical and material difference between the photograph and the painting, and a self-conscious alteration towards a non-accurate or quasi-accurate translation, and therefore a liberation from mimicry. With this in mind, transcendence assumes a purposeful surpassing of, or moving away from, one thing to another thing, and is thus, I argue, evidence for the auratic due to the affective presence that it holds in my selected examples.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

My principal aim in this study is to investigate, through the theoretical component and a body of paintings, how the process of painting from a photograph liberates difference in materialities between the source material and the selected artworks, in an attempt to locate how certain resulting translations, which are transgressive and transcendent, embody auratic elements within the painting. In order to achieve this aim, I have isolated four key objectives. The first objective is to analyse terms, definitions, and theories relating to Benjamin’s notion of the auratic, as well as conduct an analysis of the writings of theorists who have contributed to the understanding of the aura, and the relationship between the aura and photography. My second objective is to investigate the painting processes of Jenny Saville and Francis Bacon, whose selected works are mediated by photographic source material. The exposition of the works of Saville and Bacon serves as an introduction to, and support for, my close

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5 A non-accurate or quasi-accurate translation, for the purposes of my study, encompasses provocative and purposeful shifts, and refers to a deliberate transformation, or an unfaithful copy.

1.3 Theoretical positioning

My study is positioned within a post-structuralist paradigm, within which semiology and phenomenology are employed as strategic frames in order to facilitate the location of aурatic elements in specific portrait paintings.

I employ semiology as a theoretical frame in my study in the analysis of indexicality, resemblance, and representation in portrait paintings, as well as in comparing and contrasting photographic source material with paintings, and the iconic and indexical elements of difference between photography and painting. I thus make use of semiology as an operationalising element in analysing the index as trace in portrait paintings in relation to photographic source material, in order to gauge the visual translations that take place. Such visual translations include brushstrokes indexical of the type of brush that was used and the gesture and movement of the body, as well as other formal elements, including line, colour, form, and texture. I further study the physical act of the painting process, such as the evaporation of turpentine or water, which leaves pools of paint or ink which have bled into the canvas or

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7 I use the term “gauge” as a qualitative evaluation, and not a quantitative calculation. I gauge visual translations from a deliberately subjective point of view, as transcendent moments and transgressive translations are affective and emotive, and therefore rely on personal reception and perception. As I have stated, I make use of textual analyses in support of my visual analyses in gauging these visual translations.
paper, or the structure, texture, and movements of the substrate, which result in the particular placement and visual results of liquid paint on the surface.

I employ phenomenology as a strategic frame within my study in order to facilitate the reception and recognition of auratic elements in specific portrait paintings. Benjamin (2008:33) makes reference to the phenomenological reception of artworks by stating that “[t]he person who stands in contemplation before a work of art immerses himself in it; he enters that work”. I specifically employ phenomenology in terms of the embodiment that paint and painted marks present. In this line of argument, I explore Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1964, 2004) view of the role that embodied perception plays in understanding and engaging with the world, including artworks, and utilise this view as a strategic frame in order to facilitate the reception of the auratic in the selected portrait paintings. My study is invested in Merleau-Ponty’s notion that the receptive body replaces the thinking mind in an attempt to locate auratic elements, from an embodied, experiential comprehension or perspective. Merleau-Ponty (2004:69) states that it is not possible to detach things from their way of appearing. His notion of phenomenology places emphasis on the body and that which it perceives, as opposed to consciousness, as the primary site of knowledge and knowing of the world. Merleau-Ponty (2004:70-71) describes the work of art as

a totality of flesh in which meaning is not free, so to speak, but bound, a prisoner of all the signs, or details, which reveal it to me. Thus the work of art resembles the object of perception: its nature is to be seen or heard and no attempt to define or analyse it, however valuable that may be afterwards as a way of taking stock of this experience, can ever stand in place of the direct perceptual experience.

It is therefore important for me to experience the works personally in order to understand the role that perception plays in engaging with the painted surfaces. As part of my research, I view where possible, the original portrait paintings by Dumas that I have selected for my study in order to have a direct, phenomenological experience of them. The reason for needing a bodily, phenomenological experience of these paintings is twofold. The first is that this experience will enable me to better answer questions, such as what it is that constitutes the auratic in these works, and under what circumstances it might appear. The second is related to Benjamin’s argument that works of art lose their auratic quality through reproduction; hence, a visual analysis of reproduced images of selected paintings would be counterproductive for this study.
While engaging in a literature survey concerning photography and the auratic, it became evident that the loss of the aura through reproduction has been a prevalent theme since at least the 1930s. Benjamin (2008:4), in his famous essay *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (originally published in 1936), asserts that “[w]ith photography, in the process of pictorial reproduction the hand was for the first time relieved of the principal artistic responsibilities, which henceforth lay with the eye alone as it peered into the lens”. Benjamin’s notion of the aura carried with it a quality of aesthetic authority, authenticity, and unattainability, which he argued became compromised with the advent of photography and technical reproduction of the original work of art. Benjamin (2008:5-6) states that photography is able to “place the copy of the original in situations beyond the reach of the original itself”, he maintains, however, that even with the most flawless imitation, one important aspect of the aura cannot be captured in a reproduction, and that is “the here and now” of the artwork, or its temporal and spatial existence. While the reading I offer of Benjamin’s notions surrounding the auratic consists of his theory of the loss of the aura through the photographic reproduction of works of art, my investigation is more heavily weighted on an inversion of this process, namely the process of painting from a digital photograph as a starting point.

My investigation of portrait paintings that have been painted from photographic source material involves a certain to-and-fro examination of visual translations between the photographic source and the paintings, in order to gauge the visual difference in physicality and materiality between the two, and the transformation that a certain backwards-and-forwards analysis provides. It is also not only a to-and-fro examination of the relationship between the photographic source material and the painting, but also of this translation process and Benjamin’s theory of the loss of the aura through photographic reproduction, which is implemented in order to locate auratic elements within my selected portrait paintings. If a work of art is said to lose its aura through reproduction, and the relationship between the work of art and its photographic reproduction is a complex one, then, for the purposes of my study, the relationship between the artwork and the photographic source (as the starting point in the process and not an end result that occurs after a work of art is completed) may be seen as an even more complex and multifaceted one.
1.4 Chapter outline, and the respective literature consulted

1.4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, by explaining the context, the aims and objectives, a chapter outline and the respective literature consulted, and its theoretical positioning.

1.4.2 Chapter 2: The aura, the auratic, and perceptions thereof

Part 1: Auric mode

Chapter 2 consists of two parts. The first part identifies terms, definitions, and theories pertaining to Walter Benjamin’s notion of the auratic, as well as an analysis of the writings of theorists who have contributed to an understanding of the aura, and the relationship between photography, painting, and the aura. Benjamin’s pertinent texts on this subject include *Little history of photography* (1999), first published in 1931, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (2008), first published in 1936, and an earlier text titled *Paintings, or signs and marks* (2003), first published in 1917. Benjamin’s writings on mechanical reproduction, and his observation that the reproduction of works of art had an effect on traditional art-making practices, such as painting, are relevant to my research. Particular authors who place Benjamin’s now-dated analogical ideas within a contemporary digital setting are Warwick Mules and Martin Dixon, who both write about Benjamin’s notion of aura in their respective articles, *Aura as productive loss* (2007), and *The horror of disconnection: The auratic in technological malfunction* (2007). Miriam Bratu Hansen writes on Benjamin’s notion of the aura from a phenomenological perspective in her text *Benjamin’s Aura* (2008), and Andrew Benjamin elucidates Benjamin’s idea of the aura from a semiological perspective in his text *Framing pictures, transcending marks: Walter Benjamin’s ‘Paintings, or signs and marks’* (2009).

I establish my theoretical framework by introducing phenomenology in terms of embodiment, and semiology in terms of indexicality. The particular texts that I consult for my phenomenological framing are Merleau-Ponty’s *The primacy of perception and other essays on phenomenological psychology of art, history and politics* (1964) and *The world of perception* (2004), as well as Kelly Oliver’s *The look of love* (2001). The seminal texts that I consult for my semiological framing are Rosalind Krauss’s *Notes on the index: Seventies art in America* (1977), Charles Sanders Peirce’s *Logic as semiotic: The theory of signs* (1955), Tom Schofield, Marian Dork, and Martyn Dade-Robertson’s *Indexicality and visualization: Exploring analogies with art, cinema and photography* (2013), and Susan Sontag’s *On photography* (1977). The relationship between photography, painting, representation, and the copy is
investigated through a review of Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and simulations* (1981), William Mitchell’s *The reconfigured eye: Visual truth in the post-photographic era* (1998), Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of art* (1976), and Norman Bryson’s *Vision and painting: The logic of the gaze* (1983). This part of chapter 2 helps to position my theoretical premise of themes surrounding the auratic, and it also sets up semiology and phenomenology as strategic theoretical frames, as the foundation for my analyses of the selected portrait paintings that I discuss in chapters 3 and 4.

**Part 2: ‘Presentness’: Degrees of translation: Jenny Saville and Francis Bacon**

In the second part of chapter 2, I conduct an analysis of specific portrait paintings by Jenny Saville and Francis Bacon which have been mediated by photographic sources. This forms a foundation where the translational differences between photographic source material and the resulting specific portrait paintings by Saville and Bacon are identified and discussed. I acknowledge the potential infiniteness of my study, and the possibility to have included any portrait painter in my investigation, as all representations are ultimately translations from the source from which they have been painted. I discuss how I have grappled with the demarcating of boundaries in order to select artists according to their relevance to my study, and how I have come to delimit this section to an analysis of selected works by Saville and Bacon. I compare specific photographic source images with the paintings to which they give rise, in order to examine the degrees of difference in the translation process. The specific works that I examine are *Figure 11.23* (1997) by Saville, and the right panel of *Studies of George Dyer and Isabel Rawsthorne* (1970), *Four Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1967), and *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1976) by Bacon. I use this investigation in order to facilitate and contextualise a deeper reading and analysis of the visual transcendences that occur in the translation process of Dumas’ paintings, in order to locate auratic moments within her work in the following chapter.

The three primary texts consulted on Saville are *Jenny Saville* by Cheryl Brutvan and Nicholas Cullinan (2011), *Jenny Saville* by John Gray, Linda Nochlin, David Sylvester, and Simon Schama (2005), and *Jenny Saville: Continuum* by John Richardson (2012). Another source I consult is an interview with Saville titled *Jenny Saville in conversation with Nicholas Cullinan* (2012). These texts provide critical information of Saville’s painting process derived from photographic source images. The primary text I consult on Bacon is *Interviews with Francis Bacon* by David Sylvester (1980). In this book, consisting of interviews which were conducted between 1962 and 1979, Bacon speaks in great depth of his process of painting from photographs. Some of his photographic source material is also included in this book, which I make use of in my analyses of visual translations in Bacon’s work. Other texts I consult on

1.4.3 Chapter 3: The ‘portratic’: Marlene Dumas

Part 1: ‘Sourcey’ paintings

Chapter 3 is also divided into two parts. The first part follows on from the investigation of the visual translations between photographic source material and paintings by Saville and Bacon in part 2 of chapter 2. This analysis of specifically chosen portrait paintings by Dumas, and their corresponding photographic source material, is investigated in great depth in order to locate auratic moments within these paintings by arguing that the paintings are seen to transgress and transcend the source from which they have been painted. It is in locating moments of transcendence that I am also able to locate the auratic and, I argue, that while translations are evident in any process of painting from a source, and can therefore be seen as a certainty, the auratic is located when the painting transcends the source. These specific portrait paintings are *The Jewish Girl* (1986), *Jule-die Vrou* (1985), *The White Disease* (1985), *Kim* (2004), *Mamma Roma* (2012), and *Martha: My Ouma* (1984). I carry out textual analyses of Dumas, focusing on the painting processes she employs. The literature provides evidence for the location of auratic elements in her work albeit using different names and terms for the auratic. The textual analyses extend to close visual and interpretive analyses of the selected portrait paintings by Dumas, in order to investigate the visual translations, transgressions and transcendences of her photographic source material which might give rise to auratic elements within her paintings. Identifying liberties taken in size/scale, colour, painterly marks, and even the physiognomy of the subjects’ facial features, which are transgressive and transcend the photographic source image in terms of physical aspects, material trace, and indexicality, as well as evidence of subjective and phenomenological presence, together facilitate my location of auratic elements within these paintings.

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8 The title of part 1 refers to the fact that the paintings discussed in this section are derived from, or inspired by, photographic source images. These source-derived, or source-inspired, paintings are also ‘saucy’ in terms of their physical presentation, as they are particularly rich in painterly materiality.
Part 2: ‘Being-thereness’

The second part of chapter 3 is an analysis of specific portrait paintings by Dumas which I have viewed personally. The specific paintings are Dumas’ *The Next Generation* (1994-5), *The Fog of War* (2006), *Martha: Sigmund’s Wife* (1984), *The Neighbour* (2005), and *Occult Revival* (1992). This section is an analysis of my phenomenological perception of the paintings, as well as an investigation of Benjamin’s notion that works of art lose their aura through reproduction. Here I contrast differences between the original paintings and their reproduced images in books. I examine indexes and traces in the artworks that I encounter personally, and I investigate the relationship between semiology and phenomenology in terms of aural moments in the selected artworks. I unpack this relationship between semiology and phenomenology to reveal that the physical aspects of the work, the index, and the trace, have added to the presence of the work, and therefore constitute evidence for the aura.

The primary text consulted on Dumas is *Marlene Dumas: Measuring your own grave* by Cornelia Butler, Richard Shiff, Matthew Monahan, Marlene Dumas, and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (2008). In this text, Dumas explains her process of painting from photographic source material, and the complex relationship between photography and painting. Dumas, as cited by Shiff (2008:145), states that “[i]f you take a photograph, there’s always something in front of you, but with a painting there is nothing”. She boldly declares that “[y]ou can’t TAKE a painting – you MAKE a painting” (Dumas, cited by Shiff 2008:145). Two secondary texts consulted are *Marlene Dumas: Sorte* by Giorgio Verzotti (2012) and *Marlene Dumas: Intimate relations* by Marilyn Martin, Marlene Dumas, Emma Bedford, Marlene van Niekerk, Achille Mbembe, and Sarah Nuttall (2007).

1.4.4 Chapter 4: Fam(y)liar faces: An explication of my own work

In chapter 4 I explicate the practical component of my research, which consists of a body of portrait paintings from digital photographic source material for the purposes of an exhibition. The paintings vary in size from small instantaneous studies to large laboured surfaces of acrylic, oil, and ink on canvas and paper. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the translations and manifestations of trace and index of mark on the surface of these paintings, and the visual transgression and transcendence of the paintings from their photographic sources. As I cannot declare my own paintings to be auratic (while there is the hope that viewers may find them so), I focus my discussion on the deliberate shifts inherent in my paintings, which are purposefully transformed from their sources. I make use of two parallel methodologies within the making of my body of paintings. The first methodology I employ is explorative research, where my painting process involves an intuitive, haptic, and phenomenologically generative
exploration of materiality. The second methodology I employ is that of praxis, where the theoretical underpinnings of my research directly support my body of practical work, and the painting process used in my body of work thematically links the practical component to the theoretical investigation of my larger study. This second methodology involves a less spontaneous approach to painting, and is more organised, rational and calculated.

1.4.5 Endnote

I conclude by summing up the relationship between photography and painting in my study with particular emphasis on transgressive transcendences which embody auratic elements in selected work by Dumas and how this relationship is explored in my own body of paintings. I contend that visual translations in physicality and materiality between the photographic source material and the selected paintings by Dumas have been shown to be transcendent, and that these visual translations embody auratic elements. I further conclude that the transcendence of photographic sources in my own paintings is due to a phenomenological embodiment of paint on the surface of the canvas.
CHAPTER 2: The aura, the auratic, and perceptions thereof

Part 1: Auric mode

2.1.1 Introduction

The first part of this chapter identifies terms, definitions, and theories pertaining to Walter Benjamin’s notion of the auratic, as well as an analysis of the writings of theorists who have contributed to an understanding of the aura, and the relationship between photography, painting, and the aura. Norman Bryson (1983:87) states:

[T]heoretical interest in the image, over the last few decades, has been largely preoccupied with the new order of the image represented by the Photograph [sic]: though the assumptions of photography and of cinemaphotography [sic] are constantly examined and re-examined, both in the institutions and in the journals devoted to the photograph, painting remains that which the photograph has eclipsed and rendered obsolete; its assumptions are explored only rarely; its status has become that of a deposed order of the image. Investigation of the painterly sign must deal with effects of spatiality and temporality, and with concepts of the body, that are without counterpart in the study of the photographic image; effects and conceptions that are themselves highly elusive, logically devious, and resistant to most of the prevailing critical vocabularies: finding even essential terms is a struggle.

Bryson (1983:87) proposes that spatiality and temporality are key aspects when investigating the painterly sign. This spatiotemporal relationship is one that Benjamin (2008:5) endorses as imperative to the existence of the aura, as we recall one of Benjamin’s (2008:5) key components of the aura is “the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in the place where it is at that moment”. Another aspect, from the quotation above, that Bryson (1983:87) proposes is important when investigating painting is the concept of the body. The notion of embodiment, and the idea that the aura only manifests itself if the viewer is receptive to its possibility, is also one that Benjamin (2008:33) advocates in his claim that “[t]he person who stands in contemplation before a work of art immerses himself in it; he enters that work”. Bryson refers to the difficulty of finding terminology for photography’s counterpart in painting, since painting has been eclipsed by photography, and the order of the image has been deposed. The word “struggle” in Bryson’s (1983:87) quotation, however, helps lay claim to a transcendence from photography. The investigation in which I am invested is that of a complex argument of the role of photography in painting mediated by photographic source material. I am interested in the role of photography as a starting point for the painting process as source material, and what the translations in materiality embody from photography to painting. This investigation involves the
analysis of photographic source material and the resultant painting, in order to establish the relationship between the two. In this light, the photograph is seen not as that which eclipses the painting, but rather that which casts the painting into sharper relief. The photograph, if it lays claim to greater degrees of iconicity and resemblance, eclipses the relationship between painting and subject (see Figure 2.1), calling to mind the above quotation by Bryson (1983:87), where he states that “painting remains that which the photograph has eclipsed”. Of importance in my study, however, is the unhinging and repositioning of the photograph as something which is no more or less iconic or truthful than anything else. The photograph is as much a construct as the painting is. I aim to demonstrate how the photograph might be repositioned, so as to dethrone the claim of the photograph to iconicity as source material, and not as a final artwork9 (see Figure 2.2) thus leading to a triangulation of, and an equal distance between, all three elements, namely the subject, the photograph, and the painting. This relationship between photography and painting, as well as the paradoxical relationships of each with indexicality and iconicity, is dealt with in depth in section 2.1.4, in my presentation of semiology as a strategic theoretical framing device, which facilitates my identification and location of auratic moments.

Figure 2.1: Jenny Pomeroy, Tripartite relationship between subject, photograph, and painting I, 2014. Vector diagram (unpublished).

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9 In these terms I refer to iconicity in the semiological sense. I am not denying that photographs can also have exhibition and cult value. However, I am looking at photographs that have a particular use and function as source material for paintings. These photographic images are usually filed or discarded after they have been used by the artist. An example of this is the source image that Jenny Saville used for her painting Figure 11.23, as depicted on page 42 (see Figure 2.5).
The significance of the photograph and the painting having an equidistant relationship to the subject helps me argue for the photograph replacing the subject as the source for portrait paintings. However, as the chapter continues I show that this equidistant relationship is challenged, and in chapters 3 and 4 (Dumas’ and my own work) this tripartite relationship between subject, photograph and painting is complexified when I show that painting is better equipped to reveal a personhood or presence of the subject than a photograph, as the painting is shown to transcend the photograph (see Figure 2.3). I explore the relationship between photography and painting in terms of painting’s transcendence from...
the photographic source material in specific paintings by Dumas in chapter 3, which, in turn, facilitates my location of auratic moments in these portrait paintings. However, my analysis of paintings in terms of auratic presence also relies on Benjamin’s notion of the aura, phenomenological experience and reception of artworks, identification of index and trace from a semiotic perspective, as well as themes and concepts surrounding mimesis, representation, and the relationship between photography and painting. This section thus presents an unpacking of my framing strategies (phenomenology, and semiology), as well as themes and concepts (aura, representation, mimesis, and photography) on which my study relies.

2.1.2 ‘Walter Benjamin’s aura’

In my introduction, I mentioned that Benjamin’s concept of the aura is difficult to define. Miriam Bratu Hansen (2008:339) describes it as follows:

Anything but a clearly delimited, stable concept, aura describes a cluster of meanings and relations that appear in Benjamin’s writings in various configurations and not always under its own name; it is this conceptual fluidity that allows [the] aura to become such a productive nodal point in Benjamin’s thinking.

With this in mind, I attempt to gather this “cluster of meanings” in order to lay the groundwork for my location of auratic moments in specific portrait paintings. There are a few key components or arguments related to the aura found in Benjamin’s writings, which enable me to structure my analysis, including two lines of argument that describe the relationship between photography and artworks. The first of these arguments relating to photography and works of art is that an artwork’s aura is said to be lost through technical reproduction. Benjamin (2008:7) argues that “what shrinks in an age where the work of art can be reproduced by technological means is its aura”. Benjamin (2008:3) asserts that man has always been able to reproduce a work of art, and that referents have always been imitated by man, but that mechanical reproduction presents a new emphasis on looking, as it unchains the artistic function of the hand. In other words, the aura of the original or authentic artwork is lost, through the loss of the presence of the original, which Benjamin (2004:793) advocates by stating that “[t]he presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of originality”. He emphasises this point with regard to reproduction by stating that “[t]he whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility” (Benjamin 2004:793). He maintains that manual reproduction was usually considered to be forgery, a concept which aids in preserving the original’s authority. This,
however, is not the case regarding process reproduction, as it is not as dependent on the original, due to the fact that the lens is able to capture details that are imperceptible to the human eye. Related to the notion of an original losing its authenticity through reproduction is Roland Barthes' (cited by Krauss 1977:59) explanation of the nature of the photograph being “a message without a code”:

What this [photographic] message signifies is, in effect, that the relation of signified and signer is quasi-tautological. Undoubtedly the photograph implies a certain displacement of the scene (cropping, reduction, flattening), but this […] is not a transformation (as an encoding must be). Here there is a loss of equivalency (proper to true sign systems) and the imposition of a quasi-identity. Put another way, the sign of this message is no longer drawn from an institutional reserve; it is not coded. And one is dealing here with the paradox of a message without a code.

The second argument that Benjamin makes regarding photography is that in portrait photography an aura is retained through mechanical reproduction. In his essay Little history of photography (1999), Benjamin argues that there was an aura about early photographs without the photographer being aware that he or she had captured this aura through the medium of photography. However, Benjamin (1999:515-517) asserts that in the 1880s photographers made it their business to simulate this aura through artificial highlights and retouching. In this regard, William Mitchell (1998:31) suggests that images are made to appear causal, instantaneous, and natural documentations, rather than constructed occurrences, but that the images no longer have conviction, leading to and resulting in a loss of the referent. In Mitchell’s (1998:31) words, “[t]he referent has become unstuck”. With their detailed recordings, photographs were seen to connote the real, with the exclusion of human bias. Mitchell (1998:49) further contends that digital images are more problematic than analogue photography, because while analogue photography has a negative, which could be regarded as the original, digital photographs do not have negatives, which means that there is no unique original.

Benjamin (2008:14) maintains that it is no mistake that the portrait was the cornerstone of early photography. It is for this reason, as well as for my personal investment in painting, that I base my study on the examination of portrait painting from photographic source material and focus particularly on where the translation from the photographic source material to the painting becomes transcendent. Mitchell (1998:26-30) speaks of selection, organisation, and exclusion as elements which all contribute to the contested notion that ‘truth’ is being depicted. Image construction with aspects such as what is being captured, how it is captured, what has been left out of the shot, and whether it is enlarged, cropped, or printed, all contribute to the conventionality of reality as a depiction of truth. Photography commonly passes as proof of reality, on the claim that “the camera does not lie” (Mitchell 1998:23).
‘Truth’, however, is ultimately contingent and relies on a set of circumstances. Photographs are seen as depictions of evidence, and this evidence is thought to correspond to reality. Aaron Scharf (1986:9) comments, however, that “the meaning of the term ‘truth of nature’ [has] lost its force: what was true could not always be seen, and what could be seen was not always true”. In this sense, truth could be seen as another term for convention.\(^{10}\)

Other arguments of Benjamin’s for the aura of an artwork include the distance between the viewer and the artwork, and the spatial and temporal aspect of a work of art. These two arguments are closely related in that they both involve a placement of the artwork in relation to the viewer. Benjamin (2008:5) maintains that the aura resides in the “here and now” of the work of art, with its specific placement in a specific time, making it unique. This definition, according to Benjamin, is what constitutes a work of art in terms of spatial and temporal categories of perception. This notion is closely linked to Benjamin’s (1999:518) definition of the aura in *Little history of photography* (1999) as “[a] strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be”. Benjamin (2008:39) reiterates this statement in *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (2008), where he defines the aura as “a unique manifestation of a remoteness, no matter how near it may be”. Benjamin (2008:39) clarifies this notion by further stating that

> [r]emoteness is the opposite of propinquity. The essence of remoteness is that it cannot be approached. Indeed, unapproachability is one of the chief qualities of the cultic\(^{11}\) image. By its very nature, it remains ‘remote no matter how near’. Any propinquity lent by its embodiment as matter does not impair the remoteness retained from its constituting manifestation.

Benjamin declares that in order for the aura to be maintained, the distance between the viewer and the artwork must be preserved, with the collapse of space and time leading to a loss of the aura. Benjamin (2008:9) elucidates this concept with an example from nature: “lying back on a summer’s afternoon,”

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\(^{10}\) Lewis Hine (cited by Mitchell 1998:30) clarifies this point in his statement that “while photographs may not lie, many liars may photograph”.

\(^{11}\) According to Benjamin (2004:795), there are two dimensions according to which artworks are esteemed: cult value, and exhibition value. He states that “[a]rtistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult. One may assume that what mattered was their existence, not their being on view” (Benjamin 2004:795). Artworks are of cult value before they are publicly seen, and thereafter they become of exhibition value. However, a remnant of that cult value remains. Benjamin (2004:796) states that “[i]n photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value […] But cult value does not give way without resistance”. Mechanical reproduction divorced art from its roots in cult value, causing it to lose its quality of autonomy. Where copies might lose their integrity in analogue photography, digital photography removes itself even further from cult value, as it has no original and no origin. For this reason, copies cannot lose their integrity, as they are all identical. Digital images, like analogue photographs, are therefore not ritual objects, but have exhibition value in their mass consumptive form; however, digital replication now surpasses mechanical replication (Benjamin 2004:797-804).
gazing at a mountain range on the horizon or watching a branch as it casts a shadow over our reclining limbs, we speak of breathing in the aura of those mountains or that branch”. The distance implied by Benjamin of the mountain range to the viewer is what makes this experience auratic. The aura is argued by Benjamin (2008:39) to thrive under conditions of remoteness and unapproachability. The distance of a work of art to the viewer ensures the unattainability thereof, and thus preserves the aura. Georg Simmel (2004:478) similarly calls to mind the image of mountains as a metaphor to explain the distance experienced by the viewer when viewing art, when he asserts that “[a]ll art brings about a distancing from the immediacy of things: it allows the concreteness of stimuli to recede and stretches a veil between us and them just like the fine bluish haze that envelops distant mountains”.

Mules (2007) and Dixon (2007) offer a contemporary theoretical positioning of Benjamin’s notions of the aura, and particularly the temporal and spatial aspects of auratic perception. Mules (2007:[sp]) explains that Benjamin endorsed the notion that signs direct us to meaning through reference, which ultimately sees the disappearance of the material surface on which the signs are presented, through our perception and recognition of the signs. Mules (2007:[sp]) explains that Benjamin referred to the surface hidden by perception as a “surge”. He further explains that the mark emerges from the medium, that is, the material or hidden surface that the sign is presented on, and the material thus bears experience. The notion of signs, the perception of these signs, and the idea that material bears experience links back to my two framing devices as strategies for locating the aura, namely semiotic trace, and phenomenological embodiment. Mules reveals that the “mark” was renamed the “aura” by Benjamin in his essay Little history of photography (1999), where he writes of Benjamin’s notion of the aura in photography being the existence of the past in the present. This revelation by Mules of Benjamin’s thinking aids my argument for locating the auratic, from a semiological perspective, in marks on the canvas, since the terms “mark” and “aura” are regarded as synonymous. Mules (2007:[sp]) demonstrates his understanding of Benjamin’s notion of aura in his opening paragraph as “simultaneously the decayed perception of art objects in historical time, and the affirmation of a desire to ‘bring things closer’ in the ‘now’ of contemporary life. On one hand, aura signifies distance from the origin that the art object expresses, while on the other hand, aura is an expression of distance in proximity”. Mules (2007:[sp]) explains that all portrait photography has an aura of false origin because of the “uncanny presence of the past in the present” and “the consequence of looking at earlier images from the perspective of a later time”. Mules (2007:[sp]) boldly concludes that “Benjamin’s theory of temporality means the past is always unfinished”. Also highlighting this paradox of past and present, Barthes (cited by Krauss 1977:65) makes the following comment about the photograph:
The type of perception it implies is truly without precedent. Photography sets up, in effect, not a perception of the being-there of an object (which all copies are able to provoke), but a perception of its having-been-there. It is a question therefore of a new category of space-time: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority. Photography produces an illogical conjunction of the here and the formerly.

While Mules (2007: [sp]) focuses on the temporal conditions of the auratic, Dixon (2007: [sp]) focuses on the spatiality thereof. Dixon (2007: [sp]) reiterates Benjamin’s concept of aura by describing it as “a perceptual projection that is proper to the spatial senses of sight and sound”. He unpacks this by suggesting that sight ultimately only operates at a distance. Dixon (2007: [sp]) argues that height, being closely related to distance, is also seen to contribute to aura, because it is out of reach. Dixon (2007: [sp]) draws on Benjamin’s notion of the mountain having auratic qualities, because it is geographically out of reach, and he suggests, in the same line of argument, that height also produces a sense of aura because “height is beyond our capacity to challenge our physical circumstances”. Dixon (2007: [sp]) thus maintains that aura resides in a “spatial – and therefore authoritarian – sensory experience”, and that immediacy and contact lie outside of the auratic realm. The original work of art is thus guaranteed its authenticity if it is out of reach of the viewer. 12 From a phenomenological point of view, Dixon (2007: [sp]) suggests that “[a]ura captivates us only if we are receptive to its possibility, a receptiveness that presupposes reverie and response”.

2.1.3 Phenomenological embodiment

From the above presentation of Benjamin’s concept of the aura, auratic elements can be seen to rely heavily on embodiment and phenomenological aspects of reception. As stated in section 1.3, Merleau-Ponty’s view of the role that perception plays in understanding and engaging with the world is employed in my research as a strategic frame in order to facilitate the location of the auratic in specific portrait paintings. According to Merleau-Ponty (2004: 69), “painting thrusts us once again into the presence of the world of lived experience”. He explains that painting represents objects, and, in particular, a portrait painting represents a person, often named by the artist. Merleau-Ponty (2004: 71) argues that if the purpose of painting is merely to point the viewer towards the photographic representations of the

12 Given my phenomenological closeness to the paintings that I view directly this might seem contradictory. However, in the second part of chapter 3, I unpack this tension between remoteness and close physical investigation of painterly surfaces in order to demonstrate that a degree of aura manifests in the state of flux between the works being remote and near at the same.
object, which preserve all the necessary characteristics of the object and allow us to view the object in its absence, then the meaning itself would not lie in the painting, but in its subject, or the object that it signifies. Merleau-Ponty (2004:71) concludes that “all painting of any worth has come into being in opposition to precisely this conception of its role, one which painters of the last one hundred years at least have quite consciously resisted”, and declares that “painting does not imitate the world but is a world of its own”.

Merleau-Ponty (2004:72) argues that the viewer is at no point sent back to the object when encountering a painting, and that the resemblance of the sitter in portrait painting is of no significance when experiencing the painting aesthetically. He goes on to say that even in the case of painters working from life, the aim is not to evoke the subject matter, but rather to generate on the canvas a manifestation which is self-referential to the paint on the canvas itself. Merleau-Ponty (2004:72) asserts that the distinction that is frequently made between the subject matter of the painting and the artist’s style is untenable, due to the fact that the painted subject exists exclusively in the manner it has been painted by the artist. He affirms, however, that this does not mean that aesthetics matter exclusively, unaided by content, but rather that the two co-exist: “I mean that form and content – what is said and the way in which it is said – cannot exist separately from one another” (Merleau-Ponty 2004:72). Thus, meaning is created as much through the indexical marks placed on the surface of a painting as it is by the subject matter. Merleau-Ponty (2004:72) observes that when examining a painting, the viewer experiences the painting process through indexical marks and traces:

\[\text{As in the perception of things themselves, it is a matter of contemplating, of perceiving the painting the silent signals which come at me from its every part, which emanate from the traces of paint set down on the canvas, until such time as all, in the absence of reason and discourse, come to form a tightly structured arrangement in which one has the distinct feeling that nothing is arbitrary, even if one is unable to give a rational explanation of this.}\]

In terms of a phenomenological understanding of painting, Merleau-Ponty considers the act of painting, as well as the viewing practice, to be that of embodiment. According to Paul Valery (cited by Merleau-Ponty 1964:123), the painter “[t]akes his body with him”. Merleau-Ponty (1964:123-124) explains this as follows:

Indeed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.
Merleau-Ponty (1964:124) proposes that “vision is attached to movement”. He suggests that vision is an embodied act, because the eyes are physically embedded in the body, and that in order to look, we use eye movement, or even turn our bodies to face what it is we are looking at. He states that “every technique is a ‘technique of the body’, illustrating and amplifying the metaphysical structure of our flesh” (Merleau-Ponty 1964:129). Merleau-Ponty (1964:125) describes phenomenology and embodiment in terms of painting, by stating that “[s]ince things and my body are made of the same stuff, vision must somehow come about in them; or yet again their manifest visibility must be repeated in the body by a secret visibility”. He explains that colour, depth, and light are seen only because they are recognised by the same things inside the body, in the internal equivalences of those things. Merleau-Ponty (1964:127-128) argues that “the whole point is that our fleshy eyes are […] much more than receptors for light rays, colours, and lines”, and that “the same thing is both out there in the world and here at the heart of vision”.

Merleau-Ponty (1964:127) also suggests an embodied approach to painting, by saying that “[w]hen painting the eye restores the visible through the traces of the hand”. He (1964:127-128) further proposes that objects before an artist pass into him. Of great significance to my study, Merleau-Ponty (1964:128) states that “[i]t makes no difference if [a painter] does not paint from ‘nature’; he paints, in any case, because he has seen”. This statement is pertinent to my investigation of the visual translations that take place from the photograph to the painting: when painting from photographic source material, as Merleau-Ponty contends that the source from which the artist paints is irrelevant; what is relevant is that the artist sees, whether it be from life or from a photograph, and for the purposes of my study, the artist has seen the photograph.

Kelly Oliver (2001:56), too, proposes an embodied notion of vision, which she asserts is contrary to the notion put forward by Jean-Paul Sartre, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan, who offer a notion of vision that is based on alienation and hostility. Oliver (2001:56) explains that Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray, conversely, “criticise the priority given to vision and suggest replacing vision with touch” Oliver (2001:57) takes a stance that investigates the various notions of vision that were presupposed by those who, in her words, “both venerate and denigrate vision”. Oliver explores Irigaray’s propositions about the role of light, air and touch in vision. According to Oliver (2001:64), “Irigaray’s insistence on a recognition of the role of material elements in vision, perception, thought, and philosophy in general suggests a new direction for theories of recognition and intersubjective relations”. Oliver (2001:65) suggests that “[i]f vision involves touching light, then we are touched by, and touching, everything
around us even as we see the distance between ourselves and the world or other people in the world”. Furthermore, Oliver explains that Irigaray’s notion of air having density, and therefore the notion that space is not empty, necessitates a rethinking of vision. She expands on the notion of air having texture by explaining that even light is dependent on air, and therefore vision is dependent on air. Oliver (2001:66) elucidates this by stating that “[t]he texture of light cannot touch without the air that opens onto that touch” Oliver (2001:68) explains that Irigaray develops her notion of the tactile look and the link between vision and touch from Merleau-Ponty’s concept that the world is visible for the reason that it is tactile, and that “[v]ision is dependent upon tactility and the necessary connection, even reversibility, between the body and the visible world” (Oliver 2001:68). Oliver (2001:68) elaborates on this by stating that “[f]or Merleau-Ponty the corporeality of the visible world is the connective tissues that nourish and sustain the possibility of seeing. He describes vision in terms of thickness, corpuscles, tissues, grains, waves, circuits, currents, embryos”. However, Oliver explains that Irigaray emphasises “the touch of light on the eye” (2001:65), and, unlike Merleau-Ponty, who reduces vision to touch, Irigaray argues that vision is dependent on touch. Oliver (2001:68) further explains that Irigaray builds her notion of the look as caress from Levinas’ notion of touch as caress. Oliver (2001:68) explains that for Levinas, caress is a way of seeing, and that just as one hears and touches, “[t]he visible caresses the eye”.

Hansen (2008:351) presents Benjamin’s theories surrounding the auratic from a phenomenological perspective, by proposing that “[t]he aura is a medium that envelops and physically connects — and thus blurs the boundaries between — subject and object, suggesting a sensory, embodied mode of perception”. According to Hansen (2008:339), in her text on Benjamin’s On some motifs in Baudelaire (1940), she argues that Benjamin describes the aura as having “the ability to look back at us” or “lift its gaze”. Hansen (2008:339) notes that, in The Arcades Project Benjamin (1940) similarly expresses his “definition of aura as the distance of the gaze that awakens in the object looked at”. Hansen (2008:342) elucidates this by stating that “aura is itself a medium that defines the gaze of the human beings portrayed”. She further emphasises the relationship between the act of looking, perceptibility, and aura by stating that “the auratic quality that manifests itself in the object […] cannot be produced at will; it appears to the subject, not for it” (Hansen 2008:352). She explains that aura involves a phenomenological structure that allows for the materialisation of the gaze, which forms its possible meaning. Pertinent to my study of locating auratic moments in specific portrait paintings is Hansen’s (2008:342) distinction that “the aura is not an inherent property of persons or objects but pertains to the medium of perception, naming a particular structure of vision (though one not limited to the visual)”.
Hansen (2008:343) stresses that vision is one medium of perception that is used in perceiving the aura, when she quotes Benjamin, who states that “[t]o experience the aura of a phenomenon we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us”. Eduardo Cadava (1997:120) explains the phenomenon of the gaze with regard to the aura of early photographs as “their ability to look back at us across the distance of time, answering to the gaze of the later beholder”. This concept of the gaze relates back to the notion of temporality in Benjamin’s definition of the aura. Linear time is disrupted through the gaze of the subject being able to reach the viewer in the present.

### 2.1.4 Semiotic trace and index

I deploy the identification of indexicality, which is founded in semiotics, to facilitate the location of auratic moments in portrait paintings through the analysis of trace. I examine the relationship that photography has to indexicality, as this informs my investigation of painting mediated by photographic source material. Indexicality, although developed in linguistics, is of value in the analysis of visual art. Charles Sanders Peirce proposed a classification of signs consisting of icons, indices, and symbols. Peirce (cited by Schofield, Dork & Dade-Robertson 2013:176) describes this taxonomy of signs by stating that

> I had observed that the most frequently useful division of signs is by trichotomy into firstly Likeness, or, as I prefer to say, Icons, which serve to represent their objects only in so far as they resemble them in themselves; secondly, Indices, which represent their objects independently of any resemblance to them, only by virtue of real connections with them, and thirdly Symbols, which represent their objects, independently alike of any resemblance or any real connection, because dispositions or any factitious habits of their interpreters insure their being so understood.

Each of these three signs indicates a connection between the signified and the signifier, the referent and its representation. While the symbol operates independently of the physical properties of, or resemblance to, its referent, the icon functions in terms of its resemblance. The index differs from the symbol and the icon in that it has a physical relationship or connection to its referent. Joan Gibbons (2007:30) describes the physical, and causal relationship between the indexical sign and its referent by stating that “the signifier retains at least something of the existential ‘having been thereness’ of that which is signified”. According to Tom Schofield, Marian Dork and Martyn Dade-Robertson (2013:176), Peirce draws on the respective examples of a footprint, which is an index of presence, and lightning, which is an index of a storm, to illustrate indexicality. Schofield et al (2013:176) explain that indices
have direct contact or contiguity with an object, and they describe them as “physical imprints or traces from one item to another”. With Peirce’s (cited by Schofield et al. 2013:176) definition of an index being that which “represent[s] [its] objects independently of any resemblance to them, only by virtue of real connections with them”, I identify indexical marks within paintings, such as the trace of the bristles of the paintbrush in a brushstroke, or hairs of a paintbrush which have been caught in the paint’s surface (which is indexical of a paintbrush having been used), a pooling or swirling of paint on the surface of a painting (which is indexical of the diluted material used), as well as the movement of the canvas, which makes the paint run, drip, or swirl. Other examples may include an impression of a fingerprint, which is indexical of the artist painting with their hand, a sweeping brushstroke, which is indexical of a fast bodily painting movement, or scumbled marks, which is indexical of drying paint on the paintbrush. These indexical signs, as they are presented as tactile marks on the canvas, are traces that signify a transcendence from the photographic source material.

The indexical sign often embodies the absence of something and stands for something that was once there. Hansen (2008:354) explains that Benjamin’s term, semblance, “marks the object as not just absent in the work but always already lost”. Gibbons’ (2007:30) description of the index as “having been thereness” and Barthes’ (cited by Krauss 1977:65) description of photography as indexical and “having-been-there” both evoke Benjamin’s (2008:5) criterion of the presence of aura in the “here and now”, and also demonstrate that both painting and photography are indexical of their subjects. The index stands for the ‘here’ and the ‘now’, which are superseded, since the referent is spatially and temporally cut off from the present. Their trace is, however, left behind, and remains in the here-and-now. I suggest that aura may be found in indexical marks due to the trace of having-been-there, being physically present and representing that which is no longer there. This spatial and temporal aspect of the index facilitates my identification of auratic moments in painterly marks by inducing Benjamin’s notion that aura exists in the perception of space and time. The referent is no longer present, and the brush that was used to make the stroke is no longer in use. However, it has left in its place the mark, the trace, the index, which exist in the “here and now”.

Photographs are considered to be iconic due to their mimetic resemblance to their referent, yet they occupy a paradoxical iconic state. Krauss (1977:75) explains that “[t]he photograph is […] a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object”. Krauss (1977:63) notes that a painting is a sign connected to a referent along an entirely physical axis:
As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of the shifters.\(^{13}\)

Krauss (1977:63) furthermore states that this indexical quality is also “that of photography”. Peirce (1955:106) distinguishes photographs from icons by stating,

> photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs [indices], those by physical connection.

Gibbons (2007:29) states that photography is “the most widely used medium in the visual arts that embodies an indexical relationship to its subject”. Peter Geimer (2007:7) also notes that “[p]hotography, more than any other visual medium, has often been described as a trace, impression, or index of the real”. Similarly, Susan Sontag (1977:153) states that a photograph is “not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask”. As noted, a trace results from direct physical contact; therefore, according to this line of argument, a photograph is an imprint or trace of a moment that happened that has been frozen in time, even after the referent has subsequently gone away. Mitchell (1998:24) emphasises this by stating that a photograph “is a direct physical imprint, like a fingerprint left at the scene of a crime or lipstick traces on your collar”. According to Schofield et al. (2013:175), “indexicality describes relationships of contiguity in the representation of phenomena”. This definition of indexicality is useful when examining the relationship between photography and painting. Schofield et al. (2013:176) explain that the significance of the arrival of photography was that it was the apex of mimesis and further state that since classical times copying the world had been a prevailing preoccupation of the visual arts and painting in particular. Mimesis, however, is seen as iconic in that the copy resembles the object. Photography’s claim to indexicality is its direct imprint from the physical world onto the paper and recalls the presence of what it captures. Gibbons (2007:30) concedes that the index “may involve

\(^{13}\) According to Krauss (1977:69), “[t]he shifter is Roman Jakobson’s term for that category of linguistic sign which is ‘filled with signification’ only because it is ‘empty’”. According to Jakobson (1990:388), “‘I’ and “here” and “now” are examples of shifters, as they can only be understood in the context in which they are uttered. In order to shine critical light on the congruence between Benjamin’s thinking and Jakobson’s thinking, I propose that abstraction occurs in perception for Benjamin in the same way that abstraction occurs in emptiness for Jakobson. Likewise, ‘emptiness’ and ‘perception’ are filled by means of context, conception, and connotation. The here-and-now in Benjamin’s writings depends on perception in a specific place at a specific time; otherwise it remains empty. According to Anne D’Alleva (2005:33), “[i]n order to be understandable this message must refer to the reality that sender and receiver share; this reality is called context”.

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abstraction or, indeed, may be heavily mimetic”. Schofield et al (2013:179) state that “[t]he continued attraction of indexical as opposed to iconic or symbolic representation is the promise of a ‘truthful’ relationship to the world”. Despite the fact that portrait paintings can be seen as iconic due to the fact that they resemble the subject, this resemblance is, however, no more than a likeness. Painting lays claim to indexicality through the marks made on the canvas; the physical trace of the artist’s hand manipulating the paintbrush acts as evidence of the artist having-been-there.

Krauss (1977:58) declares that “[n]othing could seem further apart than photography and abstract painting, the one wholly dependent upon the world for the source of its imagery, the other shunning that world and the images it might provide”. This quotation is significant when examining the relationship between photography as source material and resultant transgressive and transcendent translations in portrait paintings, in that while the paintings I examine are not abstract, they are expressive in nature, and could be said to hover between abstraction and likeness, and to a certain extent disregard reality, while at the same time remaining figural portrait paintings. Despite this seeming distance, Krauss (1977:58) asserts that photography has become the “operative model” for abstract painting and art.14

Author Andrew Benjamin (2009:132) admits that throughout Walter Benjamin’s oeuvre he reflects on experience in relation to art and cultural objects as a crucial aspect of the presence of aura. However, in his text Framing pictures, transcending marks: Walter Benjamin’s ‘Paintings, or signs and marks’ (2009), A. Benjamin explores the semiotic relationship presented in W. Benjamin’s Paintings, or signs and marks (2003). A. Benjamin (2009:133-4) explains that any text begins by calling to mind the “realm of signs”, within which the “line” may have different meanings, such as the “written line”, the “graphic line”, and the “line of absolute sign”. A. Benjamin (2009:134) explains that the graphic line, according to W. Benjamin, both delineates an area (and thus becomes background) and exists in relation to that background, explaining that even though its result is graphic, its presence is not merely graphic. In this light, background surface is understood as a having a metaphysical identity which may not even be apparent to the eye. W. Benjamin (cited by A. Benjamin 2009:134) describes this by stating that “[t]o identify the background of a drawing is quite different from that of the white surface […] on which it is inscribed. We might even deny that identity by thinking of it as a surge of white waves (though these might not even be distinguishable to the naked eye)”. A. Benjamin (2009:135) explains W. Benjamin’s

14 According to D’Alleva (2005:32), “Krauss asserted that despite the diversity of seventies artistic practice – the seemingly ‘willful eclecticism’ that encompassed everything from video to performance to earthworks to abstract painting – these works were united by their adherence to the terms of the index, rather than traditional concepts of style or medium”. 
understanding of surface as “more than literal surface”, by stating that “while not expressed in these terms it would be as though the metaphysical came into play at the moment in which mere physical presence was transformed into material presence”.

A. Benjamin (2009:135) explains that the significance of the “absolute sign” lies in its oppositional relationship to the “absolute mark”. A. Benjamin (2009:135) describes W. Benjamin’s account that a sign represents something, and may even resemble that thing, while a mark resembles nothing. However, the sign and the mark are not dissimilar, since the mark is also seen as a trace or an index, and would therefore fall under the category of signs. According to A. Benjamin (2009:136-141), a mark is characterised by its self-referential nature, yet he explains that marks take on a different presence when they transcend their state of mere marks to become an image, by stating that “[t]he image comprises more than an organised collection of marks” (A. Benjamin 2009:138). A. Benjamin (2009:141) elucidates the transformation of marks as “transcending marks” by stating: “The question therefore concerns this transcendence; a transcendence that has its essential corollary in the re-emergence of the mark as the sight of technique. (A sight given by the mark having been attributed an operative quality rather than a representational one)” (A. Benjamin 2009:141). A. Benjamin’s explanation of the transcendence of marks leading to presence is critical to my study, in that it helps me lay claim to auratic moments residing in this transcendence. It can thus be seen that the semiotic relationship and presentation of mark, trace, and index have a close relationship to the phenomenological, in that presence is seen to manifest in the organisation of marks, which become a metaphysical site.

2.1.5 The ‘real’ and its copy

Since my study is invested in an investigation of the process of painting from photographic source material, themes surrounding mimesis, the referent and its copy, representation, and reproduction constitute an important theoretical background to my study. Benjamin’s theory of the reproduction of artworks can be seen to link closely with Jean Baudrillard’s (1981:1-14) understanding of the loss of the ‘real’, and how simulacrum threatens the ‘real’, since simulation undermines the dichotomies between the original and the reproduction, and it threatens the concept of representation. While representation celebrates an assertion of the ‘real’, simulacrum has been disparaged as a contradiction of the ‘real’. The notion of simulation questions the ability to distinguish between the representation and the ‘real’,
and, as Michael Camille (1996:31) proposes, it disturbs the order of priority, in that the referent no longer precedes the image. Camille (1996:33) cites Gilles Deluze’s explanation that “[t]he copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance”. A painting from a photograph is a representation, and may be seen as artificial, as it is a copy (from a photograph) of a copy (of the world). Furthermore, if the simulacrum is an image without resemblance, then an expressive or abstract painting would fall under that classification of simulacra, due to its lack of resemblance. Simulacrum does away with the ‘real’, it has no referent, and therefore is not a copy. The artificial and simulacrum are in opposition to each other, as the artificial is a copy of a copy, and simulacrum has no referent from which to copy.

However, a painting from a photograph may be seen as a simulation when it is reduced to the signs that constitute it, thereby losing its resemblance to the photograph it copies. This concept therefore raises the issue of the photographic source being a copy of the ‘real’ subject or object in life, and the even greater issue of a simulacrum having no referent to begin with. What is important here is the false authority claimed by the photograph to some sort of truth, against which any painting would be further distant from the truth, and thus false. This seems to undermine any iconic status claimed by the photograph, and links to my earlier statement about photographs being more indexical (causal) than iconic. This, in turn, frees the painting from any need to represent the photograph, as neither the painting nor the photograph is a truthful copy of the original. According to Camille (1996:33), the problem lies not in the distinction between essence and reality, but rather in the purging of such distinctions. In Baudrillard’s (1981:3) words, “[s]omething has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other”.

Camille (1996:31) asserts that “[a]t least since Plato the theory and practice of the visual arts have been founded, almost exclusively, upon the relationship between the real and its copy”. Wendy Steiner (1982:17) demonstrates her views on mimicry by stating that “[a]rt was not to be conceived of once again as a copy – and hence inevitably an imperfect copy – of reality, but instead as an independent object with the same degree of ‘thingness’ as objects in the world”. Similarly, Benjamin (2003:95) states that “[i]f a painter sits in front of a landscape and ‘copies’ it (as we say) the landscape itself does not occur in the picture; it could best be described as the symbol of its artistic content”. All of these notions, concepts, and ideas have their roots in Plato’s theory of forms. The first order, according to Plato, is the ideal which exists in the real world, and is unattainable; the second order is the material world, which Plato defines as a copy of the ideal, or a copy of the real. The third order is art, which is an imitation of
a copy of the ideal (Vlach 2012:sp]). In these terms, a photograph would be seen to be closer to mimesis than a painting is, and a painting from a photograph is another order removed. The referent of a painting may be a photograph, which is a copy of the world, and the world is a copy of the ideal. Mimesis is thus seen to be third-order imitation, and therefore closest to simulacrum. According to Baudrillard (1981:1), “[t]he simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true”.

As my study is invested in analysing the visual translations that occur from the photographic source material to the painting, I aim to locate auratic moments in the analysis of selected paintings that are mediated by photographs but not translated faithfully. According to Nelson Goodman (1976:6), the idea that the merit of an imitation entails copying the object as closely as possible is one that he opposes. From a semiological stance, Goodman (1976:6) states that

‘To make a faithful picture is to come as close as possible to copying the object as it is.’

This simple-minded injunction baffles me; for the object before me is a man, a swarm of atoms, a complex of cells, a fiddler, a friend, a fool and much more. If none of these constitute the object as it is, what else might? If all are ways the object is, then none is the way the object is. I cannot copy all these at once; and the more nearly I succeeded, the less the result would be a realistic picture.

Goodman argues, rather, that what is copied is one aspect of what the object is or looks like. He states, however, that this one aspect is not a random aspect; but that “the object is to be copied as seen under aseptic conditions by the free and innocent eye” (Goodman 1976:7). Goodman explains that the difficulty here is that there is no innocent eye. He states that “[n]ot only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyzes, constructs. It does not so much mirror as take and make” (Goodman 1976:7-8). Goodman (1976:9) explains that when representing an object, the artist uses interpretation, leading to visual translations and transcendence from the source material. He goes on to state that

[The copy theory of representation, then, is stopped at the start by inability to specify what is to be copied. Not an object the way it is, nor all the ways it is, nor the way it looks to the mindless eye. Moreover, something is wrong with the very notion of copying any of the ways an object is, any aspect of it. For an aspect is not just the object-from-a-given-distance-and-angle-in-a-given-light; it is the object as we look upon or conceive it, a version or construal of the object. In representing an object, we do not copy such a construal or interpretation – we achieve it. (Goodman 1976:6)

According to Goodman (1976:9), the same can be said for photography as painting: the use of a camera is still interpretative, because of the photographer’s personal style and handling. Goodman
(1976:9) maintains that “nothing is ever represented either shorn of or in the fullness of its properties”. The notion that even the most truthful copy remains precisely that – a copy of its referent – aids my analysis of the transcendence from source material to a ‘thing’ in its own right, with a transgressive transcendence, liberated from the act of mimicry, being evidence for the auratic.

2.1.6 Conclusion

The key aspects of the aura that were established at the beginning of this section in Benjamin’s characterisations have been found to overlap and interlink with themes and concepts relating to representation of the aura which were discussed in the rest of this section. I have explored notions of presence, transcendence, spatiotemporal relationships, reproduction, image selection, mimesis, resemblance, simulacrum, and notions of the ‘real’ in relation to the aura, and how these concepts facilitate the location of auratic moments within artworks.

I have presented an analysis of the auratic that includes concepts of phenomenological experience and reception of artworks, identification of index and trace from a semiotic perspective, as well as themes and concepts related to mimesis, representation, and the relationship between photography and painting as a theoretical underpinning to my investigation of auratic moments in selected paintings that have been mediated by photographs in the chapters that follow. I have shown how my framing strategies of semiology and phenomenology are interwoven with Benjamin’s theory of the auratic, by presenting notions that the aura is dependent on bodily reception as well as physical manifestation. I have demonstrated that spatial and temporal aspects of the aura rely on the viewer’s phenomenological experience of the aura, and I have shown that index and trace lead to a sense of ‘being there’ through experiencing the aura aesthetically. The complex relationship between photography and painting is framed and explored in terms of iconicity and indexicality.

I have demonstrated how all these complex themes related to representation help to create a theoretical groundwork that will assist in my identification and location of auratic moments in selected paintings by Dumas in chapter 3. However, before doing this, some connection needs to be established between this complex theoretical underpinning and painting. To this end, the second part of this chapter presents a practical and visual analysis of selected paintings by Saville and Bacon which have been mediated by photographic source material.
Part 2: ‘Presentness’
Degrees of translation: Jenny Saville and Francis Bacon

2.2.1 Introduction

In this section I examine the work and painting processes of a range of portrait painters very briefly, and more specifically, Jenny Saville and Francis Bacon. I compare selected portrait paintings by the latter two artists with their traceable photographic source material. The analysis in this section focuses particularly on the degrees of difference inherent in the translation from the photographs to the paintings. I do not aim to locate auratic moments in the work of Saville and Bacon, but, rather, I intend to identify where and how the painting transgresses its photographic source material. This analysis of the degrees of transformation establishes the groundwork for my location of auratic moments in specific portrait paintings by Dumas that have been mediated by photographs, in chapter 3.

I have chosen to focus my investigation and analysis in this section on specific works by Saville and Bacon because my painting process displays certain similarities to theirs, not only in that these artists work from photographic source material, but because of the way they consciously move away from faithful imitations (mimicry) of the photographic source from which they work. Ultimately, it would have been possible to include any portrait painter in my study, as all representations that have been painted from a referent are translations from the source from which they have been mediated. Chuck Close, for instance, is a portrait painter who paints large-scale photo-realistic portraits from photographic source material. In his earlier work, Close organised his photographs in a grid structure, which he then proceeded to replicate painstakingly onto the canvas, copying the photograph meticulously, block for block. His paintings are transformed from their photographic sources primarily in the scale and proportions of his subjects, but also in the context in which these representations are read due to the translation in size. Close (cited by Howgate 2012c:44) comments on his painting process by stating:

I’m not interested in personalities. I’m interested in the photograph. It either has interesting visual information or it doesn’t. Once I get the information I want, I begin. I paint from upper left to lower right, grid section to grid section. I hardly ever see their face.

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15 By earlier work, I refer specifically to paintings that he produced in the 1960s and 1970s.
My own personal investment in this study is in contrast to Close’s relative interest in the photograph over the subject. I am concerned, primarily, with the process of capturing the essence of my subject through the use of painterly gestures, using a photograph as a starting point, and allowing the paint and the painterly process to take precedence. I thus went through a process of elimination in order to establish which artists were most pertinent to my study. An analysis of and comparison between portraits that have been painted from life and portraits that have been painted from photographic source material originally established the groundwork for my investigation of selected portrait paintings by Dumas, which I present in chapter 3. I examined the processes employed by an artist who paints both from life and photography, namely Reshada Crouse, and two artists who paint from live models, namely Joni Brenner and Lucian Freud, in order to contrast their painting processes and outcomes with the paintings of Saville, Bacon, and Dumas. I conducted an analysis of the various different painting processes of all these artists to establish whether visual transgressions and transcencences are evident and inherent from either the live model to the painting or the photograph to the painting.

I was attracted to Brenner’s principal aim when painting people, which, according to Jessica Dubow (2002:20), is “[t]hat her portraits avoid any concept of truth construed in the sense of ‘correspondence’ or mimetic ‘accordance’”. I thus investigated the work of Brenner, who paints portraits from life and aims to capture her sitters’ presence in an abstract and almost sculptural manner, thus contrasting greatly from the conventions of portrait painting. Brenner subverts conventions of representation through transcending the boundaries of likeness and recognisability to the point of abstraction, in order to overcome certain limitations in portraiture. According to Karel Nel (2002:28), “Brenner’s portraits work with [the] ability of the eye to conjure with the image, finding the likeness, and allowing it to mutate with the deeply varied process of perception”. The purely physical axis by which the painting is connected to the referent is an indexical one. Similar to the example cited in section 2.1.4 of a footprint, which leaves its trace and is indexical of someone having been there, the trowelled texture of the plastered paint is indexical of the palette knife that was used to apply the paint. This indexical relationship between the process of painting and the painting itself is clarified by Krauss’s (1977:70) statement that the meaning of the index is established in its physical connection to the object (in this case the palette knife), and that the mark or trace represents the object that it signifies. The painting thus represents not only the sitter, but also the painting process itself, the tools used in this painting process, as well as the artist.

16 In the discussion that follows in this section I préce an analysis that I carried out at the start of my study, which enabled me to eliminate artists from my analysis, select artists who helped frame my themes, and delimit those whose paintings help focus my study.
that manipulated the tools. Moreover, the iconicity in Brenner’s paintings is made more complex in that the paintings lose their resemblance to the sitter in likeness. However, they gain iconicity due to their resemblance to the sitter in terms of bodily fleshiness and form.

Lucian Freud also painted his subjects exclusively from life. However, Freud, unlike Brenner, is not an abstract painter, but a traditional figural painter. His portrait paintings, which are an appreciation of all that is fleshy, demonstrate his interest in flesh and his fascination with the visceral and tactile quality that thickly applied impasto paint has to offer when painting people. Thick impasto paint is applied in brushstrokes which follow the undulations of the skin’s surface. The painting, according to Freud, is of the person, and not a mere representation of the sitter. Freud (cited by Boyce 2012:701) comments on this by stating that

I want paint to work as flesh, I know my idea of portraiture came from dissatisfaction with portraits that resembled people. I would wish my portraits to be of the people, not like them. Not having to look at the sitter, being them. As far as I am concerned, the paint is the person. I want it to work for me just as the flesh does [My italics].

According to Michael Auping (2012a:45), Freud did not work from photographs because he found them “too abstract”. Freud (cited by Auping 2012b:209-210) emphasises this by stating that “I’m not trying to make a copy of the person. I’m trying to relay something of who they are as a physical and emotional presence […] I’m not interested in a painting that looks like a photograph. I want my paintings to feel like people. I want the paint to feel like flesh” David Hockney (2012:7) explains that Freud’s portraits are “so layered, photographs can’t get near [them]”. Sarah Howgate (2012b:7) adds to this by suggesting that “[i]t is this gradual unpeeling of the layers, this getting under the skin, that distinguishes Freud’s portraits and makes them so utterly different from a photographic portrait”. Freud was of particular interest to me due to his acknowledgement of capturing a certain presence and aura of his sitters in his paintings from life. Of pertinence, Auping (2012b:207) describes that Freud’s paintings have a “presentness”. This ‘presentness’ relates to Benjamin’s (2008:5) temporal and spatial notion of the ‘here and now’ of a work of art, leading to an aura. Freud (cited by Auping 2012b:210) also comments on this presence that is captured in paint, and he refers directly to the aura in this quotation which summarises his thoughts on his process of painting from life, and his relationship with his subjects:

I react to what is there. I don’t make anything up. Having said that, there are so many things to react to in a portrait. There are so many qualities to a person – not only their features and gestures, but how their size and demeanour relate to you and the room. What I choose to select of all these qualities could be considered an exaggeration, but it isn’t. It’s my selection of qualities that I see. There is also a subtle aura that can be seen in different people. I don’t mean that in a religious or mystical sense at all. It’s a presence
you can sometimes capture with paint. That’s why I have to have the model always in the room, even when I’m painting the background17 [My italics].

In contrast to the foci of my study, and to Brenner’s highly expressive abstract portrait paintings and Freud’s naturalistic yet expressive figural paintings, Reshada Crouse works in an illustrational manner. Brenda Schmahmann (2013:172) explains, however, that Crouse’s paintings have a painterly materiality about them, which makes these works reflexive of the fact that they are paintings, exhibiting a ‘consciousness’ through their reflexivity; Schmahmann describes this as “signs that the painting is a produced object – in other words, that it is a product of the physical labour of painting”. Crouse deliberately avoids working in an expressive manner, and rather contentiously states that “[t]he skill of representation is often ignored in conceptual or abstract art; many artists seek ‘short cuts’” (Thurman 2009:sp). Depending on whether or not her subjects are willing to sit for her, Crouse paints both from life and from photographs. Of interest to my investigation of the translation process from referent to painting, and the location of the auratic in the transcendence thereof, is Chris Thurman’s (2009:sp) argument that the portraits that Crouse paints from life are more organic, ephemeral representations of her subjects, while her portraits that she paints from photographic source material are more photo-realistic in style, indicating that the photographic source inhibits her painting process, rather than stimulates change and transformation.

Examining these artists opened up a space for fruitful comparison, from Brenner, who works from life and ends up with abstract perceptions as portrait paintings that embody likeness yet are not naturalistic representations, through Freud, who is a ‘conventional’ figural painter who works from life and focuses on the representation of his sitters through an expressive application of paint, to Crouse, who paints both from life and from photographs and whose style changes significantly depending on her process, from naturalism to photo-realism. When examining these vast differences in representation, and the painting processes employed by Brenner, Freud, and Crouse, it is worth noting the starting-point and end-point similarities between the painting of these three artists, as well as the differences, as I will show, when compared to the paintings of Saville and Bacon, respectively. Although the starting points are significantly different between Freud and Saville, the end results are similar, and while the starting points between Freud and Brenner are the same, their end results are vastly different. The artist with the greatest range in translation is Brenner, who paints from life and ends with abstraction. The second-

17 As I discussed in chapter 1, it is also in the words of the artists in literature that I find evidence for the auratic. The two words “aura” and “presence” that I have italicised in this quotation aid in keeping subjectivity at bay when locating auratic moments within artworks.
greatest range can be seen in the painting of Freud, who also paints from life, but ends with expressive naturalism. Another step inwards and in the middle of the continuum is Crouse, who starts with either a photograph or a live model and ends with photo-realistic representations when painting from photographic source material, to more painterly yet still highly naturalistic representations when painting from life. Finally, narrowing the field are Saville and Bacon, who both paint from photographic source material. Saville, as I will argue however, ends with expressive naturalism, while Bacon ends with abstract figuration.18

Having investigated these processes, including those of artists who paint from life, I have chosen to focus on the end limit of the continuum, namely abstraction, in my investigation of the degrees of difference in paintings that have been mediated by photographic sources. Through investigating the painting processes of all these artists, including those who work from life, I have been able to delimit the scope of my study, in order to identify the artists that are particularly relevant to my specific concerns. I was able to identify that my study does not stretch to the outer limit of pure abstraction, nor is it confined to naturalistic representations, where the resultant painting has not changed enough from its original source for me to be able to investigate the inherent degrees of translation. I identified Saville and Bacon, who work from photographic source material, yet are not bound to translate these sources faithfully, as the artists that are most productive in terms of informing my investigation into the work of

18 The diagram represents a comparison of the starting points and the end points of artists who paint from life and those who paint from photographic source material. The solid lines represent the typical classification of the artist’s style of painting, but are not necessarily a definitive end point, in my opinion. The dotted line suggests that the end point might, in fact, be further along the continuum, towards expressionism, or abstraction.
Dumas and my own portrait paintings. From their work I am able to pick out certain thematic threads of translation, and to trace those threads through to the work of Dumas, for more in-depth discussion and interpretation in the chapter that follows.

2.2.2 Jenny Saville

Saville paints from photographs which she collects from a range of sources, including photographs that she takes of herself and of her friends, images from medical, pathology and forensic textbooks, images from the Internet, magazine and newspaper clippings, films, as well as photographic reproductions of artworks by artists such as Velasquez, Sargent, De Kooning, Bacon, Titian, and Rubens (Gray et al 2005:ii). In an interview conducted by Nicholas Cullinan, Saville (2012:sp) comments on her process of painting from photographs, by stating: “I don’t want to paint from life because I want to paint from the whole of life”. She elaborates on this by asserting that photography provides her with a structure, similar to a scaffolding, which offers her enough of a subject and a starting point to allow the paint to take over in her painting process. Saville's process of painting mediated by a photograph permits the painting to go beyond or transgress the photographic source material. Saville (cited by Sylvester 2005:15) explains her openness to change and transformation in her paintings that are mediated by photographs by stating: “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with having a completely different image to the one you set out with in the beginning”.

Saville (2012:sp) describes the process of working from a photograph as a certain push-and-pull relationship, where she tests how much the painting can be transformed from the photograph. Saville (2012:sp) states: “[i]t is a kind of game, to see how much it [the painting] can go out of control and how much I can pull it back so that it still serves its purpose structurally”. She elaborates on this by stating: “I have always found that game increasingly thrilling in terms of letting things go and then bringing them back” (Saville 2012:sp). She also states that she wants to be able to look at the painting, and not the subject, and that, when choosing her source material, she asks herself whether she can elevate the painting beyond the photograph, or whether the photograph does more than what she could ever do with it (Saville 2012:sp). Furthermore, Saville deliberately prompts changes in the direction of the painting from the photograph, by means of undercoating, where she applies washes or stains of paint, which initiate and stimulate a different course for the painting from the photographic source material. Saville (cited by Brutvan 2011:19) describes this process in terms of what it offers her paintings: “I start
with the painting on the floor and throw paint, it’s almost like when they’re digging and find remnants of the past… it’s like you’re putting a history on the painting and then bringing the form out of that.”

Another aspect worth noting in Saville’s process of working from photographic source material is that she sometimes digitally alters images before she begins to paint them. Saville (cited by Schama 2005:125) explains her process of changing certain elements of images, such as the colour, digitally:

Learning how to use Photoshop helped enormously, I started swinging the colours on so they almost separated from the image. In a photographic sense, they didn’t work, but as a possibility for painting, with these contrasting bleeding colours, they suddenly become really exciting. So the reds and greens lift right off the page of the photographic paper. I can get a colour framework that helps me use intense colour – a kind of energy through the colour. It’s a challenge, because I still want the flesh to be identifiable as flesh.

Saville’s process of painting from images that have been digitally altered is significant in terms of the translation process from photographic source material to painting, in that the painting is now seen to go through two stages of translation and degrees of difference. The original photograph is visually transformed in the photoshopped image, which is then transformed again in the painting translation.

Saville (2012:[sp]) states that she studies abstract paintings so as to feed aspects of abstraction into figuration. She explains that she uses colour to heighten the intensity of the painting. She describes how in photographs certain colours do not exist, such as lemon yellow and black on lips, for instance, and how, for her, abstract painting offers these possibilities. Saville (cited by Schama 2005:125) highlights this by stating: “I try to see the analogy in painting between abstraction and realism – to wrestle with this on the canvas and to get to something of this vitality in paint”. Cullinan (cited by Saville 2012:[sp]) describes what Saville is able to achieve through feeding abstraction into her work as a “constant tension between figuration and abstraction”.

Saville (2012:[sp]) speaks of a work of art being complete when it has a “presence”, or takes on a “life of its own”. Saville (cited by Richardson 2012:16) expresses her interest in the process of transformation in painting by stating: “What’s so magical about paint is that you can freeze a physical moment, literally suspend it”. The idea of a painting having a presence of its own illustrates the

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19 Sometimes artists or writers might describe the auratic in a different way, or give it a different name. The term “presence” and the phrase “life of its own”, used by Saville to describe the transcendence of her paintings over their photographic source, are useful, as she is identifying key terms that speak of a transformation. As with the words “aura” and “presence” that I identified as being evidence for the auratic in the work of Freud, these terms help to keep subjectivity at bay when locating auratic moments within artworks, and are the type of groundwork that will facilitate my identification and location of the auratic in the work of Dumas, which I present in chapter 3.
dissociation of the painting from its original photographic source image, as a painting in its own right. Saville (2012:[sp]) describes how time is collapsed in the picture plane, by expressing that a painting does not work in sequential time or unfolding, but is layered, and that the viewer experiences, all at once, the journey that the maker of the painting went through. She asserts that she finds the possibility of stretching time in that particular way intriguing. She also articulates that paint has the ability to freeze reality, and that “[the work] is a constant becoming” (Saville 2012:[sp]). Thus, the history of the painted surface is captured on a single picture plane, presenting the notion of the viewer experiencing the journey that the maker of the painting went through, a journey that took place over a period of time. This also presents a temporal relationship which has shifted and moved away from the photographic source during the time that the painting took to complete. Saville (2012:[sp]) believes that her lived experience in a work on which she spends a great deal of time comes through in the painting, embodying the notion of temporality.

In order to demonstrate the visual translations that take place from Saville’s photographic source material to her paintings, I examine and compare a painting by Saville, Figure 11.23 (1997) (see Figure 2.6), and the source material from which the painting was derived (see Figure 2.5). The condition of the source image, as well as where it is kept, reveal the function of the image as source material, not having exhibition or cult value. The image has paint and oil stains on its surface, as well as creases from having been crumpled. The image was/is kept in a file, which is indicative of the fact that its purpose is solely as a source image for the specific painting. Figure 11.23 differs visually from the photographic source material in size, colour, tactility, and physicality. Despite having used a photograph as the starting point for Figure 11.23, Saville has not copied the image faithfully. She has altered the composition by adding an ear where the photographic source material has been cropped. The monochromatic photographic source image is presumably a newspaper clipping, due to its brown grainy quality, and thus the dominant red hues, as well as the fleshy pink, beige and blue tones, of the portrait have been invented by the artist. The application of paint, in its directional mark-making, as well as the evidence of thick brushstrokes, which create texture and form in Figure 11.23 differs significantly from the flat quality of the photographic source. Saville uses tactile paint as the equivalent of flesh. Saville (2012:[sp]) describes moments where she is running one consistency of paint through another, and it feels as if she is touching another body. She explains that when the right amount of oil has been added to the paint, when it slides the right way, it translates almost like another body. Saville describes this resemblance of paint to flesh by stating: “When you put the paint on in layers, it’s like adding layers of flesh” (Sylvester 2005:14). The physical manifestation of thick paint becomes a metaphysical
translation of likeness, fleshiness, and embodiment. The translation from a flattened photographic image to textured and congealed paint surfaces that act as flesh in the painting embodies a significant degree of visual and physical difference in the transformation of one to the other and so is also transgressive.

Figure 2.5: Jenny Saville, Source image for Figure 11.23 [sa]. Newspaper clipping, size unknown (Gray et al 2005:53).

Figure 2.6: Jenny Saville, Figure 11.23 (1997). Oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm (Gray, et al 2005:51).
The size of Figure 11.23, which is approximately one-and-a-half metres square, is considerably larger than the photographic source material employed by Saville. This physically alters the modes of viewing required for each. The significant difference may be seen in the distance between the intimate act of viewing an image in a newspaper compared to the public act of viewing a large-scale painting in a gallery space, where the painting takes on a greater presence due to its size. The fact that Figure 11.23 is much larger than life makes the subject appear dominating, and even threatening, which dictates a different phenomenological perception and reading of the work compared to the source material, which is smaller than life-size. Likewise, the portrait has the ability to translate a sense or quality of embodied fleshiness onto a large surface area which could evoke a sense of self-consciousness within the viewer. In addition, the translation from the newspaper clipping to the large-scale painting is not the only factor that contributes to the degrees of difference between the two in terms of size; it is also the scale relationship of the image to the size of the canvas, the enormity of the image cropped within a large-sized canvas, which transgresses and transcends the source, not to mention the conventions of portrait painting. Saville’s large-scale painting becomes a lateral extension of space, enveloping the viewer by moving continually outwards: the forehead of the subject in Figure 11.23 has been cropped, so that she appears to be bursting out of the picture plane and transgressing the boundaries of the surface area of the canvas. William Packer (1994:15) explains this size-scale relationship by observing that “[Saville’s] canvasses are very large, conventionally so, but that she should then impose upon them out-size images of the figure that are often even too big for them is rather less expected”. These visual translations, shifts and degrees of change, and differences investigated, including size, scale, viewing conventions, colour, and tactility, result in the painting transcending its original photographic source.

2.2.3 Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon’s paintings have been almost exclusively mediated by photographic source material, yet he, like Saville, does not endeavour to copy his source photographs faithfully. Bacon, according to Martin Hammer (2013:20), was “distinctive in his willingness to transform and even subvert the photographic images he started with in the process of making his paintings, to the point that identifying the artist’s sources requires detective work”. While Bacon retains a sense of figural form, he allows

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20 This transcendence is what I will show in chapter 3 to be transformative evidence for the auratic.
moments of irrationality to take place in his painted subjects, where noses might slide across the face, mouths become twisted, and the structure of the face becomes distorted by bold brushstrokes. The wiped and swept surfaces of his paintings exhibit the spontaneity with which he treats his surfaces. Bacon’s photographic sources are often damaged, crumpled, torn, or dirtied, which Bacon (cited by Sylvester 1980:37) explains offer new possibilities for the painting. He even works from photographs taken of his own paintings, as they suggest solutions for other paintings (Sylvester 1980:37).

In an interview with David Sylvester (1980), Bacon admits that even when painting a model from life, he takes photographs of the sitter, because he prefers to work from the photograph than from his live model. He comments on this by stating: “I find it easier to work than [sic] actually having their presence in the room. I think that, if I have the presence of the image there, I am not able to drift so freely as I am able to through the photographic image” (Bacon, cited by Sylvester 1980:38). In addition, Bacon asserts that he could not attempt to paint from photographs alone a portrait of somebody that he did not know, as he claims that he relies both on the memory of the person and the photograph thereof, and he thus finds a sitter’s presence while painting inhibiting. Bacon (cited by Sylvester 1980:40) likens the process of painting to that of “recalling”, and hence asserts that: “What I want to do is distort the [subject] far beyond [their] appearance, but in the distortion to bring it back to a recording of appearance”.

Sylvester questioned Bacon as to whether he was aware of the moment when the “thing” takes over, to which Bacon replied that “[v]ery often the involuntary marks are much more deeply suggestive than others, and those are the moments when you feel that anything can happen” (Bacon, cited by Sylvester 1980:56). Bacon speaks of the visual translations that take place in his process of painting, by explaining how he makes the initial marks, and then surveys the painting for all the possibilities it might offer. He describes how, in his process of surveying the painting, he might see the possibility of the mouth in a portrait moving right across the face, and becoming something that resembles the face and a landscape simultaneously. Bacon (cited by Sylvester 1980:56) articulates that he wants his paintings to be “as factual as possible and at the same time as deeply suggestive or deeply unlocking of areas of sensation21 other than simple illustration of the object that you set out to do”.

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21 It is not my purpose in this chapter to locate auratic moments within artworks, however, it is to form a grounding for the kind of evidence-seeking in specific terms that aid my identification of the aura in the work of Dumas in chapter 3. Just as key terms, used by Freud and Saville, were identified as evidence for the auratic, the terms “thing (which takes over)” at the beginning of this paragraph and “suggestive”, as well as the phrase “unlocking of areas of sensation”, all act as evidence of the artist recognising the transcendent transformation that takes place in his own work.
Bacon (cited by Sylvester 1980:56) describes what he believes to be the difference between an illustrational form and a non-illustrational form, by suggesting that an illustrational form is instantly recognisable, and you can clearly see what the form is, while in a non-illustrational form the “sensation”\(^{22}\) is the most apparent thing in the painting, and then the form gradually seeps back into the “fact”. Bacon (cited by Sylvester 1980:56-57) elaborates on this by proposing: “This may have to do with how facts themselves are ambiguous, how appearances are ambiguous, and therefore this way of recording form is nearer to the fact by its ambiguity of recording”. This statement links back to Goodman’s observation that there are many aspects of an object, and in the case of portraiture, there is a person which may be copied by an artist and this representation relies on the artist’s conception of the referent. Bacon further suggests that the texture of a painting is more instantaneous than the texture of a photograph, due to the fact that a photograph appears to go through\(^{23}\) an illustrational course to get to what he terms the nervous system, but he states, however, that the painting’s texture speaks directly to the nervous system. Bacon (cited by Sylvester 1980:58) believes that the mystery of reality in painting is communicated through the non-rationality of marks, un-illustrational marks, but that these accidental marks have to be balanced by a sense of order, and he states that painting has to be a duality of recording facts, on the one hand, and abstract marks, on the other hand.

Bacon often commissioned Vogue photographer John Deakin to take photographs of his subjects for the purpose of source material for his paintings (Gale & Stephens 2008:181). Hammer (2013:75) explains that “[m]any large-scale Deakin prints survived in Bacon’s studio, their torn, fragmentory and folded condition suggesting that they were a constant point of reference when he was painting portraits”. Worth noting here is that even though the photographs that Bacon used as his source material for his paintings have potential exhibition and cult value, he did not exploit them for that purpose, which is evident from the description, in the above quotation by Hammer, of the state in which the photographs were found in Bacon’s studio. The fact that Bacon commissioned Deakin to photograph his subjects suggests that Bacon sought the best visual, optical and compositional quality for his source images. A fruitful visual comparison may be made between a photograph by Deakin of George Dyer (see Figure 2.7) and the right panel of a painting in a diptych titled *Studies of George Dyer and Isabel Rawsthorne* (see Figure 2.8).

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\(^{22}\) I contend that the word “sensation” could be interpreted as the presence or aura of a work, under a different guise.

\(^{23}\) This statement by Bacon is congruent with Peirce’s (1955:106) assertion that a photograph is “forced” to correspond point to point with nature, and is thus a false icon.
Figure 2.7: John Deakin, *Photograph of George Dyer*, [sa]. Photograph, size unknown (Sylvester 1980:39).

Figure 2.8: Francis Bacon, *Studies of George Dyer and Isabel Rawsthorne* (Right panel – George Dyer), 1970. Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 30.5 cm (Trucchi 1975:140).
As mentioned earlier, Bacon only painted people that he knew well, as he preferred to paint from the photograph and the memory of the person. According to Hammer (2013:74), “[t]he most convincing pictures from the 1960s are sensitive and intimate depictions of individuals in Bacon’s life”. George Dyer, Bacon’s lover, was therefore the muse for many of his paintings, including the right panel of *Studies of George Dyer and Isabel Rawsthorne*. The painting of Dyer is a profile portrait where Bacon has taken liberty in the painting by twisting and contorting Dyer’s mouth and other facial features, as well as treating the surface with large sweeping, curved brushstrokes. Bacon’s subject is enveloped in swathes of fleshy-coloured brushstrokes, and the portrait has been transgressively transformed from the photographic source material through imaginative and expressive movements of the paintbrush. The surface appears agitated due to erasures, distortions, and gestural application of paint. Bacon’s intimate relationship with his subject is exposed through his inventive and instinctive handling of paint marks, which are made to look accidental. This expressive mark-making contributes to the transformation of the painting from the photographic source material, where the painted surface evolves independently, far beyond its source.

Bacon also painted numerous self-portraits, such as *Four Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1967) (see Figure 2.10) and *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1976) (see Figure 2.11), which demonstrate examples of the artist working directly from photographic images of himself. These could well have been derived from a collection of photographs that Bacon took of himself in automatic photography booths (see Figure 2.9). The orientation and format of the painted self-portraits make reference to the vertically orientated photographic strips. It is evident that Bacon employs his source material as a loose compositional tool, rather than as a reason to mimic accurately, as his paintings are transgressively transformed from the source photographs. Formally, the texture of the canvas is visible through the swathes of scumbled brushstrokes (indicative of drying paint on a paintbrush), demonstrating a struggle with the surface of the canvas and highlighting the textural quality of paint that has been applied, being completely different from the pigmented surfaces of the photographic source material. In both paintings, the heads are seen to concave in a series of sweeping, curved brushstrokes. Repetitive ovular shapes are incorporated into the form of the face, and in other sections, portions of the face appear to have been scooped or hollowed out. Conceptually, the paintings have a heightened sense of reflexivity, due to the fact that they are self-portraits. They reveal an inner exploration, which is expressed in the brushwork. They may be seen to be more truthful and honest expressions, because they are self-reflections on his identity.
Figure 2.9: Francis Bacon, *Photographs of Bacon taken by himself in automatic booths*, [sa]. Automatic booth photographs, approx. 5 x 7.5 cm each (Sylvester 1980:43).

Figure 2.10: Francis Bacon, *Four Studies for a Self-Portrait*, 1967. Oil on canvas, 91 x 33 cm (Romano 2008:27).
Bacon’s painted subjects remain recognisable from the photographic source material, yet the manner in which the facial features have been translated, in a way that is bent out of shape, demonstrates a move towards a personal and a phenomenologically embodied understanding and experience of the personalities of his subjects. Luigi Ficacci (2006:72) describes this as follows:

> When the repressed explosive energy of the person emerges in its expression, the head manages to become a portrait, to express the reality of that person. The common aspect of the face disappears, and the apparent wholeness of the personality disintegrates. Only fragments of it remain in the picture, little more than signs of belonging that concentrate its capacity for total, sudden and violent identification.

Each of Bacon’s paintings discussed above have the word “studies”, preceded by the given name of the subject in the title of the work. The implication of this seems to point towards representation, recognisability, and identification, perhaps due to Bacon’s awareness of the path of change and transformation along which the paintings have travelled. The use of this word also points to Bacon’s process of painting, where painting someone is an examination, a ‘study’, of the person, both in terms of outward appearance and, as Ficacci suggests in the above quotation, internally, as a deep understanding of the subject’s personality.

Similar to Saville’s photographic source material for Figure 11.23, Bacon’s source images are monochromatic, facilitating the inventive use of colour in his paintings. Bacon uses colour in a diametrically opposite way to Saville, as a non-illustrational index of flesh, as can be seen in his use of red, green, and purple in *Four Studies for a Self-Portrait*, and blue and magenta hues in *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait*. This demonstrates how, while Saville seeks to find equivalents for flesh in her portrait
paintings, Bacon transcends fleshiness through his abstract use of colour. The thick, scumbled brushstrokes which are evident in Bacon’s paintings texturally surpass the smooth quality of his photographic source material, where it can be considered that a photograph, by virtue of its flatness, lacks the thickness, texture, and form of paint. The linearity that Bacon achieves transforms the subject in the photographic source material to a point of abstract figuration in his paintings, demonstrating that Bacon utilises his photographic source material as a suggestive foundation, and point of departure. The fact that the source image is used as a starting point, in turn, is evidence for how Bacon employs his source merely as a basis for comparison, and how he subsequently exploits, rediscovers, and invents the subject in a transgressive painterly gesture, rather than mimicking the source faithfully.

2.2.4 Conclusion

Through the investigations and analyses of portrait paintings by Saville and Bacon, who both paint from photographic source material but have different painterly approaches and styles, I have shown that the material translation from photographic source material to the painting demonstrates degrees of difference embodied in the formal elements of the selected paintings discussed. The material and physical translations have been shown to be presented as indexical marks, such as texture, line, colour, or the presence of a brushstroke on the canvas, and the liminal space where paint becomes the equivalent of flesh, or is transformed in a non-iconic depiction of flesh. As was the case with the other artists, who were discussed in the beginning of part 2 (Brenner, Crouse and Freud), it is worth noting their starting-points and end-points when examining the differences in representation between Saville and Bacon. Both artists use photographic source material as the starting point for their portrait paintings, yet the end results are considerably different. Saville’s portraits are translated from photographs to the point of expressive naturalism, where a sense of the ‘real’ is retained in the portrait painting, while Bacon allows an expressive abstraction to occur when using photographic source material as a starting point in his painting process.

Part 1 of this chapter has established a foundation for part 1 of chapter 3, in which complex themes surrounding the aura and representation are operationalised in the location of auratic moments in Dumas’ work that I have viewed personally, and which I interpret from a phenomenological perspective. Part 2 of this chapter has established the groundwork for part 2 of chapter 3, where my comparative analysis of degrees of difference between photographs and paintings in the work of Saville and Bacon
is taken one step further, in order to identify moments of transcendence between the photographic source material and resultant paintings by Dumas, which, in turn, facilitates my location of auratic moments in the specific portrait paintings that I analyse.

Dumas works predominantly from photographic source material, which is transformed through the painterly approaches that she employs. Dumas challenges traditional realism by not simply rendering the painting as a copy of the photograph, but by exploiting both the formal conventions of portrait painting and the physical materiality that paint has to offer. It is the physicality and materiality of these paintings, as well as other formal elements in the paintings (as they are presented as indexical marks), which I argue contribute to auratic moments in these artworks. This will be explained in the analysis of these paintings in chapter 3. Benjamin’s notion of the aura, my framing strategies of phenomenology and semiology, and other themes related to photography and painting inform my investigation and location of auratic moments in the work of Dumas in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3: The ‘portratic’ in Marlene Dumas
Part 1: ‘Sourcey’ paintings

3.1.1 Introduction

According to Martin Hammer (2013:20), “[m]any artists, from Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) onwards, have surreptitiously used photography as a storehouse of motifs, a ready alternative to drawing from life”. From the Impressionist painter Walter Sickert, through to more recent painters, such as Gerhard Richter, Luc Tuymans, Chuck Close, Francis Bacon, and Jenny Saville, artists have based their paintings on photographic source material, while simultaneously affirming the painted mark as the mode of filtering these photographic references (Hammer 2013:20). In this section I discuss the work and painting processes of Marlene Dumas, focusing particularly on her use of photography as a starting point in the process of making paintings. To this end I conduct an investigation of Dumas’ transformations, transgressions, and transcendences from the photographic source, in order to locate auratic moments within the physicality of Dumas’ expressive portrait paintings. I analyse degrees of difference, where the photograph is not adhered to or translated faithfully in the painting, and I provide evidence for why I propose that such works are auratic. In light of what Benjamin (2008) and Mitchell (1998) suggest about the simulation of auratic moments in photographs, I also examine Dumas’ selection process, including what she chooses to omit from the photographic source, and how images are strategically cropped in her final paintings.

According to Cornelia Butler (2008:46), “[t]here is almost no painting in Dumas’s oeuvre without a traceable photographic source”. Richard Shiff (2008:145) observes that the models employed by Dumas for her paintings are typically in the form of images from either the press, publicity shots, or Polaroid photographs of friends and family that she takes herself. Butler (2008:45) comments as follows on Dumas’ process of working from photographic images: “Dumas may be inspired by a love of art history, particularly of painting, but she derives her subjects from Polaroid photographs, personal snapshots, torn sheets, notes, drawings, and thousands of media images that she keeps in her ever evolving image bank.” This practice of taking and gathering photographs, and what Butler (2008:71) describes as Dumas’ “aesthetic relationship to photography and casual practice of taking Polaroid photographs”, forms the groundwork for Dumas’ painting process, where the photographic sources become “visual and formal notes for her paintings”. Butler (2008:45) describes the way in which Dumas
collects images from varied sources as a “hunting and gathering”, which develops from a state of order
to disorder, and which generates the visual information or knowledge for her paintings.

Dumas intentionally transforms her paintings from their original source images, and deliberately shifts
and steers them in a different direction from the initial photographic sources, revealing her conviction in
the idea of painting for painting’s sake. Dumas’ painting process is what Ulrich Loock (1993:117) would
describe as “painting in order to implement and undermine the photographic flatness of the world”.
Butler (2008:63) similarly declares that “Dumas paint[s] to resist, to comprehend, and to insist upon, for
herself and for the viewer, the knowledge of what is not laid bare by the photograph”. Dumas (cited by
Shiff 2008:145) illustrates how she feels about the relationship between photography and painting by
boldly declaring that “[y]ou can’t TAKE a painting – you MAKE a painting”. Shiff (2008:145) comments
on the difference between these two actions by asserting that

> [Transforming these images, Dumas] remakes the taken. Her distinction between making
> (making a decision, altering the state of things) and taking (taking a meaning, accepting
> the given identity) plays on a common understanding reflected in colloquial language;
> rather than make, we “take” a conventional photographic picture.

Shiff (2008:152) further emphasises the intentionality behind Dumas’ deliberate divergence from her
photographic sources, by declaring that

> [w]hen Dumas paints from a source or model in photographic form, photography and
> painting, as well as the real-life model, become subjects to be experienced; photography
> and painting confront each other in Dumas’s understanding. Whatever the status of the
> source image, she actively changes it in painting it, accepting her responsibility beyond the
> taking for several aspects of making – or remaking.

### 3.1.2 Taking and making: *Jule-die Vrou* and *Jewish Girl*

> My people were all shot
> by camera, framed,
> before I painted them.
> They didn’t know I’d do this to them.
> (Dumas, cited by Mark 2008:211)

As alluded to by Dumas in the above poem, she often paints from Polaroid photographs that she has
taken of her friends and relatives. Polaroid photographs are instantaneous and quick, due to the
Polaroid camera’s ability to produce a developed film image instantaneously. Akin to a portable
photographic booth, the Polaroid camera revolutionised the relationship that photographers had with the photographic image. The advent of digital photography has since overshadowed some of the appeal of the Polaroid, with digital cameras and cellular phone cameras having the capacity to generate instant photographic images on a digital screen. Polaroid photographs, in the 70s and 80s, may be seen as the equivalent to the digital, screen-based photographs of today; however, they remain unique in their ability to be developed instantly onto photographic paper. The ‘snapshot’ convention of the Polaroid is similar to the Impressionists’ ‘being-thereness’, where a sense of spontaneity was achieved through the blurring and cropping of figures. The instantaneity of the Polaroid camera meant that such photographs were often informal, and not necessarily taken with much thought, where the photograph was the capturing of a fleeting moment. For this reason, there is a significant difference and distance between paintings that have been mediated by Polaroid photographs and paintings that have been mediated by photographs which have been carefully considered and composed. Dumas relishes her haptic relationship with the Polaroid camera, as well as makes reference to specific paintings that have been derived by Polaroid photographs in the following poem:

**Homage to the Polaroid**

The only camera I ever liked and ever used was the Polaroid camera. 
The Polaroid, always and only, true to its own sublime distorted nature. 
Fast and fickle and hands-on physical not concerned with digital vanity. 
Cheap and expensive at the same time. 
No copy and no negative

P.S. Without you, no Jewish Girl, 
no Pregnant Image, 
no Occult Revival, no Jule-die Vrou.

– M.D., 2008

(Dumas, cited by Butler 2008:91)

*The Jewish Girl* (1986) (see Figure 3.2) and *Jule-die Vrou* (1985) (see Figure 3.4) are two examples of paintings which have been mediated by Polaroid photographs, and where Dumas has transformed the paintings considerably. Of paramount significance in the transformation of these paintings from their source images is the deliberate shift in colour that Dumas has initiated. Dumas has evidently intensified the temperature of the colour palette in each of the original Polaroid photographs, and enhanced the colours in the resultant paintings. The source image for *The Jewish Girl* (see Figure 3.1) has a cool
palette, due to the greenish-blue background in the photograph, as well as the pale skin tone of the subject. Dumas has made these cool colours more pronounced in the painting, by using a limited palette of predominantly blue analogous hues and muted tints of white and beige (see Figure 3.2). Similarly, the warm palette in the photographic source image for *Jule-die Vrou* (see Figure 3.3), attributable to the reddish-brown tone of the subject’s skin, has been intensified in the resultant painting (see Figure 3.4). Consequently, the painting is composed almost entirely of strongly saturated and dominant red, orange and pink hues. Dumas has allowed the warm tones, which are localised on the skin of the subject in the photograph, to pervade the entire surface of the painting, permitting the garish red hues to predominate the natural colour of certain elements, such as the hair, which was originally brown/black in the photograph. The colour employed in each of these paintings is symbolic, rather than naturalistic. Dumas has used blues and reds, respectively, in these two paintings to replace the natural tones of the subject’s skin in the photographic source material, and in taking these liberties, she has transformed the paintings with richly coloured surfaces, giving them a presence that is not matched by the photographic images. These changes in colour are markedly transgressive, as the degrees of difference between the source and the painting are vast. Furthermore, it may be observed that through the radical transformation of colour in these two paintings meaning is formed and, as a result, the denotative qualities lead to connotative implications. The intensification of the cold colours in *The Jewish Girl* creates an almost eerie atmosphere and, similarly, the red filter in *Jule-die Vrou* evokes connotations associated with the colour red, such as warning, passion, sexuality, and elements of the body, such as blood, creating drama within the painting. Shiff (2008:145) highlights the notion that denotative qualities lead to connotative meaning within Dumas’ paintings, in his observation that “[i]f the most transient meanings as well as the ultimate ones remain indeterminate for both artist and viewer – ‘images mean whatever’ – the decisions made in a painting have at least the advantage of being concrete”. Shiff (2008:147) further explicates that

> [I]to think across the two media of painting and photography is to understand that photography – by comparison, only comparison – is better equipped to picture a model passively, without responding to, enhancing, or altering its existing appearance or quality. The cultural significance of photography hinges on its capacity to function as baseline archive of fact.
Figure 3.1: Marlene Dumas, Source image for The Jewish Girl, 1984-6. Polaroid photograph, 7.9 x 7.9 cm (Butler et.al 2008:91).

Figure 3.2: Marlene Dumas, The Jewish Girl, 1986. Oil on canvas, 130 x 109.5 cm (Butler et al 2008:78).

Figure 3.3: Marlene Dumas, Source image for Jule-die Vrou, 1984-6. Polaroid photograph, 7.9 x 7.9 cm (Butler et.al 2008:91).

Figure 3.4: Marlene Dumas, Jule-die Vrou, 1985. Oil on canvas, 125 x 105 cm (Butler et al 2008:78).
Other formal elements, or denotative qualities, such as line, mark, texture, and tone, also contribute to the connotative meaning within the two paintings. The textured surfaces in Dumas’ paintings belie the photographic flatness of their Polaroid photograph sources. The Jewish Girl and Jule-die Vrou have not been painted naturalistically, but rather in an expressive, painterly manner. Jule-die Vrou has been treated as largely flat, yet remains painterly, with patches and strokes of the yellow underpainting having been allowed to show through the scumbling of paint on the surface. The rough and agitated surface connotes dynamism and drama within the painting. Dumas has not endeavoured to paint all the strands of hair in the subject’s fringe, nor has she paid attention to shadows, as there is an absence of tonal modelling, or shading, where dark tones have been largely omitted in flat applications of red paint. The painterly texture and the material surface of the painting reveal Dumas’ intention for the work to be self-consciously painterly, and not a mimetic copy of the photograph. Areas of the painting have been highlighted, drawing the viewer’s attention to these moments, such as the lips and the region around the mouth, which are tinted in a pink hue, the whites of the eyes, which have been intensified in the painting compared to the photograph, and the hand, which is a lighter shade of orangey-yellow. The emphasis on the mouth and fingers by their difference from the rest of the image can be seen to connote seduction as the conceptual meaning of the painting as the finger that is touching the subject’s chin can be seen to resemble a phallic motif, or suggest the touch of the viewer.

In The Jewish Girl, rather than omitting details seen in the photograph, Dumas has added more detail to the subject in her painting. The Polaroid photograph is characteristically blurred and indistinct, due to the immediacy of the ‘snapshot’ that Dumas has taken of her subject. Certain facial features and elements, such as the delineation between the chin and the neck, which is barely visible in the Polaroid photograph, have thus been invented. Similarly, the eye sockets, which are dark and sunken in the photograph, have been brought forward in a re-construction of lighter tones. The eyes themselves are larger than in the source image, and they appear glazed over due to the application of the cloudy, or milky, opaque tones, resulting in the eyes emerging as rather sinister and ghostly in the painting. There is a single isolated yellow swathe that has been painted between the eyes, which further enhances the prominence of the eyes in the painting. In the same way, a single stroke of light blue draws attention to, and highlights, the corner of the subject’s mouth, where it is slightly upturned in a lopsided smirk-like smile. The eyes in both these paintings are prominent features of the portraits. While Dumas allows other features of the face to recede, become distorted, shift, disappear, or move into abstraction, the structure and shape of the eyes remain faithful to the source image, and are often, as is the case in these two paintings, accentuated to a greater degree than is the case with the other facial features. The
facial expression of the subject in *The Jewish Girl* is transformed from a glance in the direction of the camera, which is barely discernible in the dark and blurred Polaroid photograph, to an uncanny, unnatural, and mysterious gaze, which might evoke discomfort in the viewer, as the expression is indeterminate and ambiguous. The expression of the eyes in *Jule-die Vrou* is transformed into an intense, concentrated stare, an alluring stare that simultaneously challenges the viewer that views her.

All these formal decisions, as well as the material presentation of painterly marks, collectively contribute to the feeling, tone, or connotative qualities of each of the paintings. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:145) comments on the inventive way in which she paints from photographs, by stating that “[i]f you take a photograph there’s always something in front of you, but with painting there is nothing”. At this point, I repeat the quotation evoked earlier by Shiff (2008:145) that in “[t]ransforming these images, [Dumas] remakes the taken”, as it is fundamental to the idea that Dumas purposefully changes, alters, and remodels her paintings from their photographic source images. Giorgio Verzotti (2012:25) expresses the same point in his exposition of remaking, when he proposes that

> [a]ll these discursive strategies serve to animate the images, or rather to re-animate them, removing them from the fixity of photographic representation. So it is a re-animation, with the function of re-appropriating the icons before re-interpreting their apparent meanings.

In this transformation of remaking, re-animating, re-appropriating, and re-interpreting, there are degrees of difference, which are markedly transgressive and allow the painting to transcend its original photographic source, as I have illustrated in the above analyses. This transcendence is seen in painterly, indexical marks, where ‘presence’ is instilled in the painting through the presence of Dumas herself. There are two types of indices at play: there are the traces of the maker’s hand, and there are the traces of the maker’s mind, which controls the hand, which leaves its mark, leading to the ‘presence’ of a thinking mind, the traces of decision making, indices of doubt, and the making of changes. Here the relationship between the iconic sign (*what* is being portrayed) and the indexical sign (*the way* it is portrayed) is highlighted as the point where transgression occurs. The subject (icon) remains the same in both the photograph and the painting, yet the way in which the subject is represented in each differs fundamentally. Dumas (cited by Williamson 2009:220) declares that “[i]f it’s a good photograph I don’t want to try to imitate the photograph by making a painterly image of it. The meaning doesn’t reside in the source but what you do with it”.

The indexical signs are evidence of Dumas’ presence in the transformation of the subject that is portrayed; the painterly surface directs us towards Dumas’ physical and mental presence as the
painter. Furthermore, this trace and presence is lodged in the transgressive and transcendent degrees of difference from the source material to the painting, because the presence of Dumas’ actions in the process of making the paintings, and the indexical marks left behind as a trace of this interaction of artist with surface, embeds the painting with a presence, which I argue is evidence for the existence of auratic moments within Dumas’ works. According to Shiff (2008:146), “[u]nlike photography, the painting process has no critical stilled moment – despite its stock of traditional imagery, no stilled pose that fixes into a cliché”. This is affirmed by Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:146) in her statement that painting “[d]oesn’t freeze time”. This idea of painting being in a state of flux in comparison to the stasis of photographs relies on the indexical marks and signs within paintings, as revealed in Jule-die Vrou and The Jewish Girl. These indexical marks act to further establish these paintings’ transcendence over their photographic source material, which I contend to be the evidence of subjective presence and auratic moments within the paintings.

According to Shiff (2008:170), “[Dumas'] painting speaks more forcefully than the photography she uses as its source. But it also speaks ambiguously and in riddles”. Butler (2008:44) explains that “[Dumas] uses the space on the canvas as an arena of psychological tension and the face or body as a container for meaning”, and that she “returns the touch of the painter’s hand to the symbolic” (Butler 2008:46). However, while formal elements, such as colour and marks on the surface, may lead to symbolic meaning in Dumas’ paintings, it is also important to acknowledge that meaning is ultimately subjective, and that any truth relies on perception. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that content is built into Dumas’ paintings as much through the physicality of the material surface as through conceptual meaning. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (2008:211) elaborates on this as follows:

One of the ways [in which Dumas' paintings] derive power is through their insurgent materiality: the representational image has no more purchase on the viewer than the individual strokes, stains, and drips – as well as the layers of colour – that constitute the works “traces,” indexical marks of the artist’s own body.

The texture (whether it be gooey, dry, or wet), the forms (whether they be intentionally flat or modelled in an illusion of three-dimensionality), and the colour (whether it be a limited palette of analogous hues, an arrangement of intensely saturated colours, or a monochromatic palette) are the material meanings within Dumas’ paintings, as they are paintings that attempt to privilege the act of painting and painterly qualities, a celebration of formal elements. Virginia MacKenny (2007:sp) elucidates this point by stating that “in Dumas’s work, it is the painting’s surface that manifests the content”. Furthermore, with regard to the concept of meaning represented by indexical signs, Shiff (2008:161-2) explains that “[a]
painting can feature its play of mark (sensuality) as opposed to its play of sign (meaning)”, and that “[t]hose desperate for meaning will convert color-marks into color-signs. And signs into other signs”. Of significance to my earlier analysis of the finger in Jule-die Vrou resembling a phallus is Dumas’ (cited by Shiff 2008:161) remark “I get irritated when I draw a ‘wortel’ [carrot] and it is suggested that I want to draw a penis. If I want to draw a penis, I’ll draw one”. This statement by Dumas, however, also demonstrates that the potential to find meaning in paintings is a consequence of the fact that her paintings abandon the fixed, denotative nature of a photograph, and become ambiguous and open-ended in their expressiveness. Mark (2008:214) affirms that “as the viewer, one is faced with the limits of knowability (intention) and the creative possibilities that ensue (interpretation)”. In this regard, when Dumas was once asked by a viewer, who was intrigued by a small painting of a naked girl, what the age of the child was, Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:147) responded “it is not a child, it is a painting”. According to Shiff (2008:147), this is revealing of Dumas’ acknowledgement of “immediate appearance” versus “the identification of a proper category or classification”. Shiff (2008:147) clarifies this by stating that

[t]o appreciate Dumas’s reply is to understand that the emotional life of the image belongs to the painting, not its model, and that the emotions must also belong to the artist who makes the painting as well as to the viewer who takes its meaning. The situation is further complicated because the emotional states of the artist and the viewer need not correspond or even be compatible.

In establishing phenomenology as a framing strategy for my study in the previous chapter, I presented Merleau-Ponty’s (2004) argument that meaning is not created in painting solely through the subject matter, but rather through the self-referential manifestation of paint on the canvas itself. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty (2004:71-72) asserts that “painting does not imitate the world but is a world of its own”. Merleau-Ponty (2004:72) affirms that this does not mean that aesthetics matter exclusively, in the way that the painted subject exists in the manner that it has been painted by the artist, but rather that content and aesthetics co-exist. In the light of Dumas’ (as cited by Shiff 2008:147) reply “it is not a child, it is a painting”, I evoke Merleau-Ponty’s (2004:72) argument that the viewer is at no point sent back to the object when encountering a painting, and that the resemblance of the sitter in portrait painting is of no significance when experiencing the painting aesthetically. This unhinges the iconic resemblance that a painting has to its referent, from a semiological point of view, in that the painting is never that thing which it represents, but rather a representation of the thing.
Ultimately, the expressive formal elements in Dumas’ paintings are not neutral, with the result that the viewer is forced to make meaning through the material surface texture, marks and colour of the painting. Jacques Lacan (1977:105) does not try to deny this meaning-making quandary with which the viewer is presented, when he comments that “[n]o painting can exist without the tension of what it figures and what it concretely consists of. The pleasure of what it could mean and the pain of what it is not”. Thus, meaning is created as much through the indexical marks placed on the surface of a painting as it is by the subject matter, as Verzotti (2012:17) explains: “Dumas' painting is governed entirely by [a] dual voice, this dialectic between emotional agitation\(^{24}\) and the compositional order necessary to express it.” Dumas’ paintings are both intellectual and sensual; they are as much about the intellectual decisions made in terms of composition, colour, and subject matter as they are about the sensual application of paint according to spontaneity, impulse, unreflective irrationality, and instinct.

3.1.3 Gathered sources: The White Disease, Mamma Roma, Martha: My Ouma, and Kim

Sontag (1977:3) declares that “[t]o collect photographs is to collect the world”. Dumas works not only from Polaroid photographs of friends and family, but also from a wide variety of gathered photographic images, including newspaper clippings, images from magazines, film stills, and photographs taken by others. Butler (2008:45) comments on Dumas’ process of painting from photographic images by stating that

[to visit Dumas’s studio is an excavation: the time spent in front of any painting in progress is matched by that spent following a lively narrative of stories, ambivalences, and productively circuitous routes around her photographic sources.

Unlike the ‘snapshot’ Polaroid photographs that Dumas uses as source material in some of her paintings, documentary photographs, in press publications or magazines, are of a different photographic convention. There is a certain degree of importance and permanence attached to a press photograph, which carries with it a documentary gravitas that Polaroid photographs do not have. Where a Polaroid photograph usually captures a transitory moment, press photographs are re-codified, considered, selected, and often posed for. Dumas paints from a collection of photographic images, which vary in the subjects that they depict: strangers, notorious criminals, close relatives, celebrities and film stars. As Butler (2008:43) explains, “[p]ortraits of the living, portraits of the dead, […] groups,\(^{24}\) The “emotional agitation” (Verzotti 2012:17) that is created on the surface of the painting speaks strongly of an affective element which might be read by a viewer as particularly auratic.
dead girls, big babies, crying women – this is the shorthand, the typology of subjects that Marlene Dumas has used in her ongoing exploration of portraiture. The four examples I have chosen to discuss in this section demonstrate this point. The subject in the source image (see Figure 3.5) for The White Disease (1985) is someone unknown, and it can be assumed that the source image was taken from a medical journal or magazine. The subject in the source image (see Figure 3.7) for Kim (2004) is Kim Hyon-hui, a former notorious North Korean agent and mass murderer, and the source image is from a newspaper clipping. The subject in the source image (see Figure 3.9) for Mamma Roma (2012) is a still of the actress Anna Magnani from the Pier Paolo Pasolini film Mamma Roma. The source image (see Figure 3.11) for Martha: My Ouma (1984) is a photograph of Dumas’ grandmother taken by Sandra Kriel. Thus, it is evident that not only does Dumas choose a diverse selection of people as her subjects, but also that her source material is gathered from a wide range of media.

Each of the paintings analysed in this section demonstrate degrees of difference, which are transgressive in their transformation from their source images. The physical, indexical and material aspects of the paintings are unpacked and explored in terms of their affective content and embodiment. According to Shiff (2008:145), “to the extent that photography connotes an objective uncensored vision (primarily because of its mechanical aspects), it establishes a viewer’s distance from the image it presents”. The phenomenological act of painting could, therefore, be argued to bring the viewer closer to the image through the artist’s embodied investment therein, transforming the paintings through the artist’s decisions with regard to colour, mark, composition, and application of paint, embedding emotional content in them and transforming, changing, and shifting them from their sources. Shiff (2008:151) explains that “the message of a painted image, with its ‘trace of the human touch’ and ‘feel of the surface’, moves beyond the nominal identity of its model. Even the most representational of images becomes complicated by feelings experienced as the image was being made (not taken)”. I argue that this transgressive transformation of physical properties, which facilitates affective qualities, is aural, in that the painting is brought closer to the viewer through Dumas’ act of painting it, and through the transcendence of the perfunctory purpose of source images, in favour of emotional surfaces rich in affective content.

According to Butler (2008:62), The White Disease (see Figure 3.6) is “[b]ased on a medical headshot of a woman suffering from an affliction of the skin”. It can be assumed that Dumas has incorporated aspects of each of the three photographs of the woman in the collage; the eyes and the mouth bear a
resemblance to the eyes and the mouth in the first image, the nose bears a resemblance to the nose in the third image, the shadow under the chin and the patterned clothing bear similarities to the second image, and the milky skin tone bears similarities to the third image. Although these similarities can be traced from each of the three photographs to the painting, the painting is not mimetic of any one of the photographs. In addition, Dumas has also changed aspects of the face, such as the nose, which is suggested, rather than modelled or painted to completion, the mouth, which has slid to the right of the face, and the hair, which is minimalistic and unfussy. Dumas has accentuated the whiteness of the skin, which appears translucent and thin, with tinges of undercoating colour showing through the opaque, creamy overlay of white paint, which governs the surface of the face. The way in which the skin has been painted is an observation of the age of the woman, as well as her race, rather than her skin disease. According to Butler (2008:62), “[t]he transparency Dumas attains by using translucent paints and watercolours to render skin in thin multicolored layers is a metaphor for the covering and exposure of evil”. As Butler (2008:62) reveals, the “white disease” to which Dumas refers in the title is a metaphor for racial and ethnic intolerance. Bedford (2007:37) explains that “while alluding to a medical condition, [the painting] suggests that racism is an illness or an aberration from the norm”. While the source material for this painting is, without doubt, a diseased woman, Dumas has changed the particular kind of disease, which, in turn, has altered the meaning of the work. Dumas has left out from her painting the red skin colouration of the skin disease itself (noticeable around the subject’s nose), which confirms that the painting is not about a physical disease, but rather about an ethical, moral and psychological disease. As stated by Butler (2008:62), The White Disease “pointedly addresses the symbolic power of race and the delicate conditions of ethnic identity and intolerance”.

Figure 3.5: Marlene Dumas, Part of a selection of Dumas’ image bank, filed under the section “Female Portraits”, and the source image for The White Disease, [sa]. Collaged postcard of a patient, 10.5 x 14.8 cm (Butler et al 2008:77).

Figure 3.6: Marlene Dumas, The White Disease, 1985. Oil on canvas, 125 x 105 cm (Martin et al 2007:37).
The meaning in the painting relies both on what is being portrayed and the way it is portrayed, and the meaning is transformed through the way in which Dumas has handled the painted subject. Dumas has treated the surface with thin washes, as well as scumbled brushstrokes which run vertically through the hair and over the face, which make the face appear flattened and cut out of the contrasting dark background. Shiff (2008:146) comments on the way in which the medium used to produce a work of art creates meaning within the work, by stating:

All media are unstable, unreliable, subject to manipulation and simple error, but this is not the only cause of their being suspect. The opposite also applies; a medium can be used to control and limit meaning. In any particular context, a medium will tend either to yield to or restrict meaning’s free play, but the potential of each medium to turn one direction or the other, toward either indeterminate or determined meaning, differs.

The woman’s face is expressionless, yet it appears hostile and pitiable at the same time, with her tightly pursed lips and what Butler (2008:62) describes as her “piercing blue gaze”. The subject in the painting may be argued to have assumed an aura of bigotry. The lack of expression seen in the subject in The White Disease is similar to that seen in Kim (see Figure 3.8). The unexpressive way in which Dumas has painted the face in Kim, which is almost entirely flat and seems to remain, to a large extent, unpainted, is matched by the blank expression of her subject’s face.

The source material for this painting is a newspaper clipping of Kim Hyon-hui which appeared in a Dutch newspaper in 1988 (see Figure 3.7). Adrian Searle (2004) explains that there is something vaguely familiar about some of Dumas’ portraits. This could be attributed to the fact that the subjects in Dumas’ paintings are often people that have featured in newspapers or other media. Searle (2004) illustrates this phenomenon with reference to Kim:

I discover that Dumas’s Kim is Kim Hyon-hui, the 25-year-old so-called “virgin bomber” responsible for blowing up a Korean airliner and killing 115 people in 1987. Sentenced to death, she was later pardoned after it turned out she was acting on the orders of North Korea, in an attempt to dissuade countries from attending the 1988 Seoul Olympics.
While the newspaper clipping is completely monochromatic, Dumas has warmed the palette slightly by adding areas of olive green and brown tones in selected places. The eyes, which are downcast and revert the gaze of the viewer, are painted as stark black outlines, and they appear as islands on the large, round face of the woman. The nose and the mouth are painted softly and subtly in comparison to the heavy, angular shape of the hair, which frames the moon-like face. Dumas has zoomed in on the subject’s face, so that the circular shape of the face takes up the entire intimate format of the painting, cropping out details which distract from the clinical coolness of the image, such as the microphones pictured in the photograph.

Commenting on the source material from which the painting was derived, Searle (2004) observes that “Dumas likes old newspapers. She has said that you can’t judge a painting by the picture that inspired it: ‘They say you can’t judge a book by its cover, you can’t judge a woman by her lover. But paintings have to be judged by their covers and their lovers’’. From this quotation it can be observed that the ‘cover’ is the painting, and the ‘lover’ is the artist, alluding to the embodiment of the artist in the artwork to be ‘judged’, as well as to the semiotics of the ‘cover’ being the trace, which is indexical of the ‘caress’ of the ‘lover’. The idea of the ‘caress’ of the ‘lover’ also evokes Oliver’s (2001:68) notion that what is viewed ‘caresses’ the viewer, in her statement that “[t]he visible caresses the eye”. The aura thus lies in
the transformation from the source to the painting, in the material presentation of paint in the work, and in the embodiment of Dumas, who painted the work, as well as in the embodiment of the viewer, who looks upon the work.

As with *Kim*, the source material for *Mamma Roma* (see Figure 3.9) is also monochromatic, and, once again, Dumas has warmed the palette, adding soft browns and pinks to her neutral palette in the painting. The most significant degree of difference is the mottled and blotchy texture of Dumas’ painted surface, where paint has been applied thickly, appearing in places as if she has used her hands to paint areas of the painting instead of a paintbrush.

As stated, *Mamma Roma* (see Figure 3.10) is derived from a still of the actress Anna Magnani from the black-and-white Pier Paolo Pasolini film *Mamma Roma* (see Figure 3.9). According to Butler (2008:46), Dumas’ “many references to and appropriations of films are recycled through the gathering of stills”. Dumas (cited by Verzotti 2012:39) articulates the desire that she had to paint and narrate, for the Sorte exhibition in Milan in 2012, the emotions of the mother of Christ, who mourned the death of her son, and she asserts that she found the equivalence in a Pasolini film character: “Eventually Anna Magnani

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Figure 3.9: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Still of Anna Magnani as ‘Mamma Roma’ in *Mamma Roma*, 1962. Film (Nahud, A.J. 2011).

Figure 3.10: Marlene Dumas, *Mamma Roma*. 2012. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm Milano (Verzotti 2012:69).
as ‘Mamma Roma’, screaming, expressing the grief of a mother that has lost her son, became my model” (Verzotti 2012:39). Dumas (cited by Verzotti 2012:43) comments on her use of this still as her source material:

What is it about Pasolini that I have returned to him again? His sensuous use of light and dark. The ‘unrealistic’ way he treats narrative in his films. How the personages appear and disappear. How he can distrust himself. (Dumas, cited by Verzotti 2012:43)

Allessandra Klimciuk (2012:91) explains that the Paolo Pasolini film is the moving picture version of the Pieta, and is thus steeped in emotion, as can be seen in the still from which Dumas derived her painting. The heartfelt anguish and distress expressed by the subject is enhanced by the short and clipped way in which Dumas has applied the paint, which illustrates the intensity of emotion in the subject, and contributes to the auratic perception of the resultant painting. Dumas has transformed and altered the painting from the source image, in that she has shifted the angle of the axis of the face from a diagonal position to a vertical position. She has also reduced the subject’s teeth, so that the screaming mouth is a dark void. Dumas has accentuated the already close-up shot from Pasolini’s film to a greater degree, which further supports the aura of emotional intensity and also due, in this instance, to its small size and one-to-one scale relationship with the viewer. According to Verzotti (2012:31), “[i]n his films, especially the early ones in black and white, Pasolini uses the camera rather simply, as he said himself he was self-taught, based on close-up and very close-up shots, tracking shots and panoramic shots”. Dumas has further cropped the already close-up view, so that the hair, chin and hands do not feature in the painting, and the face fills the entire format. Butler (2008:45) states that “[r]ecuperating images by appropriating, projecting, altering, and painting them is a way of being in the world, of bearing witness and making contact through the invention of visual language based on a productive distortion and restoration of still images”. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:162) asserts that “[a]n image needs edges to belong to”. This convention of cropping is also seen in Martha: My Ouma (see Figure 3.12), where Dumas has zoomed in on the subject’s head and bust, which, in turn, eliminates the background ‘noise’ of the original source material (see Figure 3.11). Dumas (cited by Mbembe & Nuttall 2007:128) comments on this by stating that “[i]t is not so much that you go to the object but that it is drawn towards you and sucked out of the environment and context until it becomes a close-up”, a potentially auratic moment, a way of being in the world.

The source material for Martha: My Ouma is a photograph of Dumas’ grandmother taken by Sandra Kriel circa 1970. The photograph is old, and thus monochromatic, yet, unlike the previous two examples discussed, where Dumas has kept the paintings predominantly monochromatic, with hints of colour, this
painting is comprised of tints and shades of dirty blue. The cool colours, as well as the emotionless
gaze of the statue-like subject, whose carved eyes resemble those of a stone sculpture, hold onto the
austerity of the source image. The subject is imposing, with her square jaw echoed in her squared
shoulders, angular facial features, and hairline. The surface of the painting is made up of a storm of
hazy, swirling brushstrokes. The circular motion of the brush, evident in the wet-on-wet texture of the
surface, resembles a halo, or a visual representation of an aura of divinity. According to Butler
(2008:55), Dumas reflected on the presence of this painting by expressing that it is “as imposing as a
portrait of God as a woman”. This idea is articulated by Dumas (2007:56) in the following poem, which
she wrote in 1988 about this portrait:

God cannot be painted
And He isn’t a man
But if He had been a woman,
He would have looked like this sometimes.

While this painting is a portrait of her grandmother, and focuses on familial relations, Dumas (2007:56)
acknowledges that it is also a painting of a perceived older version of herself:

The older I get
the more I look like her.
Give me a little more time
and you can call this work:
A self-portrait.
The liquid quality of the painting is possibly attributable to Dumas’ phenomenological experience of her grandmother. Dumas (2007:56) writes, “How soft my grandmother felt to touch.” The sensuality of the wet-on-wet brushstrokes translates into the memory of the softness of Dumas’ grandmother’s skin, and the act of painting her grandmother’s skin translates into Dumas touching her grandmother; through stroking the surface of the painting with her brush, Dumas carresses the skin of her grandmother. The colour used, too, is possibly attributable to Dumas’ memory of her grandmother’s physical appearance. Dumas (2007:56) writes, “How blue she bruished [sic]. How the sun shone through her almost transparent pink ears.” The skin of the subject appears both transparent and bruised in the painting, with the blue underpainting showing through the thinly applied washes of creamy beige paint. Dumas’ recollection of how blue her grandmother’s aged skin bruised filters through to govern the entire painting, resulting in the painting being composed of symbolic colour, rather than naturalistic colours. The painting conveys a sense of near intangibility and an ethereal ambience. Dumas painted this portrait of her grandmother after her grandmother had died, and she reveals that she “imagined her as if she was in heaven somehow” (Dumas 2007:56). This is evident in Dumas’ application of paint in swathes in the background, which can be seen to resemble the ephemeral quality of vaporous clouds, rather than stereotypical puffy white clouds. The atmosphere that Dumas has achieved in the painting is much like the concept of the aura itself, which is intangible and ethereal. Butler (2008:46-52) observes the way in which Dumas both transforms her paintings from their photographic sources, and references the photographic qualities of her sources in her application of paint on the surface. With regard to this, Butler (2008:46-52) states that “[t]he artist’s sensuous washes and brushstrokes return her excerpted subjects to the liquid realm of the photograph”, while simultaneously acknowledging that she has a “desire and ability to craft a painting practice that flaunts an emotional realism even as it participates in a conceptual and strategic relationship to photographic distancing”.

3.1.4 Conclusion

The first part of this chapter has dealt with photography’s relationship to painting as a starting point and source, as opposed to an end product: as something that occurs as a form of documentation once the painting has been completed. Shiff (2008:146) declares that “[b]ecause the various media based on photography have long been dominant suppliers of culturally coded, institution sanctioned imagery, painting by comparison is the less restrictive medium”. I have demonstrated how transgressive alterations from the photograph to the painting, which are intentional and purposeful, facilitate a
transcendence of the painting over its source. In doing so, I have also shown how these transcendences are evidence for the auratic within the works discussed, by locating where the moments of transgressiveness become transcendent. According to Shiff (2008:150), compared to other modes of depiction, photographs are “whole and instantaneous”, and are able to “still the moment” and bond “a certain space to a certain time and a certain time to a certain space”. Shiff notes, however, that early daguerreotype portraiture constituted an exception to this rule, because it involved a long exposure period. Benjamin (1977:48) argued that in early photographic practice, the subjects lived “not out of the instant, but into it; during long exposure they grew, as it were, into the image”. Shiff (2008:150) comments on this characteristic of daguerreotype portraiture by stating that “[t]he early subjects seemed to adjust their depiction, paint their own portrait – actively, not passively”. Shiff (2008:150) explains that in the same way, “a painter lives into a painting […] recognized through […] an experiential bond of sensation”. Through the process of translating and transforming the image from its photographic form into a painting, the painting is returned once again to the bodily phenomenological experience of time and space, with the subject actively ‘living into the instant’ through the painter’s spatiotemporal and indexical relationship with the canvas.

Having established the complex relationship between photography and painting and having located auratic moments within certain paintings which transcend their sources, in the next part of this chapter I identify auratic moments within paintings that I have experienced directly, and analyse them within a phenomenological framework. I explore the flip side of photography’s relationship to painting by investigating the camera’s influence on the loss of the aura due to the reproduction of artworks, in relation to Dumas’ *The Next Generation*, *The Fog of War*, *Martha: Sigmund’s Wife*, *The Neighbour*, and *Occult Revival*. My phenomenological experience of Dumas’ paintings is unpacked and investigated in terms of key aspects within Benjamin’s concept of the aura. I compare the selected paintings that I view with reproductions in books, in order to probe a relationship between photography and painting in terms of reproduction and Benjamin’s notion of the loss of the aura through such reproduction.
Part 2: ‘Being-thereness’

3.2.1 Introduction

As established in sections 1.3 and 2.1.2, an important aspect of Benjamin's theory is the loss of the aura in artworks due to reproduction. In the digital age of the 21st century, some 80 years after Benjamin’s writings, works of art are reproduced not only in books, catalogues, and posters, but also on the Internet, where numerous copies of the original work are instantly accessible worldwide. Images of artworks are resized, colour-corrected, light-enhanced, cropped, and decontextualised to the point that the image becomes something significantly different from the original image in its original context. My study does not concern the effect of the camera on the loss of the aura due to the reproduction of artworks, but, instead, is concerned with the inverse of this process, namely the creative process of using technology and photography as a starting point in the process of making artwork. I contend, however, that it is of significant value to unpack this relationship between the original and its reproduction, as this is a crucial aspect of Benjamin's theory surrounding the aura. Such an unpacking will help me locate auratic elements within selected paintings by Dumas from a phenomenological and embodied experience of viewing the paintings personally.

3.2.2 The Next Generation

As part of my research I was granted a private viewing of Dumas’ The Next Generation (1994-5) (see Figure 3.13) at Iziko South African National Gallery (SANG) in Cape Town. It was critical that I encounter the original series of paintings, in order to have a direct, phenomenological experience of the work. Since works of art are said to lose their aura through reproduction, images of the work that I examine in books, catalogues, and on the Internet remain remote and distant. It was therefore necessary for me to locate the artwork in Cape Town, organise an appointment to have a private viewing of the artwork, and travel from Johannesburg to Cape Town to see it. This specific work may be argued to retain its aura because of its remoteness and distance from the viewer, in that it is part of the SANG’s collections, where it is kept in a drawer in a private storeroom, and it is thus inaccessible to members of the general public who might happen to visit the gallery. The aura of the artwork is further maintained, from my personal perspective, and in terms of my particular geographical location, in that I
had to travel to view the work, and in that Cape Town is geographically remote from Johannesburg. This geographical and spatial relationship of distance and remoteness on which the aura relies is closely related to another key component of Benjamin’s notion, namely the here-and-now of the artwork. The spatial and temporal aspects of the work in the specific place and time that I viewed it makes the original unique, in that, unlike reproductions, which may be readily available and in many places at the same time, the original can only be in one place at a time. In my case, my specific viewing place was the storeroom in the SANG, and my specific viewing time was 10 am on 8 July 2013.

The affective context, such as the excitement generated by a private viewing, as well as the practical limitations of time constraints and the desire to ‘see it all’ and ‘take it all in’, with the curator lingering in case I damaged or made off with the portraits, affected the way in which I perceived the aura in my viewing. Due to the fact that I viewed the work in the gallery’s storeroom, the physical context of the work was significantly different, in a number of ways, from the conventional way in which artwork is exhibited in a gallery. Firstly, I was unable to view the paintings collectively, as they were intended to be exhibited, banked in a grid-like formation on the wall, but, rather, I had to view each one individually, due to the confined area of the storeroom. The Next Generation consists of 45 watercolour portraits, and the implication of not viewing them collectively (as a whole) is that the individual portraits in the series are not read in conjunction with all the other individual portraits as a whole, where moments of one painting might ‘talk’ to another and where the works might have ‘conversations’ with each other.

Secondly, the work, as I viewed it in the storeroom, has been removed from the convention of a white-walled gallery space, which typically allows the work to be viewed with few distractions. Visual distractions in the storeroom included cabinets, drawers, and other furniture, as well as the table covered with felt cloth on which the individual portraits had been placed for my viewing, one by one, and on top of each other. Furthermore, the convention of a work being hung on a wall enables the viewer to stand back, to gain distance from and perspective on the work as a whole. My viewing experience, however, involved looking down on the works, which had been placed on a low table. The effect of these viewing conditions, firstly, determined a close proximity of the work to me, and, secondly, changed the perspective of the work from viewing it straight ahead to leaning over and looking down at the work. Thirdly, due to the fact that there is no natural light in the storeroom, it is artificially lit with fluorescent light fittings in the ceiling, unlike the way a gallery space would be lit, with small spotlights. Lastly, I was allowed to handle the works personally, provided I wore the thick fabric gloves that were supplied to me by the curator of prints and drawings.
I argue for the aura of the work in terms of distance and proximity with regards to my handling of the artworks with gloves in two ways. The first line of argument is that my haptic interaction allowed for a closer and more embodied viewing experience than if I were to view the series in a gallery, where touching of works of art is generally forbidden. This distance is usually enforced in gallery spaces by framing the works on display, exhibiting them behind glass, or even installing alarms that sound if the viewer crosses a demarcated line on the floor. By insuring that the viewer cannot get too close to the work, a certain distance is maintained between the work of art and the viewer in a gallery, a distance that Benjamin argues preserves the work’s aura, by virtue of the fact that the work is unattainable. The other line of argument is that even though I was able to handle the works and view them in close proximity, the gloves I wore acted as a barrier between my hands and the individual works, creating a certain degree of distance, remoteness, and inaccessibility within this close propinquity, consequently preserving the aura of the work.

In addition, on this point of personal interaction, the curator allowed me to take photographs of the individual artworks, for the purposes of my study, provided I did not use the flash on my camera. Taking photographs of artworks in galleries is generally forbidden, and at the SANG, patrons are prohibited from even taking cameras into the exhibition spaces. My act of taking photographs of the original works of art is ironic, and it goes against the grain of Benjamin’s notion of the aura, since works of art are said to lose their aura through reproduction. The fact that I viewed the original individual artworks personally in order to experience the aural perceptions that they had to offer, and then resorted to reproducing them for the purposes of my study is paradoxical. However, the photographic reproductions which appear in this section serve as illustrations of individual works, and they reveal close-up details and areas within the pieces, as they are presented as indexical marks, which I found to be auratic in my direct viewing of the original work. Together, these reproduced images and this formal text provide another degree of remoteness from my personal and private reading of the works themselves. The works are thus remote and near at the same time, and it is in this state of flux that a degree of aura manifests.

As mentioned, reproduced images of artworks are resized, colour-corrected, light-enhanced, and cropped, which decontextualises the artwork and presents it as something considerably different from the original work. I have not been able to find a single image in books, catalogues, and on the Internet that represents the series in its entirety. The images in the books Marlene Dumas: Intimate relations by Martin et al (2007:106-107) (see Figure 3.13) and South African art now by Sue Williamson (2009:222-
223) (see Figure 3.14) have been printed over a double page spread, which has caused the three centre portraits in each of the images to be distorted by the centre fold of the books. I explained this dilemma to Andrea Lewis, the curator at the SANG, and I requested a photograph of the series. However, the image with which I was provided (see Figure 3.15) was less useful than the other two images, as it only includes nine of the portraits in the series. I was only able to find two other images of the work on the Internet, one being a low-grade, pixelated image consisting of 30 of the 45 portraits (see Figure 3.16), which is only available on a pornographic website, which was not deemed appropriate for my purposes, and the other being an image of Marlene Dumas standing in front of a portion of the series (see Figure 3.17), which I was able to locate in an article about Dumas’ exhibition *Intimate Relations* in 2008 on the official website of the City of Johannesburg. Considering what I said about numerous reproductions of works of art being instantly available and easily accessible worldwide on the Internet, it is ironic that these are the only images I was able to find of the series. It is important to note that the colour of the work is significantly different in each of the reproductions. The image in *Intimate relations* is predominantly grey, with subtle hints of colour, the image in *South African art now* is sepia, the image provided by SANG has a greenish filter, and the image from the Internet is hard black and white. The image with Dumas in the foreground is closest to the original colour of the portraits in the series. The significance of the difference in colour in each of these reproductions becomes increasingly important in my discussion concerning the colour of the works, further on in this section.  

![Figure 3.13: Marlene Dumas, *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (Martin *et al* 2007:106-7).](image)

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25 It must be noted that even the printer used for the printing of the images on these pages produces subtle variations of colour in comparison to how these images appear in the sources consulted.
Figure 3.14: Marlene Dumas, *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (Williamson 2009: 222-3).

Figure 3.15: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (Lewis 2013/07/26:[sp]).

Figure 3.16: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (Artnet 2014:[sp]).
While standing in front of the paintings, I was acutely aware of the fact that I had to document, in some quantifiable way, this phenomenological occurrence that I was experiencing. Instinctively, I began to take note of the physicality of the paint on the surface of the paper. The first relationship I noticed in the paintings was a seemingly semiotic one. The physical marks on the surface of the paper, such as scratchy brushstrokes, indexical of the use of a hard-bristled paintbrush, are juxtaposed by smooth washes, passages, and directional paths of liquid paint on the paper, which are themselves indexical of the way the page would have had to be moved and manipulated to make the paint run, swirl, and pool. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:151) provides a description of her process of painting with watercolours on paper, in a step-by-step manner much as if she were giving guidelines on how to follow her process of painting:

Paper used on the floor. Watery ink thrown onto the paper like a big blob. Work with Japanese and Chinese brushes very quickly while still wet. Hold paper up to let water run down or from left to right, to create skin-like texture… The fluid quality is important.

Shiff (2008:151) explains that Dumas works in close proximity to her paper, squatting in a position to quickly lift the paper in order to catch the flow of pigment and guide its potential, and that this requires a skilful hand, as often the sheet of paper used is very large. Dumas’ physical closeness to the page determines a certain physical embodiment in the artwork. Penny Siopis (cited by Williamson 2009:220) describes Dumas’ relationship as “an intimacy with the surface, rather than a distance”. The fluid quality which Dumas regards as important results in certain ‘mistakes’ which are evident in the portrait paintings, such as drips, splatters, splashes, and trickles on the sides of the page on which the work is
painted (see Figures 3.18 to 3.20), as well as on the back of the page (see Figure 3.21). Shiff (2008:150-151) explains that “Dumas can establish the contoured edge of a form either by tracing a line in a conventional way or by lifting the sheet of paper and guiding the rapid flow of liquid pigment as gravity makes the edge. Sometimes a stray line or band extends out from the articulated body – a runoff of excess liquid”. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:161) comments on the ‘mistakes’ that are inevitable in this particular process of painting that she employs, by stating that “[i]f the painting does not want to go in the direction where I thought it was going when I started, then I let it go its own way to some extent. I love chance… Without surprise, no drawing”. In addition, pinhole marks in the corners of the page (from the way in which the paintings were exhibited, or made), the machine-made deckle edges of the Fabriano paper, and Dumas’ dated signature contribute to the semiotic relationship of trace and index in the works (see Figure 3.22). The chance spots and drips, the signature, the deckle edges of the page, and the holes all draw attention to the physical, material presence of the painting’s surface, by dictating consideration of that which lies outside the contours of the portrait. Shiff (2008:151) explains in his commentary that “[t]he spots mean nothing – or mean ‘whatever’. In any event, they cannot but be seen”.

Figure 3.18: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.19: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.20: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).
These elements, as well as subtle hints of colour, specks of white page allowed to show in between brushstrokes, the variation and contrast in tone and texture from one portrait to another, the trace of initial pencil marks and outlines on the page, areas where paint has bled and run, paint splodges, speckles, drips, and swipes took precedence in my viewing experience. I took note of the many different and varied modes of mark-making, such as the juxtaposition of sweeping, smooth, watered-

26 Splodges arise when dense, heavy paint is applied to the surface of the page, and the paint spreads as it lands on the page; a speckle is the remnant of a mark or the fine dots of paint dispersed in the process of the paintbrush moving quickly; the word “drips” refers to the either accidental or purposeful effect of gravity pulling a drop of paint onto the surface of a page, which is indexical of movement; and swipes are marks made with a fast sweeping movement of the paintbrush in the hand.
down applications of paint glazes, and speckled, scumbled marks and cracks or paths formed in the drying process (see Figure 3.23). In some of the portraits, certain areas of flat watercolour washes are interrupted by ‘accidental’ drips inside the contours of the face (see Figure 3.24), as well as paths and cracks created by the mixture of wet paint and a fine mist of dry spots of paint (see Figure 3.25). At close range, I noticed smears, dots, and finger marks, which are indexical of Dumas having used her hands to make the marks, instead of using a paintbrush (see Figure 3.26). Dumas produces a blurred effect in some of the works through the layering of wet glazes (see Figure 3.27). She also applies paint to an already wet surface, which results in the paint bleeding and spreading on the page (see Figure 3.28), while in other areas she has created a swirled, marbled effect, which is indexical of water and paint failing to mix on the surface of the page (see Figure 3.29).

Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:150) explains the importance of indexical marks and traces in her paintings, as well as how she ensures that certain brushstrokes remain visible, by not correcting or refining them in her paintings: “For me, painting has to show its method, how it becomes what it is; [it should] move back and forth from ‘illusion’ to the ‘gesture’.” It became evident to me that the physical and visceral elements of the paintings, and the subtle sensualities of brushstroke and mark within each piece, essentially lead to a phenomenological experience of the work. As I mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, I have employed the two strategies of semiology and phenomenology as frames in my study, in order to locate the auralic elements within a work. I had previously regarded these strategies as independent of, and different from, each other. What I realised, however, is that the indexical marks and physical traces of the paintbrush on the surface play an instrumental role in the presence of the work, and consequently the viewer’s phenomenological experience of the work. In the case of Dumas’ paintings, my receptive body responded to the visceral and physical marks on the surface, while at the same time it responded to Dumas’ response to bodies, faces, portraits, and personalities. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:150) clarifies the way semiology and phenomenology work together, by asserting that painting “is about the trace of the human touch”. The trace of brushstrokes and painterly marks on the surface of the substrate index the artist having applied the paint with a bodily movement; consequently, the reception of such traces by the viewer embodies the experience of the artist as much as it does the experience of the viewer. Shiff (2008:151) describes Dumas’ painting process from a phenomenologically embodied and an indexical point of view as “a moving trace, passing through the experience of time and space”, and he explains that “touch is the vehicle, a medium in itself. It is reciprocal, a matter of touching and being touched […] the hand feels the set of sensations produced by its own actions".
Figure 3.23: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.24: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.25: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).
During my viewing appointment, I referred to a reproduced image of Dumas’ series *The Next Generation* in *Marlene Dumas: Intimate relations* (Martin *et al* 2007:106-107) (see Figure 3.13) alongside the paintings themselves, thus viewing the two simultaneously. An immediate observation was that the small-scale reproductions of the work and the photographs that I took of the work are unable to capture or display the detail of the original works. This might seem an obvious observation, but the exact extent to which the detail of the original work had diminished became clear when I calculated that the scale of the reproduced image to the original was a rather minuscule 1:14. The size of the individual paintings is illustrated in the image below, where the actual size of the image can be seen in comparison to its surroundings, including my face and my body (see Figure 3.30).
A subsequent phenomenological relationship is therefore the size of the work in relation to the viewer’s bodily and optical reception. In the case of the reproductions of Dumas’ work, the entire 45-piece body of work can be viewed at once, while the original pieces, whose visual motifs are approximately one-and-a-half to two times larger than life-size, demand a different kind of viewing. A small-scale reproduction of this body of paintings allows the viewer to view all the paintings in the series at the same time, with the viewer’s eye moving from piece to piece, easily focusing on one individual painting at any particular time. With the original piece, however, the viewer’s eye cannot capture each piece in its entirety at once, let alone the entire body of paintings, which results in the eye sweeping in paths across the work. I found that my eyes jumped from one textural field or detail to another, leading me to see it in parts or sections as I was drawn to certain areas. Steiner (1982:36) explains that the way we ‘read’ a painting is similar, but not identical, to the way we read a text:

[T]he eye can in fact focus on only relatively small portions of visible objects and must scan them in order to build a unified image. Pictorial perception is thus a matter of temporal processing, like literary perception, with the difference that the ordering of this perceptual sequence is not predetermined by the painting itself (at least not as far as we know).
In this light, I felt that the fundamental nature of the work changed dramatically from the original to the reproduction. Textural details on the surface of the paintings are lost when the paintings are reduced in size in reproductions. Certain details, for instance the subtle texture of the paper substrate, seem to be visible only when viewing the original pieces. This is particularly the case where the physical flatness of the surface of the page has been manipulated. In this regard, there is evidence in one particular portrait that the surface has been scratched away with a sharp object (see Figure 3.31), and in another portrait the surface has been built up by layering pieces of torn paper (see Figure 3.32). Even my photographs which appear as illustrations will obscure visual information that is visible when viewing the paintings personally. This phenomenological relationship with size and scale can be seen to rely on the semiological relationship of surface texture, index, and mark, where certain details are inaccessible in reproductions in books, due to the reduced size.

Steiner’s (1982:36) notion of pictorial perception relying on temporal processing links to Benjamin’s key component of the aura being its existence in the here-and-now. Steiner (1982:36) also suggests that there is no particular or predetermined order in which a painting is read, as there is when reading text, which indicates that each person’s phenomenological experience is determined by their own perception of the work in the unique way that their eye moves and reads the painting.

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27 A viewer ‘owns’ the entirety of the viewing process of reproductions of Dumas’ The Next Generation, but in viewing the original work, with its implication for ‘walking the line’ of the entire work, a viewer ‘owns’ only fleeting, “relatively small portions” (Steiner 1982:36) of this whole.
Another observation is that the slight and subtle suggestion of colour in the works is almost lost in the reproduced images. The body of work appears to be entirely monochromatic in the reproduced images in Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations (Martin et al 2007:106-107) (see Figure 3.13). However, when I viewed the paintings at close range, I noticed subtle hints of blue, red, and pink (see Figures 3.33 to 3.38). A few of the monochromatic paintings have been warmed and accented with orange-brown hues, with one painting, in particular, exhibiting large areas of burnt-orange stains on the surface (see Figures 3.39 and 3.40). There are also two paintings which have rather striking and unmistakable yellow areas, which are barely noticeable in the small-scale reproductions of the works (see Figures 3.41 and 3.42). The close-up photographs that I took, with permission from the gallery, demonstrate some of these subtle hints of colour. However, even the photographs that are printed here, as with the small-scale reproductions, do not reveal the intensity of colour that I was able to see when I viewed the works directly.

Figure 3.33: Marlene Dumas, Detail of The Next Generation, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.34: Marlene Dumas, Detail of The Next Generation, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).
Figure 3.35: Marlene Dumas, Detail of The Next Generation, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.36: Marlene Dumas, Detail of The Next Generation, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.37: Marlene Dumas, Detail of The Next Generation, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.38: Marlene Dumas, Detail of The Next Generation, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).
Figure 3.39: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.40: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.41: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.42: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Next Generation*, 1994-5. Watercolour on paper, 66 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author, used with permission).
According to Butler (2008:63), “[w]hat Dumas’s experiments in representing groups seem to have yielded for the artist is a fascination with the mechanics of the gaze, a central concern in any discussion of portraiture”. The gaze in Dumas’ portraits contributes to a phenomenological experience of this series. According to Mbembe and Nuttall (2007:125), “[y]ou look at the painting but the painting also looks at you”. In this light, the portraits, which are inanimate objects, are personified and are given the agency to gaze. Dumas gazes at her subjects and instils a certain gaze in her portraits, in the way she paints their eyes, which then gaze at the viewer, who, in turn, returns the gaze by looking at them, resulting in a tripartite gaze between the artist, the portrait, and the viewer. According to Hansen (2008:339), Benjamin describes the aura as having “the ability to look back at us”, or “lift its gaze”, and defines it as “the distance of the gaze that awakens in the object looked at”. Hansen (2008:342) emphasises this point in her statement that “aura is itself a medium that defines the gaze of the human beings portrayed”. As discussed in section 2.1.3, with regard to the aura involving a phenomenological structure that allows for the materialisation of the gaze, which forms its possible meaning, Hansen (2008:352) highlights the relationship between the act of looking, perceptibility, and the aura, when she asserts that “the auratic quality that manifests itself in the object […] cannot be produced at will; it appears to the subject, not for it”.

Furthermore, in consideration of what Butler asserts regarding Dumas’ interest in representing groups, and what this may yield for the concept of the gaze, the 45 individual portraits, when exhibited together as a series, form a crowd of people. This determines that the viewer is faced with the gaze of a crowd, which may produce an aura of intimidation and threat, as opposed to an intimate one-on-one gaze exchange such as I experienced in my viewing of the works individually. Whether the eyes in Dumas’ portraits stare back at the viewer challengingly, look up at them longingly, draw them in seductively, or divert their gaze entirely, the portraits have a presence because of Dumas’ manipulation of the power of the gaze in the portraits. This presence, in my view, is a contributing factor in locating the auratic in Dumas’ paintings. The eyes of the portraits in the small-scale reproductions do not demand the viewer’s attention, due to their size. However, the presence of the gaze of the portraits in the individual paintings viewed is demanding, due to their larger scale, and arguably their authenticity and authority as originals. This presence that I felt in the paintings could also possibly be due to my emotional responses to the expressions, personalities, and characters depicted in each portrait. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:147) comments on the relationship between the presence of a painting and emotions by stating that
I am dealing with emotions that everyone feels. But I'm always conscious of this tension between knowing that you are making an object, a physical thing, and being aware that you are also referring to things [the emotions] that cannot actually be painted. If the painting works, that tension\textsuperscript{28} is there [My italics].

Similarly, the way in which Dumas' subjects are painted describes or provides insight into their characters or personalities. Each subject has been treated in a different style, suggesting that the material presence of paint is intertwined with the message conveyed by the painting. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:151) proposes that “[t]he content of a painting cannot be separated from the feel of its surface”. Dumas' comment is evocative of Merleau-Ponty's (2004:72) statement, which was introduced in section 2.1.3, namely that “form and content – what is said and the way in which it is said – cannot exist separately from one another”. This relationship is evident in Dumas' varied handling of each individual painted subject, which demonstrates her understanding of the capacity of materials to convey a message and express emotion.

This comparative analysis between reproduced images of The Next Generation and my personal experience of the original facilitated my recognition of the relationship between the semiotic and the phenomenological aspects of the work. In my experience of the original work, the presence of the paintings was determined by the physical traces on the surface of the page, which are indexical of Dumas' painting process, her experiences, and her embodied having-been-thereness. By comparing the original work with reproduced images of the same work, I established that there are significant differences in the appearance of formal elements such as size, colour, texture, line, and form, as well as in the context of the viewing experience of the original, on one hand, and a reproduction on the other hand. These formal elements, which are inaccessible in reproduced images, facilitate presence in my experience of the work. I consequently align myself with Benjamin's notion of the loss of the aura through reproduction, as I believe that the loss of the opticality of these formal elements leads to the loss of presence in the work, which may be equated with the loss of the aura. Having established the relationship between the original and its reproduction, and having focused on the significance of indexical marks, resulting in the experience of presence in the work with regard to The Next Generation, in the section that follows I explore the notion of reproduction of artworks in greater depth with regard to Dumas' The Fog of War (2006).

\textsuperscript{28} The words “works” and “tension”, used by Dumas to describe her paintings, imply a potential reading of auratic moments.
3.2.3 The Fog of War

The concept of reproduction of works of art is thrown into sharp relief in the case of *The Fog of War* (2006). The theory that the aura is lost through reproduction was confirmed by my experience of what I thought was an original set of four paintings by Dumas and a poem by her titled *The Fog of War* (see Figure 3.45). On closer inspection of the accompanying label (see Figure 3.44), however, I realised that the work was, in fact, a reproduction of the original. The work that I viewed consists of four lithographic archival prints of the original paintings, which have been hand-signed, dated, and editioned by Dumas in pencil.

![Figure 3.43: Marlene Dumas, The Fog of War (Friendly Fire, The Fog of War, The Refugee, Collateral Damage), 2006. Lithograph on paper, 45 x 35 cm each, edition 66/80 (Martin et al 2007:49).](image)

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29 Exhibited at Gallery on 6th in Parkhurst, Johannesburg as part of a pop-up group exhibition called “Primavera”. The exhibition ran from 18 September to 6 October 2013 and included work by William Kentridge, Marlene Dumas, Cecil Skotnes, Anton Smit, Helena Hugo, Mbongeni Buthelezi, and Hilton Edwards.
The original set of four watercolour paintings has been photographed and reproduced as lithographs. These lithographs are authorised copies of the original work of art by Dumas. There are 80 copies in the edition, which determines that, unlike digital photographic reproductions which can be copied and reproduced endlessly, there are only a limited number of prints in the edition. The fact that Dumas has chosen to reproduce the original paintings of *The Fog of War* in a reproducible print medium raises the question of the authenticity of the original in printmaking practices. According to printmaking tradition, every item in an edition is an original, but when an edition of prints reproducing another work is undertaken, especially an original painting or drawing, then the prints are no longer originals, in a pure printmaking sense: they are now reproductions. This edition, however, would still be considered a limited edition, as a true limited edition usually consists of fewer than 100 prints (Berman 2014:[sp]). Benjamin (2008:12) states that “from a photographic plate, for instance, many prints can be made; the question of the genuine print has no meaning”. This begs the question as to whether all prints are originals, or whether they are all reproductions with no original. In the case of *The Fog of War*, there is an original work, so the lithographs are reproductions. The matter is complicated, however, by the fact that the reproduced lithographs are all signed, dated, and numbered by Dumas personally: the

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30 There is some discrepancy in the literature on this work as to whether the reproduced archival prints are lithographs or digital prints. According to Martin *et al* (2007:49), they are lithographic prints, and so for my purposes, I discuss them as lithographic prints.

31 In an interview with Kim Berman, Executive Director of The Artist Proof Studio, who has extensive experience of printing editions for Ergon Gunther, William Kentridge, Wim Botha and Mark Attwood, Berman stated that given the economics of the South African art market, South African print editions very rarely go above 80 prints, irrespective of printmaking medium (certain processes like Aquatint and Drypoint etchings would deliver smaller editions).
signature authenticates the works, but it does not make them originals, as they remain reproductions of the original watercolour paintings.

The lithographs that I viewed retained all the painterly qualities of what, I would imagine, the original works possess. On close inspection, the material and visual appearance of the lithographic prints is similar to that of the watercolour paintings in *The Next Generation*. The varied strokes and textures of the paintbrush, as well as accidental splashes of paint, are visible and preserved in the reproduction. However, while certain marks may be preserved in their material presentation as lithographs, I suspect that if I were able to see the print as an object, and turn the print over, as I was able to do with the works in *The Next Generation*, there would be no trace of any hand or making process on the back. Thus the phenomenological experience that I had with the object is replaced with a view of a surface only, which is hardly auratic in comparison to my haptic and bodily experience of *The Next Generation* at SANG.\(^{32}\) The sizes of the lithographic prints are the same as those of the original paintings. However, as Shiff (2008:147) explains in relation to photography, an important component is missing: the trace of the process of the painting being made, and the presence of the artist in the indexical marks on the surface, which cannot be transferred in the photographic reproduction. Shiff (2008:147) states that photography

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\text{stills a mobile view and represents the singular moment in all the detail available to human vision and even more, since it registers the visual beyond the physiological limitations of the eye. Beneath the surface of photographic emulsion, no traces of earlier states of the same image will be discovered, only the trace of the archival photographic moment.}
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The reproductions have been made to faithfully mimic the original, unlike reproductions of works of art in books and catalogues, where size reduction results in a loss of detail, colour and texture. The reproductions are even exhibited according to gallery conventions, as (if they were) the original works of art. Aline Saarinen (1961:14) raises the issue of the real and its copy by posing the following thought provoking question: “If a fake is so expert that even after the most thorough and trustworthy examination of its authenticity it is still open to doubt, is it or is it not as satisfactory a work of art as if it were unequivocally genuine?” This question posed by Saarinen is of significance to my study of auratic perceptions in that it questions whether the aura can be simulated through accurate, veristic mimicry.

\[^{32}\] Thus the ‘painterly qualities’ I thought were similar to those experienced in *The Next Generation* as auratic moments are substituted in *The Fog of War* with ‘printerly qualities’, which comparatively, have lost these auratic elements.
In my experience of Dumas' *The Next Generation*, the presence that I perceived in the paintings was determined by the physical traces on the surface of the page, which are indexical of Dumas' painting process. In my viewing of *The Fog of War*, however, the material traces and physical marks that I saw were removed from their indexical relationship to the artist's painting process, in that the work had been reproduced in a printmaking technique. The formal elements of the work, which had, in the case of my viewing of other artworks, contributed to my overall viewing experience, were now distant and inaccessible, in that they were reproductions of the original. In the case of these paintings, however, the relationship between the original and the reproduction is made more complex, in that the reproductions have been made to accurately mimic the original.

When considering the original works, and based on the fact that I have seen other watercolour paintings like this by Dumas, I am able to unpack where and how the aura of the original works might lie by analysing the printed reproductions. Two of the subjects in the set of portraits *Friendly Fire* and *The Fog of War* are blindfolded, while the subjects in the other two portraits, *The Refugee* and *Collateral Damage*, have their eyes closed. All four subjects are in a reclining position, which is evident by the angle of their disembodied heads. This is not a conventional pose in portraiture. None of the subjects make eye contact with the viewer, in a refusal of the gaze and a concealment of identity. Yet even without the subject’s acknowledgement of the viewer’s gaze, and a return of the gaze, the portraits might still retain a presence; and, as Hansen (2008:343) suggests, “the auratic return of the gaze does not depend upon the photographic subject’s direct look at the camera”. The painted subjects appear in an ambiguous state, where it is not clear whether they are sleeping or dead, as Bedford (2007:48) elucidates: “Marlene Dumas’s paintings of blindfolded prisoners and dead bodies, derived from media imagery of civilians in the Gaza Strip or caught in conflict in Iraq, are often rendered in such states of abjection that it is not always clear whether they are dead or alive.” Barthes (1981:78-79) comments on the paradox of photography in terms of the temporal processing of past and present:

> By shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead…. In photography the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric; and in the case of animated beings, their life as well, except in the case of photographing corpses.

Shiff (2008:146) explains that photography represents its subject without rearranging it into something that it is not, without making it metaphoric of anything. He explains that the corpse is an exception to this, because “photography certifies that the corpse is alive as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing – death metaphorically transformed into preserved life”. Shiff (2008:146) further notes that death
can be brought to life even more through painting, by acknowledging that “[a]n image does not necessarily distinguish between the living and the dead. There is a difference, however, between photography and painting as representational media. When the subject is death, painting is more alive than photography, because it contributes its own animation”. In the original works, the expressive manner in which Dumas has painted these four subjects, essentially animates them beyond their state of sleep or death, as Dumas (cited by Williamson 2009:220) states: “[A] painting must be alive…there is no use making a dead painting of a dead person.” While Dumas’ paintings might depict death in a state of living, she simultaneously affirms the transience of life itself, in a memento mori technique, as Bedford (2007:44) explains: “[T]he allusive properties of watercolour suggest the fugitive nature of life and the bleak circumstances of death.”

Each portrait has been treated in a different painterly style. Friendly Fire (see Figure 3.46) consists of light liquid washes and glazes, with areas such as the blindfold having been painted minimally, allowing the white of the page to constitute part of the painting. By contrast, Collateral Damage (see Figure 3.47) has been painted in an aggressive and vigorous manner, with harsh, dark, scumbled, and scribbled brushstrokes. The contrast between the method and the approach employed by Dumas in these two portraits, and between all four portraits, demonstrates Dumas’ emotional response to her subjects, revealing the way in which she animates her subjects’ presence beyond their state of sleep or death. According to Shiff (2008:162), “[i]n Dumas’s experience, making art about bodily sensations is very much a tactile matter – articulated by following one’s hand, often rather blindly, instead of comprehending by eye the fixed image of a codified expression”.

Figure 3.45: Marlene Dumas, The Fog of War (Friendly Fire, The Fog of War, The Refugee, Collateral Damage), 2006. Lithograph on paper, 45 x 35 cm each, edition 66/80 (photograph by author, used with permission).
Figure 3.46: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Fog of War (Friendly Fire)*, 2006. Lithograph on paper, 45 x 35 cm each, edition 66/80 (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.47: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Fog of War (Collateral Damage)*, 2006. Lithograph on paper, 45 x 35 cm each, edition 66/80 (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.48: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Fog of War (The Refugee)*, 2006. Lithograph on paper, 45 x 35 cm each, edition 66/80 (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.49: Marlene Dumas, *The Fog of War (The Fog of War)*, 2006. Lithograph on paper, 45 x 35 cm each, edition 66/80 (photograph by author, used with permission).
The four archival prints that I viewed, however, were framed behind glass (see Figure 3.45). The glass layer acted as a barrier in my viewing experience, in that ambient light, as well as reflections and refractions from the windows and spotlights in the gallery, interfered with the images by obstructing and visually fracturing them in areas (see Figures 3.46, 3.47, 3.48 and 3.49). These light interferences could be argued to compromise the aura of the work, as they prevent the work from being seen in its entirety, and viewers have to continually reposition themselves in relation to the work. Conversely, the aura of the work might be argued to thrive on the distance and unattainability created by the glass layer as a barrier, and the reflections that the glass creates, which makes the work less accessible to the viewer. However, all of this is no more than a false aura, an irritant, and this, along with the loss of the aura through ‘printerly’ marks makes hunting for the auratic point back to the remoteness of the original paintings.

3.2.4 Martha: Sigmund’s Wife, The Neighbour, and Occult Revival

As part of my research into the phenomenological experience of portrait paintings, I travelled to London and Amsterdam (18 April–4 May 2014), in order to view some of the most famous portrait paintings by renowned artists from the 13th century through to the present day. I visited the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the Tate Modern, the Tate Britain, and the Courtauld Gallery in London, as well as the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (SMA), the Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum, and Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam. The main aim of my research trip was, however, to keep an appointment that I had made to privately view paintings by Marlene Dumas, which are part of the Stedelijk Museum collection, and which are kept in an offsite storage depot that houses over 90,000 works. The depot is not near the Stedelijk Museum in the Museumplein, but in the western harbour area of Amsterdam, which is a 20-minute train ride from Amsterdam Central Station to Sloterdijk, followed by a 15-minute walk to the storehouse. The following brief description of my visit to the depot is included here as it describes a similar experiential remoteness and excitement which I described in section 3.2.2 regarding my Cape Town visit.

I made contact with Michiel Niejhoff, the team leader at the information centre at the Stedelijk Museum, who put me in contact with the head of the depot, Rolf Kat, in order to arrange an appointment to see the works in the collection on Wednesday 30 April 2014 at 10 am. I was sent a list of works by Dumas in the museum’s collection, as well as images and specifications of the works, prior to my visit. After
confirmation of my appointment, I was required to send identification to the warehouse management, who then informed security of the time and date of my appointment. On arrival, I was required to announce my presence to security over an intercom, and produce proper identification before gaining access to the storehouse. There were a few stringent rules that I was made aware of before my appointment, namely the following:

- Notes may only be taken with a lead pencil.
- Photography for personal use is allowed without tripod and without light.
- All instructions from SMA personnel need to be followed.

These strict rules and procedures contributed to the bureaucratic procedures that I had to endure to gain access to the depot, and I thus experienced an intense remoteness prior to my viewing of the works. This remoteness was enhanced by the geographical distance that I had to travel to view the works in Amsterdam; by the time I arrived at the depot I had taken three aeroplane flights and two train rides from South Africa. As discussed in relation to my trip to Cape Town to view The Next Generation, such geographical and emotional distance and remoteness is argued by Benjamin to contribute to the auratic. This remoteness was then countered by a physical closeness in my private viewing of Dumas’ paintings. Dumas (cited by Mbembe and Nuttall 2007:127) articulates that “[a] painting is something that you have to get up close to. To see, you have to get intimate. If a painting doesn’t change as you get closer, it is not a good painting”. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2007:127) explain that for Dumas, intimacy and seeing are the grounds of perception, and they state that “[c]ontrary to a language of critical distance, so often invoked as a condition of knowing, [Dumas] suggests that knowledge is to be found in closeness, can be articulated only in terms of the close-up”.

Verzotti (2012:17) asserts that in Dumas’ paintings “the meaning of the work depends largely on the process of viewing it”, and that “much is delegated to the observer’s interpretation”. After having viewed numerous portrait paintings in the many galleries and museums that I visited in London and Amsterdam, the most prominent aspect of my private viewing of Dumas’ paintings at the Stedelijk Museum storehouse was the spatiotemporal relationship that I was able to have with the paintings. The environment in which I viewed the paintings at the depot was in sharp contrast to that of the galleries and the museums. In the galleries the walls are painted dark, and the lighting is often intentionally dimmed, in order to preserve the pigments and surfaces of the paintings. The paintings are also framed (sometimes behind glass for preservation, making it difficult to see the works clearly, due to reflections on the glass which interfere with the image), and the large ornately decorative frames often distract
from the painting itself. These specific galleries and museums draw tourists in their numbers, and are generally always busy, which often makes it difficult to see the works, let alone contemplate them at leisure. Such an atmosphere is disruptive, and the exhibition spaces are crowded and sometimes noisy, with people pushing and bustling, which is not conducive to contemplation. I was very much aware of myself, my body, and those around me, and even when the spaces were not crowded, I could not get too close to the paintings, due to the boundaries that dictate a certain viewing distance in the galleries I visited. Furthermore, there are so many paintings to see, that it is overwhelming, and I often found myself moving quickly from one painting to the next, in an attempt to ‘see everything’.

All these considerations were thrown into sharp relief in my viewing experience of Dumas’ paintings at the storehouse, where I had time to engage with the works, as my appointment was not limited to a stipulated length of time, and there were not as many paintings to see. The time that I was given to contemplate the works at my leisure played a significant role in my viewing experience, and I found that the longer I contemplated the works, the more I noticed their material elements and presence. My experience of the intensity of the paintings would not have occurred had I viewed the paintings in a gallery. Furthermore, the space was large and uncluttered, and I was able to stand back to gain distance, as well as move closer to examine details within the paintings. The lighting conditions were also ideal, with bright fluorescent lights in the ceiling, and large windows in the wall adjacent to the paintings, allowing for natural light to filter into the viewing room. The works were hung on a grid attached to clean white walls (see Figures 3.50 and 3.51). I was conscious that the viewing conditions played a significant role in the presence of the paintings, and that the aura of each work was able to be experienced when I had sufficient time and space to perceive it, not a false aura created by the grandeur of a gallery, a large number of viewers, elaborate framing, artificial lighting, and an international location.
My visit to the depot in Amsterdam was a seminal point in my research, as there I was able to view large-scale oil-on-canvas portrait paintings by Dumas, as opposed to watercolour portrait paintings on paper and archival print reproductions in The Next Generation and The Fog of War, which I had viewed in Cape Town and Johannesburg, respectively. The other seminal aspect was that not only was I able to compare the original work to reproduced images that I had printed out and brought with me to the appointment, but I was also able to find the source material for some of these paintings, which enabled me to make a three-step comparison between the source images, the reproduced images, and the original paintings, as opposed to the two-step comparison that I had made between the reproduced images and my phenomenological experience of the original works in The Next Generation and The Fog of War.

The first painting that I examined was a large-scale portrait titled Martha: Sigmund’s Wife (1984) (see Figure 3.52). The photograph of Sigmund Freud’s wife, Martha Bernays (see Figure 3.51), which
Dumas used as the source material for her painting, appears in a collage titled Statements, which was a contribution by Dumas to the magazine Dutch Art and Architecture Today. According to Bedford (2007:35), “[m]any of [Dumas'] portraits from 1983 onwards explore complex subjectivities in relation to the discursive practices of psychoanalytic theory […]. Martha: Sigmund’s Wife confirms Dumas’s interest in the network of intimate relations around key theorists”. The scale of this painting is evident in the above photograph of me standing next to the painting (see Figure 3.50), where it can be seen that the head of the subject is three times larger than my own head, and the entire painting is two-thirds my height, which determined an encompassing embodiment when I viewed the painting at close range. However, while I was able to view the painting at close range, I could not see the painting in its entirety unless I stood back at a distance. As explained in section 2.1.2, Benjamin (2008:39) considers remoteness, and hence inapproachability, to be one of the principal contributing factors for the existence of auratic perception, and he maintains that the distance between the viewer and the work of art is what preserves the aura of the work. In my viewing experience of this painting, however, proximity trumped remoteness, and another perceived aura came into play, namely the physical, visceral and phenomenological materiality embodying the painting’s transgressive transcendence of its source. I thus argue that in this case, the aura occurs in the close propinquity between the painting and me as the viewer, and that it operates in the occluded space against which remoteness and utter proximity push. It is in this state of flux between closeness and remoteness that I argue the auratic to emerge.

Figure 3.51: Marlene Dumas, Detail from a collage titled Statements, in the magazine Dutch Art and Architecture Now, and source image for Martha: Sigmund’s Wife, 1982. Photograph of Martha Bernays (Sigmund Freud’s wife), size unknown (Martin et al 2007:29).

Figure 3.52: Marlene Dumas, Martha: Sigmund’s Wife, 1984. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm (Butler et al 2008:82).
In order to facilitate a comparison between the reproduced images of Dumas' portrait paintings, found in books and other sources, and what I saw when I viewed the paintings directly, I have included photographs that I took of the paintings, in order to illustrate the inherent differences. It should be noted that my photographs are still reproductions of the original works, and are therefore not a true reflection of what I saw. However, they are closer representations in terms of colour and certain physical and material details within the works than is the case with smaller reproductions. The photograph that I took of Martha: Sigmund’s Wife (see Figure 3.53) illustrates, among other things, the saturation of colour, which is lost in the reproduced image (see Figure 3.52). The most outstanding feature of this painting is the red area that occupies the nose and right side of the forehead. The images that I had studied of this painting did not prepare me for the intensity of the pure cadmium red patch on the subject’s face, which seemed to hover on the surface of the canvas, and which is warmer than the dirty crimson colour that I was expecting. Shiff (2008:158) states that “colour is an arbitrary mark that resists becoming a sign”. In this light the red patch does not describe or signify the colour of the subject’s skin, is not naturalistic, nor iconic, but rather symbolic and indexical, in that it references the act of painting itself and the trace of the artist’s thought process; it is inventive and exploratory, and it reveals Dumas’ investment in the notion of painterly painting.

Figure 3.53: Marlene Dumas, Martha: Sigmund’s Wife, 1984. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).
Notwithstanding the fact that I had studied these images as reproductions prior to viewing them in person, and that I was not seeing them for the first time, I was, in fact, experiencing them for the first time in person. I had preconceived ideas of what I was going to experience before I saw the works, based on having seen reproductions. This could be argued in two ways. The first is that the difference between prior seeing and the surprise of experiencing something vastly different from what I was expecting is what contributes to the auratic. The second is that the aura in the original work might be diminished through seeing a reproduction of the work first. I have experienced the latter when standing in front of some of the great masters’ paintings, which I have studied, and whose aura seems to precede them. An instance that stands out in my mind was when I visited the Louvre in Paris in 2008 and saw the original Mona Lisa (1503-6). I was disappointed at how small the work is, as I had imagined it to be much larger, perhaps as large as its reputation. I was also not able to see it clearly, as it was housed behind thick bullet-proof glass, and due to its reputation, it was surrounded by tourists with their cameras. This example seems clichéd, as many people have had a similar experience of the painting, yet this too affirms the notion that the work is built up in the mind of the viewer, leading to disappointment when the viewer finally sees the original work which does not live up to the aura of remoteness that has been established. I experienced similar disappointment with Rembrandt’s The Night Watch (1642) and Van Gogh’s Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat (1886-7), during my recent visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

In Martha: Sigmund’s Wife, Dumas has employed a diverse range of mark-making and shading, or toning modes, within the painting, from a flat application of pure hues to a soft modelling of forms. She has made use of all the canonical techniques of painting, namely Cangiante, Unione, Sfumato, and Chiaroscuro. Dumas has used Chiaroscuro in the bold contrast between dark and light, seen in the way the ghostly white face of the subject looms out of a heavy dark background. She has employed Cangiante, which is observed in the way she has changed the shadow around the left eye and nostril to a darker hue of blue, in spite of the milky white skin tone that she has assigned to the subject’s face (see Figure 3.53). This is done in order to render more vibrant tones in the shadows, as she could have added black to make the shadow under the eye grey. She has used Sfumato in the smoky or cloudy application of paint, seen around the left eye (see Figure 3.54), and particularly in the region of the mouth (see Figure 3.56). The mouth is out of focus and dissolves into a scumbled region of soft and fluffy textures, with very little delineation between the mouth, the chin, and the neck. Dumas has made use of Unione, seen in the way she has employed vibrant colour within her application of Sfumato, particularly around the left eye, where she has applied peach, blue, brown and red tones, which seem
to bruise the surface of the canvas. In my experience of the painting, the diverse painting modes that Dumas employs contributes to the aura of the painting, in that they held my interest and did not allow any sense of complacency in me as the viewer. As Butler (2008:45) explains, Dumas’ paintings require “the kind of engaged viewing that Laura Mulvey called ‘curious spectatorship,’ as opposed to a pensive or passive one”. Furthermore, the arbitrary and random organisation of different colours on the skin of the subject distorts the figurative and naturalistic form of the face, to the point of near abstraction. The placement of the saturated cadmium hue shape and the patchwork of smaller red characters around the eye (see Figure 3.55) do not follow the contours of the nose and face, but rather dissect the face into separate facets, and act as face paint, which sits on the surface of the face.

Dumas (cited by Butler 2008:44) affirms that for her “a good portrait conveys a point where attraction and alienation meet”. This push-and-pull relationship between appeal and repulsion evokes Julia Kristeva’s (1982:1-4) notion of the abject, which is something that is neither object nor subject, and it repulses desire violently. Kristeva (1982:1-4) defines abjection as our reaction to a menacing collapse in meaning, due to the blurring of boundaries between subject and object, or between self and other. Kristeva’s definition of abjection calls to mind Hansen’s (2008:351) suggestion that “[t]he aura is a medium that envelops and physically connects – and thus blurs the boundaries between – subject and object, suggesting a sensory, embodied mode of perception”. In this line of argument, abjection may be seen as evidence for the auratic, since, as Hansen (2008:339) states, “aura describes a cluster of meanings and relations that appear in Benjamin’s writings in various configurations and not always under its own name”.

According to Kristeva (1982:1-4), the abject is seen as a manipulator, subverting boundaries, conventions, and laws, and, in Kristeva’s (1982:4) words, “is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them”. Complementing this sense of abjection is the forceful and concentrated gaze of the subject, created through the use of colour, form, and mark-making. The left eye (see Figure 3.54) is blurred, bruised, and slightly tilted downwards to the left and conveys a sense of helplessness and pity, but the right eye (see Figure 3.55) is wild and animal-like, evocative of the stare of a predator. Her expression is thus ambiguous and troubled, as it is simultaneously pleading and threatening. Furthermore, while she appears dominating and powerful, with a sturdy frame, her shoulders are slumped, and she has no mouth with which to talk or scream, shout or whisper (see Figure 3.56). I found the work to be at once repulsive and alluring, due to the abject presence it
possesses, dense with aura. As explained in section 2.1.3, and pertinent to my study of locating auratic moments in specific portrait paintings that I have seen, touched, and experienced, Hansen (2008:342) advises that “the aura is not an inherent property of persons or objects but pertains to the medium of perception, naming a particular structure of vision (though one not limited to the visual)”.

Figure 3.54: Marlene Dumas, Detail from *Martha: Sigmund’s Wife*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.55: Marlene Dumas, Detail from *Martha: Sigmund’s Wife*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.56: Marlene Dumas, Detail from *Martha: Sigmund’s Wife*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).
As I suggested in my analyses of *The Next Generation* and *The Fog of War*, the indexical marks on the surface play an important role in the phenomenological experience of the work. The traces that Dumas leaves behind on the surface of her canvases (indices) have no physical resemblance to her, as they are not iconic. However, what these marks do testify to is the presence of the artist within the painting. The indexical marks, however, go further than merely signifying Dumas’ presence in her paintings; they also communicate and suggest possible emotional states or frames of mind. As previously suggested, through interpreting the marks made by Dumas, it is possible to interpret meaning in her work. Dumas (cited by Mark 2008:211) encapsulates this notion in her statement that

> The aim is to ‘reveal’ not to ‘display.’ [...] I am intimately involved with my subject matter… I am not disengaged from the subject of my gaze. With photographic activities it is possible that they who take the picture leave no trace of their presence, and are absent from the pictures. *Paintings exist as the traces of their makers and by the grace of these traces* [My italics].

The images below (see Figures 3.57 to 3.62) illustrate the variety of indexical marks and traces in specific moments within *Martha: Sigmund’s Wife*. A combination of textures and painterly modes is evident, from moments of thicker paint to areas of scumbling, where the surface of the canvas remains visible, with long dry strokes complemented by clusters of wet daubs, indicating a change in viscosity, pace, and movement. Areas where the paint has been scratched away are indicative of a sharp object, such as a palette knife or the pointed, wooden end of a paintbrush, having been used, while in other parts traces of bristles are visible, indicating the particular shape and size of the different paintbrushes that were used. Certain areas, such as the eyes, are painted up carefully, while other areas, such as the ear, are described with a single directional stroke of paint. The background, which appears flat in reproductions, is made up of a collection of long swathes that differ slightly in tone and colour and are juxtaposed by short, quick, horizontal brushstrokes running vertically like the rungs of a ladder. Shiff (2008:150) assigns agency to Dumas’ strokes, which he asserts “feel their way around” the various contours of a face on the canvas. He expands on this notion, explaining that by giving license to her strokes

> a certain subjectivity and even sentience to the material and physical components of representation, [occurs] as if they were leading the painter’s brush as well as following it. [...] The direction of Dumas’ brush, its vector, matters. With flowing strokes that reveal their material origin, she represents a model by imitating the feel of its form as much as the look.
My personal and phenomenological experience of the painting was one of embodiment, not only in terms of viewing, but also in terms of finding evidence of Dumas' physical and emotional investment in the painting process. For me, the auratic also resides in the indexical marks that are physically present, and which represent that which is no longer there, due to the trace of something and someone having-
been-there. My identification of auratic moments in the painterly marks is facilitated by the spatial and
temporal aspect of the index, and is informed by Benjamin’s notion that the aura exists in the
perception of space and time. The referent has is no longer present, and the brush that was used to
make the stroke is no longer in use. However, it has left in its place the mark, the trace, the index,
which exist in the here-and-now.

In contrast to Martha: Sigmund’s Wife, where the face of the subject looms out of a large, dark framing
background, the subject’s face in The Neighbour (2005) constitutes most of the format, and is cropped
at the top and bottom of the head. According to Mbembe and Nuttall (2007:128), “[i]n many of the
paintings the faces are larger than life-size, the effect being to increase the sense of abstraction. Any
background is eliminated, and the face is isolated in the foreground. This is the method of the zoom –
the movement of a lens that can bring a picture closer”. The portrait has been painted in soft, almost
monochromatic, tones, but, as is evident from the comparison between the reproduced image of the
painting (see Figure 3.64) and the photograph that I took of the painting (see Figure 3.65), the colour in
the work is not as visible in the reproductions. Even my own reproduction of the work does not faithfully
illustrate the pinky and peachy, beige tones with which Dumas has painted the portrait. However, they
are slightly more discernible than is the case in other reproductions.
The paint has been thinly applied, which is evident not only in the wash-like appearance of the surface, but also in the pencil marks that are visible on the nose, the ear, and the upper lip (see Figures 3.66 and 3.67), which are indexical of Dumas’ process of drawing the image onto the canvas first before painting it. She has not endeavoured to model these forms through building up the surfaces, but, rather, she subtly allows the mere suggestion of these facial features to describe their position and presence. Searle (2004) describes Dumas’ painted surfaces as follows:

> The relative thinness and brevity of her painted touch matters. What can be shown, or not shown, is embedded in the painting – in its lapses, in the spaces between an ear and a cheek, as much as in the articulation of an eye or a mouth.

Dumas has used muted colour in selected areas on the face, where pink tones show through the yellowish cream surface of paint. She has also applied a dirty cadmium yellow hue in thin linear strokes selectively around the left eye and she has built up the texture of the beard with blue daubs in between the black smears of paint, to create depth in the area of the face where one would expect a beard to be in a male portrait. In doing so, she has freed up the painterly process to transgress mimicry without losing the meaning of ‘beardness’ (see Figures 3.68 and 3.69). These indexical marks become
significant in the painting, as moments of articulation are sparsely interspersed in a field of relatively simplistic painting, leading to greater emphasis on the indexical marks, even though they are themselves not highly articulated. The auratic perception of the work lies in these indexical traces, as well as in the transgressive transformation from the source image (see Figure 3.63). In previous examples Dumas derived her source material from monochromatic images and subsequently supplemented her paintings with colour, whereas in this painting she has done the opposite. Dumas has intentionally deviated from the source image, which is a colour clipping from a German magazine, *The African Courier*, by painting *The Neighbour* in a highly contrasted and largely monochromatic technique.

Figure 3.66: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Neighbour*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.67: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Neighbour*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.68: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Neighbour*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.69: Marlene Dumas, Detail of *The Neighbour*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm (photograph by author, used with permission).
The Neighbour seems to be an ironic title for the work, as the subject in the source material for this painting is Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim extremist who murdered Dutch author, actor, columnist, film director, and film producer Theo van Gogh in 2004 (Wirtz 2014:sp); the man in Dumas’ painting appears vulnerable and incapable of assassination. The title could either allude to the fact that we are living among murderers, or could raise the question of what a murderer looks like. According to Laurens Wirtz (2014:sp), the subject’s frontal gaze is personal and humane, and he comments that “[i]nstead of looking into the eyes of the personification of evil, the viewer gets the feeling that this young man simply could be your neighbour”. According to Wirtz (2014:sp), Dumas exposes the ironies inherent in her paintings by undermining assumptions and undercutting prejudgets that viewers might develop from images seen in the press and the mass media. This work, in particular, would seem to suggest that an image of a man with a beard who has a Middle Eastern appearance is not a neutral one, even though Dumas has not depicted the subject in a negative context, and the general characteristics of the man reveal nothing about his personality or demeanour. If anything, the offender appears sympathetic, compassionate, and understanding in Dumas’ painting, with his head tilted slightly to the right, and his gaze meeting the viewer with directness, and even sincerity. Butler (2008:55) explains that the title and other formal elements within Dumas’ paintings “may hint at the subject's relationship to the artist but obscure it at the same time; Dumas’s titles are often playful or oblique and her paint handling frequently radically alters, even obliterates, her subjects' identities”.

By giving her painting of a cold-blooded murderer the title The Neighbour, Dumas highlights the difficulty inherent in interpretation, and the tension between what is seen and how it is construed. This semiotic mismatch recalls Dumas’ (cited by Shiff 2008:147) statement “it is not a child, it is a painting” (section 3.1.2), in that the painting is a representation of a man who resembles Bouyeri in iconicity alone. The notion of unpredictability in Dumas’ work creates a sense of conceptual instability, and it is in this volatility and space of flux between certainty and uncertainty that I argue the aura exists, particularly in light of Hansen’s (2008:339) statement that “it is this conceptual fluidity that allows [the] aura to become such a productive nodal point in Benjamin’s thinking”.

Such a semiotic mismatch is also evident in Occult Revival (1992) (see Figure 3.72), where the title suggests that the painting is in some way concerned with mystical, magical, and paranormal phenomena, and alludes to that which is not measurable or scientific. The title is ambiguous in relation to the painting, which does not seem to contain occult symbols, except for the geometric lines which
appear on the face of the male subject. These geometric lines form a pattern which, on close inspection, appears to be the first stages of the construction of a Sri Yantra (also known as the Sri Chakra) (see Figure 3.70), which is the oldest occult symbol, an object of devotion in Sri Vidya, and the symbol of Hindu tantra, which is founded on the Hindu philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism (Kak 2010:[sp]). Occult Revival is a diptych that was mediated by two Polaroid photographs (see Figure 3.71). In the reproduced images of the paintings (see Figure 3.72) in the book Marlene Dumas: Measuring your own grave (Butler et al 2008:98), the faces of the two subjects appear orangey-brown in complexion, whereas the paintings are much pinker when I viewed them in person, particularly the portrait of the female subject, which is, in fact, a self-portrait. The photographs that I took of the paintings (see Figure 3.73) show a change in colour from the reproduced images in the book to how the original paintings appear. The paintings actually have a limited palette of pinks and blues, with hints of pale yellow and white tones, and a deep, receding dark-blue background. The surfaces of the faces are made up of translucent, luminescent pink washes, which make the skin appear semi-transparent. The painting is remote, in that unless you view the painting personally, you do not see the pink tones. My familiarity with the reproduced image produced an auratic surprise when I was confronted with the almost neon-pink complexion of the subjects in the portraits, causing the aura to reside in the surprise, which is thus not auratic at all. This could be seen to be an example of a false aura in relation to the factual painting, but real in relation to my phenomenological and optical experience of the original work.

Figure 3.70: Sri Yantra, 2010. Vector diagram (Kak 2010:[sp]).
Figure 3.71: Marlene Dumas, Source image for Occult Revival, 1984-6. Polaroid photograph, 7.9 x 7.9 cm (Butler et al 2008:91).

Figure 3.72: Marlene Dumas, Occult Revival, 1992. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm each (diptych) (Butler et al 2008:98).
Figure 3.73: Marlene Dumas, *Occult Revival*, 1992. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm each (diptych) (photograph by author, used with permission).
According to Butler (2008:55), the verticality of *Occult Revival* “extend[s] the space of painting into some other phenomenological realm, confronting the viewer with boldness that seeks to share, if not threaten, both physical space and space of the memory”. Height and distance play a significant role in the aura of the work phenomenologically, and, as discussed in section 2.1.2, Dixon (2007:[sp]) expands on Benjamin’s concept of remoteness and aura by suggesting that height is seen to contribute to aura, because sight ultimately only operates at a distance. Due to the large scale of the individual paintings in the diptych, and the height created by one painting being banked on top of another, the viewer is required to either view the painting from a distance, or look up at it, contributing to the preservation of the distance, remoteness, and inapproachability of the work. My viewing of the work, however, was not of the two paintings in the diptych banked vertically, due to a lack of space and resources for hanging the works in the storeroom. The portrait of the female subject was hung on a grid against the wall, and the portrait of the male subject was placed next to, and slightly in front of, this portrait on a stand with wheels (see Figure 3.74). In light of what Butler suggests about the physical presence of the work being created by its height and the presence that it commands phenomenologically, it is probable that auratic presence was lost in my viewing the work in two separate pieces, both from the perspective of height, which would have contributed to the overall impact of the work, and the perspective of coherence, which was possibly lost as a result of the two paintings being separated, when the artist’s intention was that they should be read as one painting.

Figure 3.74: The viewing room at the Stedelijk Museum storehouse, Gyroscoopweg 15, 1042 AB Amsterdam, Netherlands. Image showing the manner in which the diptych Marlene Dumas, *Occult Revival* (female), 1992, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm and Marlene Dumas, *Occult Revival* (male), 1992, oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm was set up for my viewing (photograph by author, used with permission).
I was, however, arrested by the eyes of the female subject, whose piercing gaze seemed crazed and manic. The eyes take on a menacing appearance due to the bright pink highlight in the pupils, which is the same colour as the subject’s face, indicating that this area has been left unpainted. The unsettling appearance of the eyes is further enhanced by the complementary light-blue tone of the surrounding iris and the pale lemon yellow seen in the whites of the eyes (see Figures 3.75 and 3.76). The subject’s facial expression is distressing and chilling, yet at the same time coy, as if she is keeping a secret, perhaps the secret of hidden knowledge or knowledge of the hidden, which can be inferred from the title. The idea that she might be keeping a secret is confirmed by the ambiguous mouth, which appears sealed by a series of dark red-brown swathes of paint. The red lines that run across the male subject’s face, which interrupt the face and slice it into segments, and which also confirm the notion of the occult within the paintings, are much clearer and more dominant in the painting compared to what is seen in reproduced images. The dark backgrounds from which the portraits emerge are not flat and black, as they appear in reproductions, but are a combination of deep ultramarine-blue horizontal strokes. Similarly, the areas of greatest highlight, where light is cast on the sides of the subjects’ faces, have an electric-blue tinge, which is visible in the original paintings, but less so in the reproductions. These colour changes, as well as the other physical and material aspects of the work, contribute to a sense that physical transgressions in the paintings index a psychological threshold that likewise has been transgressed. In locating these transformations, which also takes the title into account, I am able to locate the auratic in this ambiguous work.

Figure 3.75: Marlene Dumas, Detail of Occult Revival, 1992. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm each (diptych) (photograph by author, used with permission).

Figure 3.76: Marlene Dumas, Detail of Occult Revival, 1992. Oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm each (diptych) (photograph by author, used with permission).
3.2.5 Conclusion

Verzotti (2012:25) speaks of colour and gesture as being the “vehicles for emotional intensity” in Dumas’ paintings, (transcendences, which I argue, are evidence for the auratic within her work) when he states:

Dumas’ figuration is one which seems to have its own rules broken from within, with the unrealistic use of colour, often spread in blotches of colour without any structural relationship with the figure or with the space described, with the highly synthesizing brushstrokes and the very liquid, fluid paint, especially in the works on paper, which seems literally to dissolve the figure at the moment that it is defined, or to make it into a ghostly apparition through an accentuated use of gesture.

The diverse combination of physical materiality that I observe on the surfaces of Dumas’ paintings creates an auratic perception, from a semiological perspective, in the personal and direct viewing of her paintings. With the vast range of indexical marks, from thick impasto textures to thin traces and washes, from wet, reflective, dripping surfaces to dry, matte, cracked surfaces, and the difference between heavily contrasted neutral chromatics and strongly saturated hues, from blended tones to harshly demarcated shapes, all contribute to the aura that I perceived in each of the works. Shiff (2008:150) explains that “[e]ach element plays its part in creating the whole but remains relatively distinct. Looking at a painting or drawing by Dumas, you feel that you can count the separate marks that made it”. Verzotti (2012:25) further describes the formal elements of colour and gesture as producing a “vital energy” that emanates from Dumas’ paintings, stating:

Colour and gesture are the vehicles of an emotional intensity; you could say that there is a vital energy emanating from Dumas’ images [...] The image is defined by and immersed in the vitality of the painting, which does not lose its tension even when the gesture erases, softens and liquefies, removing the recognisable signs.

I propose that what Verzotti observes to be “vital energy” denotes presence, or aura, within Dumas’ paintings. However, it is not only the physical materiality in Dumas’ paintings that creates an auratic perception, in my experience, but also the metaphysical aspects of the paintings, which are liberated phenomenologically. In an interview conducted for the Sorte exhibition in Milan in 2012, Alessandra Klimciuk (2012:93) asked Dumas whether there was any relationship between the physical and the metaphysical elements in her work. Dumas (cited by Klimciuk 2012:93) responded by stating that “[a]ll artworks partake in this dilemma, but some artists are more concerned with this than others. Be it about the non-material dimension of time and the physical dimension of space, or the tension between the artwork as material object and the immaterial subject matter thereof”. The ambiguous interplay between
physical and metaphysical elements, which Dumas speaks about in relation to her paintings, is a space within which the auratic might manifest. Abstract concepts, such as ‘knowing’ and ‘being’, as well as the phenomenological concepts of time and space, form the foundation of Benjamin’s notion of the auratic, and are aspects that contributed to my perception of the auratic in Dumas’ paintings. Dumas (cited by Klimciuk 2012:93-94) speaks of the “special coming together of circumstances when a painting feels as though it suddenly ‘works’”. Dumas (cited by Shiff 2008:150) also alludes to the metaphysical and phenomenological aspects of feeling something intangible in the act of viewing her paintings, when she states that “[t]he contemplation of the work (when it ‘works’) gives a physical sensation similar to that suggested by the work”.

In the following chapter, which is an explication of my body of paintings that have been mediated by photographic sources, I explore the manifestations of trace and indexicality in terms of the visual translations, transgressions and transcendences that the paintings have over the source material from which they were derived. I focus my discussion on the deliberate shifts inherent in my paintings, which have been purposefully transformed from their sources.
CHAPTER 4: Familiar faces: 
An explication of my own work

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explicate the practical component of my research, which consists of a body of portrait paintings produced for an exhibition. These portrait paintings have been mediated by digital photographic images as my source material, and include small instantaneous studies, large laboured surfaces of acrylic and oil on canvas, as well as ink on paper, methodical and calculated investigations, intuitive and highly expressive explorations, grouped works which act as series, as well as digital installations. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the translations and manifestations of trace and index of mark-making on the surface of these paintings, and the visual transgressions from, and transcendences of the paintings over their photographic sources. The source material is an important part of my process, and thus appears in various modes throughout the exhibition. This chapter is an explanation of the methodologies that I employ in my painting process, as well as an analysis of my paintings in terms of their conceptual meaning, which is created through the materiality of the paintings. As it is not my intention to locate the auratic in my own paintings, I centre my explication on the conscious and intentional changes between my paintings and the source material from which they are derived; changes which I consider to be transformative and transgressive. I interrogate my own painting process in light of what I have learned through my analyses of Dumas’ work. I contend that my portraits, like those of Dumas, do not sit comfortably within the conventions of portraiture, or abstraction, and thus open up a painterly space, where transgressing the photographic sources exploits intuitive processes which have the potential for visual disharmony.

I make use of two parallel methodologies in the making of my body of paintings. The primary methodology that I employ is exploratory research, where my painting process involves an intuitive and phenomenologically generative exploration of materiality. The secondary methodology that I employ is that of praxis, where the theoretical underpinnings of my research directly support my body of practical work, and the painting process employed in my body of work thematically links the practical component to the theoretical investigation of my larger study. This secondary methodology involves a less spontaneous approach, and is more organised, rational, and calculated. These two methodologies, with their different degrees of spontaneity, are explored at different times throughout my body of work. I
explore difference in terms of materiality, where different techniques and approaches to building an image are employed, resulting in markedly different modes of painting. The first mode that I explore in my explication of my paintings is one of liquidity, which entails a liquid finding and distilling of the image, while the second mode that I explore is one of relational aesthetics and touch, which involves density of paint and impasto.

The tone of my writing in the explication of my paintings is consciously reflexive, descriptive, and less formal in comparison to that of the previous chapters, in that I provide explanations of my painting processes and procedures in an almost step-by-step manner, and I provide insight, where I consider it to be informative, into the personal and affective conceptual meanings of my paintings. While I explicate the personal meanings of the portrait paintings in this chapter, I am also aware that each person that views my paintings will have a different perception of them and will create their own connotations, which will arise from their own set of associations and contexts. Thus, while I provide personal insight into what the paintings signify for me, I am open to the notion of the ‘death of the author’, which Federico Freschi (2014:sp) describes by stating that “the artwork will always assume meanings and interpretations beyond the expectations or intentions of the artist”, and “the ‘true’ meaning of the work resides in this discursive, highly subjective space of interpretation”.

I began to derive my paintings from photographic source images as a practice early in my undergraduate studies, due to the convenience of using photographic images rather than live models, which developed into a passionate engagement for me. Ironically, I began to feel liberated by the boundaries that photographic images possess; conceivably, I require those boundaries in order to ultimately transgress the limitations that they present. As an expressive painter, painting the figural (the human form, and the face) was a natural path for me. Willem de Kooning (cited by Lanchner 2011:16) once stated that “[f]lesh was the reason oil paint was invented”. The corpus of paintings that I produced for my undergraduate studies explored the face and facial features, specifically my own, by means of expressive painting techniques. These factors have collectively led to my practice of painting expressive portraits from photographic images.

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33 It is not within the scope of this study to unpack Nicolas Bourriaud’s (2002:113) more complex ideas of relational aesthetics in art, which he proposes encompasses “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context”. My paintings are rather an exploration of my personal and familial relationships with my subjects and are perceptions of my intimate understandings of family members and friends.
There is a fine line between resemblance and abstraction in my portrait paintings. The face is the part of our bodies that most distinguishes us from other people; each individual has unique facial features, which produce unique facial expressions. The face may even be regarded as an indexical sign of an individual’s personality, as facial expressions index an individual’s emotions, but for the purposes of my study I am invested in the notion of what happens when I transgress my photographic sources by losing a degree of likeness through abstraction. While it is my intention to capture degrees of likeness in my portraits, I do not attempt to paint realistic or naturalistic portraits, focussing rather on spontaneous studies that capture a phenomenological ‘something’ about my subjects. What lies beneath the exterior of each individual’s unique facial expressions and features are their unique minds, personalities, characters, and identity. It is from here that the expressive abstraction in depictions of my subjects arises in my portrait paintings.

Thoughts and emotions make up the intangible essence of an individual. Thus, where there is a denotative descriptiveness that is not necessarily a likeness in my portraits, such as through the use of mark and colour, it is a response to the being beneath, inside, or behind the face itself. My expressive layers of paint on the canvas consequently become the substitutes for the external layers of skin on my subjects. These painterly ‘skins’ reveal something about a subject’s essence and being, unlike the anatomical, dermal layers that cover the body, and which do not reveal anything about the individual’s personality. If these marks, brushstrokes, colours, and modes of painting become substitutes for the personality, character, identity, and essence, of a subject, the question may then be posed as to why it is important that I paint faces at all. As Joni Brenner (2014:47) elucidates, a portrait “involves multiple subjectivities and then exists in its own right as a material object”, and it “can be read as an object and as a standing-in-for a subject”. By evoking this statement by Brenner, I contend that it is in the liminal space between the external appearance of the unique facial features, expressions, and physiognomy of the subject and their inner being, character, and personality that I attempt to find a balance. This balance also exists somewhere between portraiture’s iconic, indexical, and symbolic roles, and is where the two constituents of the inner and the outer come together, which brings to mind the ambiguous interplay between physical and metaphysical elements of which Dumas speaks in the conclusion of my last chapter. The physical presence of the subject in my portraits, which requires a personal relationship with my subjects, is essential, and subjectivity and perception of both the exteriority and interiority of my subjects are thus key in my portraits. Hence, unlike Dumas, who draws inspiration from a range of subjects and sources, I only work from images (which I have either taken myself or have
downloaded from social media sites) of people that I know intimately – family members, and close friends.

My paintings are primarily concerned with materiality, colour, and mark, and, as a result, the way in which I paint my subjects is just as important as the subjects themselves. My subjects are, however, my inspiration to paint the way I do, as these paintings are “true” portraits of people that I know deeply and intimately. According to Richard Brilliant (1997:19), “[p]ortraits owe their high reputation and enormous popularity to their unique subject matter and to the intensity of the viewer’s engagement with the portrait image at a much deeper level of personal involvement and response than is usually encountered in the experience of visual images”. In this light, my practice goes beyond trying to capture the likeness of a subject, and often moves towards encapsulating what I consider to be the essence, or being, of a character. I physically translate a glimpse of certain perceived aspects of my subject’s corporeal and essential personhood from my personal point of view. The essence of my subjects is shown through material and substance, and through revealing and hiding personal relational elements. A photograph reveals little about a subject’s personality in comparison to a painting. Photography’s two-dimensional, iconic resemblance to its subject cannot achieve what a painting is able to do in terms of revealing the essence and being of the subject in physical, indexical terms. Sean O’Toole (2014:31) explains how a photograph with a poor quality of likeness loses its “aura of transparency”, but that even when a photograph offers a fine quality of likeness, “[p]hotographs are never truly transparent”. O’Toole’s use of the word “transparent” refers to the act of revealing in portraiture, which I contend, painting is better equipped to do than photography. Furthermore, expressive portrait painting is better equipped to reveal personhood, or presence, through the relationship between painterly surface and the translation of subject matter.

Painterliness is a tool or vehicle in my painting process of revealing and concealing relational aesthetics and identity as an attempt to balance the slippery area between outward appearance and inner personality. There are some paintings in my oeuvre where the portrait does not act as a vehicle for representation in terms of likeness at all, and the subjects are unrecognisable in terms of iconic

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34 These portraits are true to me, as truth ultimately depends on individual perception. The portraits are true, in that they do not merely present a capturing of likeness, as is the case in conventional portraiture, but they present my perception of a person as a ‘whole’. Some of these portraits might be difficult for friends or family members to see, and certain tensions exist as a result of the way in which I have depicted them.

35 As the chapter unfolds, I discuss the concept of hiding certain physiological elements in order to reveal emotional qualities through painterly marks, where a likeness is replaced by expressive mark-making, in order to convey the perceived essence of a subject.
resemblance, but my perception of their personhood is revealed through the use of colour or mark, and shapes or forms serve as inspiration for free exploration of materiality and substance on the canvas. Another tool that I employ in the act of revealing or concealing the identity or personality of my subjects is the conscious act of titling. Some of my portraits are given names as their titles (in the historical tradition of portraiture), others are titled by the relationship that the subject has to me, while others are given more abstract titles. These different modes of titling act to either support or disrupt the identity of the subject.

My entire working process is one of exploration and experimentation. I do not necessarily know what a painting will look like when I begin, and I often change the direction of a painting midway through the process. I do, however, make certain colour decisions at the outset. I work predominantly in analogous hues of colour, grouping like colours, such as yellows, oranges, and reds, or a range of greens or blues, to form a particular palette for a painting. In addition, I often pair complementary colours, such as orange and blue, as my dominant colour palette in a work. I usually zoom in on my subjects, so that the face takes up most of the format of the canvas. I disregard the negative space surrounding my subjects in terms of pictorial backgrounds or perspectival spaces, but treat these areas as flat spaces, which are consciously two-dimensional, and occupy the same plane as the subject. Alternatively, I glaze these areas, so that they recede as dark spaces, from which the subject looms. If I detect that a painting is not working, I might pour turpentine or linseed oil on it, or wipe off the surface layer of paint, to see if something new emerges through the process of chance. I am not precious about my work, and as a result, I have produced a large body of work consisting of 80 paintings of various sizes, some of which will be analysed and explicated in this chapter. Painting for me is a way of thinking: I think through painting as an active way of problem solving and doing, rather than planning beforehand. There is thus an element of surprise in the finished pieces, as I do not necessarily know how works will ultimately turn out. I allow for chance in the way liquid moves and changes the forms as they dry. I often start with ink drawings, as a warm-up exercise, or I do small ‘throw-away’ studies on canvas sheets (see Figure 4.1).
My lack of preciousness in my paintings also yields consciously ‘ugly’ surfaces and relationships that construct tensions which might be considered to be unresolved, visually difficult, or formally uncomfortable. This brings to mind Kristeva’s (1982:1-4) notion of abjection relying on the tension between attraction and revulsion discussed in section 3.2.4 in relation to Martha: Sigmund’s Wife. My process thus also allows these moments to remain in this state, without bending to a desire to resolve, or clean up, certain relational elements. My paintings are situated on the outer fringe of the convention of portraiture. My painting practice is inventive and exploratory, and I purposefully resist my own methods becoming canonical modes of working. I intentionally alter and change the way in which I wield my brush or apply my paint, in an attempt to render each portrait as a unique study of a unique subject. I endeavour to steer each painting to be different, not only from the photographic source image from which it is derived, but also from the previous painting, in terms of technique and method. I work rapidly, and often in a state of frenzy, working on multiple paintings simultaneously as I find satisfaction.
in the immediacy of the process of painting. My studio often becomes somewhat of an obstacle course, as I paint on many surfaces at the same time, with very little space in which to move works around on the floor (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). I surround myself with source material images, as well as images of the work of other artists, as a constant source of inspiration (see Figure 4.4), however, I do not copy my sources directly. My process is very much a bodily one, where I crouch over large canvases and move quickly up and down and around the works. I work from the easel to the floor: I might start a painting on the easel and then move it to the floor to work liquid surfaces over previously painted surfaces. Hence, it is not a sedentary process, but an active and a physically embodied involvement.

Figure 4.2: Studio space. 2014 (photograph by author).  
Figure 4.3: Studio space. 2014 (photograph by author).
For each of the paintings that I discuss and analyse in this chapter, I have included the source image from which the painting was derived, regardless of whether I refer to the image directly in the text. These source images are often crumpled, creased, and torn, and are usually marked by paint stains, splatters, and brushstrokes, typically in the colours that I have used in the respective painting. The state of my source images indexes the haptic relationship that I have with them during my process of painting, as well as their ultimate purpose as source images in my process. The photographs that I use as source material are in no way auratic, as their purpose is not one of exhibition or cult value, but rather, they act as starting points which offer direction and inspiration. I do, however, either take or choose my photographic source material with a painting in mind, and thus I select or choreograph photographs with a particular pose, or from a particular point of view, when planning a particular painting. I employ the photographs that I use as documentary sources to help mediate an understanding of how to paint certain forms and features, such as a nose, a mouth, or eyes, from a particular direction, or in a particular pose, in my portraits.

It must be acknowledged that there is always an infinite number of possibilities in terms of the direction that each painting can take, and for each painting I must accept a particular path. Some of my paintings
have even been through many different iterations before they materialise in their final state. During my painting process, I often experience an internal battle between myself and my source material, which stands in for the ‘sitter’ of conventional portraiture. I struggle with certain limitations that come with representing people that I know intimately, as they do not want to see themselves eviscerated or distorted in a way that they might find disturbing or unsettling. As these portraits probe my relationships with people, I have to contend with the fact that my subjects might question my perception of them. There is an unequal power relationship between my subjects and me, in that they are not present as the sitter in my painting process, but have been substituted by a photographic image. The power relationship is also unequal in that I determine how my subjects are represented, due to the fact that they do not have a say in how they appear and whether they deem the portrait to be an appropriate (i.e. flattering) likeness, as was the case historically with commissioned portraiture. As Fred Phaswana (2014:7) elucidates, “[t]he sitter looks back, wondering what the artist sees and whether he or she will intuit and express, expose or mark the personality that lies hidden beneath the physical features”. There have also been instances where I have painted a portrait of someone from a photograph that I have downloaded from a social media site, and I have felt somewhat uncomfortable, yet at the same time empowered. As I study the photograph and caress the subject into being on my canvas, intimately depicting my perception of the individual, I have been struck with the thought that my subject might not be aware of the fact that I am painting them, in that moment, in their absence, and that I am liberating a perceived presence of my subjects through their absence.66 Barbara Freemantle (2014:21) explains that ambiguity manifests when portraits depict both presence and absence, and according to Ernst van Alphen (1997:248), “portraits need not only represent a presence but may also be signifiers of absence”.

Since I ultimately cannot detach myself from my process of painting my subjects, I argue that my portraits are all, to some degree, self-portraits, in that my style, mode, technique, and process of painting are embedded in the physicality of the paintings, in some cases more so than any resemblance or likeness to my subject. All my paintings may be regarded as indexical signs of my existence, my having-been-thereness, as well as of the thinking mind that controls the movement of materials on the surface of the painting. My paintings index my relationships with my family and friends, as well as my relationship with myself. They are traces that act as clues to my inner cognitive and

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66 In order to not fall foul to any ethical concerns, both in terms of a broader body politic and also within the narrower concerns of ethical clearance for my study, I have only painted portraits of friends and family, and I have received permission from each person.
emotional states and frames of mind during my painting process, and they are clues that index a probing into the personalities and characters of my subjects.

4.2 Slipping and glimpsing

The paintings that are grouped in this section involve a liquid distilling of the image. The portraits are arrested in their state of liquidity, flux, and liminality. The surfaces of the paintings crack, percolate, and shift during the drying process, and chance is thus allowed to act upon and change these surfaces. The act of painting is problematised by the level of control that I have over the liquid surfaces, and by the resultant abstraction of forms. Some of the portraits in this section are on the brink of disintegration, where presence is held back from decomposition, and arrested in a state of liquid liminality.

4.2.1 Mother, Brother, Me

Mother, Brother, Me (2013) (see Figure 4.5) is a triptych of three large-scale portraits that have been mediated by photographs of my mother, my brother-in-law, and me (see Figure 4.6). The triptych is made up almost entirely of primary and secondary colours, which are employed as non-illustrational indices for flesh. These bright and unrealistic colours also index my intention for the paintings to markedly transgress their photographic sources, and thus serve as indices of my cognitive decision making. The colours and marks feed off each other, and as a result, the whole (the triptych) is greater than the sum of its parts (each individual painting).

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37 This is given particular focus in section 4.3, in the analysis of relational aesthetics in Father, Grandmother and Fairest of Them All.

38 I use the term “liminality” to exclusively describe the physical surfaces of my paintings and to describe the materiality of the runny paint on the canvas where states of flux are arrested when the paint dries.
The portraits possess a liquid dryness, which is a result of the process that I employed in making them. I started this process by painting the flat backgrounds (underpainting) with acrylic paint, which dries plasticised, and thus serves as a base on which to paint my next layer. Once the base layer of acrylic had dried, I began demarcating the contours of the faces loosely with oil paint, which I diluted by adding linseed oil. I then used turpentine to manipulate and move the paint around on the canvas, by dripping it or pouring it in areas. The oil and the turpentine are immiscible, and do not mix straight away. As a result, where the turpentine repels the oil paint and linseed oil mixture, blotchy textures are created.
The light tones in the portraits are achieved by leaving the flat acrylic base colour to show through, and I sometimes control these areas by blowing the oil paint mixture around on the canvas with my mouth, and physically manipulating the canvas to control the flow of the diluted mixture. The darker tones are achieved by building up denser areas and using darker colours of the liquid oil paint. The liquid texture of the diluted, runny mixture of paint is arrested on the surface of the painting when the turpentine evaporates and the linseed oil dries. The textured swirls, blotches, and cracks index the oil paint and linseed oil repelling each another, as well as my manipulation of this repulsion.

Because of the liquid nature of the diluted paint and turpentine that I use, I painted these portraits on the floor. This, however, presented some difficulties in the painting process: it was difficult to reach certain areas of the painting, since the canvases are large in size, and it was also difficult to see what the portraits looked like because of the foreshortening and distortions created by the large canvases on the floor. I therefore took photographs of the paintings from above during the process, in order to check proportions and tones. The liquid nature of the material also determined that I had to leave the canvases on the floor to dry, which meant that I could not see the paintings properly until they were completely dry and I could turn them upright. The paintings took on a life of their own as the materials continued to repel one other and move on the canvas, distorting the paintings in a chance manner, and adding to the element of surprise when I was able to view the paintings upright.

I wanted these paintings to constitute a series, and I thus went through a process of decision making in terms of colour for all three of them. The first portrait I painted was the self-portrait (right). I intuitively decided on a warm palette of a cadmium yellow medium hue for the background layer, and crimson and Vandyk brown for the subsequent layer, in which I built the form of the face. I used swatches of primary and secondary colours to then determine what the palettes of the remaining two paintings would be (see Figures 4.7 to 4.9), and I came to the decision to use the lighter colours of green and orange, based on the aesthetic consideration that I wanted the second layer to be darker in all three paintings. I paired the orange background with blue, and the green one with purple, resulting in the paintings together being made up of all three primary colours and all three secondary colours.
The portraits give the impression of ephemerality, of being captured in a fleeting moment, where nothing is fixed or permanent, and they appear to be in a state of transience and liminality. They emerge as impressionistic snapshots due to the liquid materiality of the paint on the surface, and the way the paint blurs certain moments of each painting. This is particularly evident in the self-portrait, where the sweeping movement of the fluid paint in the lower left register moves into the mouth and pulls some of the mouth with it in its sweeps. Speckles and dots, which index the turpentine splatters that I dripped on the paintings, create the texture of the skin in the portraits. The hair of the female subjects in the two outer portraits has been built up with fingermarks/strokes, which index the fact that I used my hands, and not a paintbrush, to apply the paint on the surfaces. Similarly, the texture of the beard in the male subject is not illustrational but, is created through the medium, namely the drips and texture of the paint itself. In the left portrait, the female subject has paint running from her mouth, which could resemble a beard, and there are blotches of ultramarine-blue paint on her skin that do not necessarily describe the contours of her face, but are purely painterly. In the same way, the purple paint, which is used in the middle portrait to describe facial features, also creates organic shapes in
localised areas, which sit on the surface of the face, and do not follow the structure of the facial contours. The form and structure of the nose are broken down where a river of turpentine interrupts and disrupts the nose. The eyes are mismatched in the right self-portrait, where one eye is much darker than the other, indexing my conscious decision to shift the image away from the mediatory photographic source by prompting transformations and transgressions in the painting. The lack of physical density of paint in the triptych, which adds to the ephemerality of this series, is compensated for by optical density, in terms of the heavy contrast between the light and the dark areas within the paintings.

4.2.2 Disembodied Selfie

Similar in style and approach to Mother, Brother, Me is Disembodied Selfie (2014) (see Figure 4.10). The painting is derived from a selfie photograph that I downloaded and printed from a friend’s Facebook profile picture (see Figure 4.11). Selfies are photographs taken by the subject of themselves, with a hand-held digital camera, phone, or tablet. These self-portrait photographs are typically shared on social network sites. Freemantle (2014:27) explains that these photographs are “often casual, taken at arm’s length, which creates the typical selfie perspective (an uneven, asymmetrical composition with distorted foreshortened facial features (usually the nose), and often with the arm being visible), or a mirror reflection”. These photographs are the equivalent of the snapshot Polaroid photograph, in that they are immediate, portable, and easily produced. However, these images are not often printed, and they exist on screen-based devices, and so by printing this selected selfie, I have placed it in a realm that is similar to the function of the Polaroid. In Disembodied Selfie, I have omitted the subject’s shoulders and bust, which are typical characteristics of the selfie, so that the head hovers, rather uncomfortably, from the bottom of the horizontally orientated canvas.

Unlike the dry liquidity in the previous example, this portrait has a shiny gloss finish, which seems to arrest the painting in its wet state. The wetness and liquid nature of the work also evokes the gloss finish of the photographic image, and it evokes the liquid process of developing analogue photographs. Unlike the previous examples, where I painted each entire canvas one flat colour, and then painted over that, in Disembodied Selfie I painted the negative space around the head yellow, and then added washes of brown acrylic over the demarcated area of the face, to create a degree of toning, before

39 The decision to paint the space around the head yellow was inspired by the aesthetic appeal of Dumas’ The Benefit of the Doubt (Bedford 2007:40), which is a series of monochromatic portraits painted on yellow backgrounds.
applying the final liquefied black oil paint layer, resulting in a sepia skin tone. I allowed the black liquefied oil paint to transgress the boundary of the head and bleed into the yellow negative space that surrounds it, so as to disrupt and destabilise the form of the head, particularly in the lower left register, while in other areas, such as the top right register, I controlled the contour more carefully.

The notion of disembodiment in *Disembodied Selfie* is emphasised by the fact that the head is presented to the viewer upside down. The work is not just exhibited upside down, but it has been painted on the floor, where I painted the subject from all angles, often standing on the side of the painting, where I viewed it upside down. The mode of displaying the painting, on its head, is a conscious transgression of the conventions of portraiture. My upside-down display of this work can be seen to reference Neo-Expressionist painter Georg Baselitz, who was renowned for his upside-down paintings (Gagosian Gallery 2012:[sp]). By inverting his subjects, Baselitz emphasises the pictorial structure of painting over the subject matter, highlighting form and painted surface as his main focus (Franzke 2009:[sp]). Baselitz’s act of turning his portraits, landscapes, buildings, and bodies upside down confuses the viewer and it does not allow any complacency or contentment. This is similar to the intention that informs my upside-down portrait. In my portrait, however, the orientation and image are problematised by the act of making the portrait from all sides, and the fact that I did not have a particular orientation in mind when I painted the portrait.
4.2.3 Red Pill, Blue Pill

Red Pill, Blue Pill (2014) (see Figure 4.12) is an example of the more intangible and ethereal paintings in my body of work, where I have allowed the paint to move and transcend the recognisable contours and features of the face, to the point of near abstraction. The paintings scarcely resemble their source images (see Figure 4.13a&b), as I sought to discover what would be revealed when the paint was less rigorously manipulated, and I endeavoured not to control the medium to the extent that I did in Disembodied Selfie. The diptych’s two-toned palette consists of process cyan and vermillion, which I used to oppose and counter each another, optically and conceptually. One portrait (left) is painted in blue on a red background, and the other portrait (right) is painted in red on a blue background, resulting in the pair appearing as positive and negative images, respectively. As discussed in relation to Dumas’ The Jewish Girl and Jule-die Vrou, blue and red have markedly different psychological effects on the brain. The colour red in Western society is associated with heat, danger, or caution, such as is the case with stop signs, traffic lights, markings or corrections in red pen, emergency vehicles, and emergency buttons, while the colour blue has a more tranquil and calming effect, as it is associated with coolness, the sky, the ocean, and water. The two primary colours, blue and red, are not directly opposite each another on the colour wheel, however, vermillion is close to orange, and orange and cyan are near-complementary colours, due to their slight variations from their natural primary hues. These two colours thus fight for attention and dominance in the paintings.

The title of the work references the 1999 Wachowski Brothers film The Matrix, where the protagonist, Neo, is given the choice between a blue pill, which will allow him to live in the “illusion of ignorance”, or a red pill, which will lead to the “truth of reality”, alluding to Baudrillard’s theory of Simulacra (The Wachowski Brothers 1999). The red pill and the blue pill are symbols. They are not iconic, nor are they indexical of that which they symbolise, and their meaning has no physical or aesthetic relationship to the signs for which they stand, yet they have come to symbolise in popular culture, and particularly through the Wachowski Brothers’ cult trilogy, the choice between facing reality or burying one’s head in the sand. The portraits are semi-profiles, and they face away from each another, metaphorically emphasising the fork-split paths of each decision. Each canvas, however, includes both colours, and thus symbolises the blurring of boundaries between binary opposites, questioning the notion of the real, particularly in relation to representation, as these portraits are not mimetic of their source images, and they transgress likeness and iconic faithfulness. These dichotomies between illusion and truth correlate
with the dichotomous relationships, in my painting process, between photography and painting, and between fidelity and transgression.

Figure 4.12: Jenny Pomeroy, Red Pill, Blue Pill, 2014. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 153 x 101 cm (photographs by author).

Figure 4.13a: Source image for Red Pill, Blue Pill, 2012. Photograph, 21 x 15 cm each (photograph by Dana Cato, used with permission).

Figure 4.13b: Source image for Red Pill, Blue Pill, 2009. Photograph, 21 x 15 cm each (photograph by Dominic Giampaolo, used with permission).
I liken this particular painting process, and, indeed, my entire process of painting, to Willem de Kooning’s notion of slipping and glimpsing. As mentioned, I never quite know how a painting will turn out, and I am thus in a constant state of slipping and glimpsing, a state of uncertainty and instability, but at the same time exhilaration, when painting my portraits. De Kooning referred to himself as a “slipping glimpser” in the following animated statement of his:

Each new glimpse is determined by many, many glimpses before […] Because when I’m falling, I’m doing all right; when I’m slipping, I say, hey, this is interesting! […] As a matter of fact, I’m really slipping, most of the time, into that glimpse. I’m like a slipping glimpser.

(De Kooning, cited by Stevens & Swan 2006:569)

The idea of slipping is further relevant, in particular in my wet paintings, where the materiality of the paint is literally slippery, and the mixture of turpentine and oil paint physically slides and slips without my being able to control it, or necessarily wanting to control it. Glimpsing becomes particularly relevant in the more abstract paintings in my body of work, where the faces of my painted subjects are not clearly discernible, yet the viewer (and myself as the maker) are allowed glimpses and moments of recognition within the paintings, countered by other moments of confusion and distortion. Furthermore, I am not able to see what the portraits look like until they are dry, when I can turn them upright. So, during the painting process, I am essentially only glimpsing.

4.3 Material personhood

The paintings in this section are unpacked and discussed in terms of their relational aesthetics. In each of these portraits, the personhood of the subject is shown through my perception, be it a conscious decision or an unconscious feeling. I use painterliness as a vehicle in an act of revealing or concealing the true relational elements or identities of my family members. Sometimes this portrayal is concerned with outward appearance, and sometimes it pertains to inner personality. These relational aesthetics, such as the specific reasons for the choice of certain colours and modes of painting, are explored in relation to the portrait paintings in this section. The viscosity of the paint is fundamentally different in these portraits from that of the portraits discussed in section 4.2 above. Each painting in this section has a different material quality, a different tactility, and has been purposefully treated in a different mode of painting, according to the material personhood and essence that I endeavoured to capture in the portraits of my family members.
4.3.1 Grandmother

Grandmother (2013) (see Figure 4.14) is, as the title indicates, a portrait of my grandmother in her old age. I started painting the portrait at the time that my grandmother was dying in 2013, and I finished the painting once she had passed away. I was drawn to a particular photograph of my grandmother (see Figure 4.15), from which I derived the painting, because of the way her lips were parted in the photograph. My grandmother had emphysema, and the image appeared, to me, as if she was gasping for air. I emphasised this in my portrait, as it is the way I remember her, with her struggle to breathe being prominent in my mind. The painting is accordingly a symbolic and figurative representation of my grandmother’s last breath. The drips and cracks act as painterly substitutes for the wrinkles on her skin, which I achieved by painting the portrait in an expressive manner, and while the oil paint was still wet on the surface, I applied a mixture of deep crimson-brown oil paint and turpentine, and I lifted the painting upright to allow the surface drips to run down the canvas. Where pure turpentine is applied, the oil paint repels the turpentine, and the paint on the surface separates, causing it to look like cracks, or paths or rivers meandering across the surface of the painting.

My grandmother was cremated, and for that reason the red palette is symbolic, to me, of fire and incineration. The theme of death is emphasised in this painting, as the subject has a ghostly and haunting appearance. I was not necessarily aware of all the aesthetic relationships with my emotions and feelings at the time that I painted my grandmother. However, through reflection, these elements were revealed. In hindsight, my grandmother looks like ‘death warmed up’. Her spectacles act as a veil to partially conceal her eyes, contributing to a sense of no-longer-thereness. This having-been-thereness and no-longer-thereness is pertinent, considering that I painted my grandmother’s portrait while she was dying, and I completed the portrait when she was no longer alive. Leon Battista Alberti (1956:63) states that a portrait can “make absent men present” and “make the dead man seem most alive”. Brenner (2014:45) elucidates that “[c]onventionally made during a person’s life, the portrait comes to stand in for the individual after their death, often with a renewed significance. Portraits exist on the threshold between past and present, between life and death".
4.3.2 Mars

*Mars* (2013) (see Figure 4.16) is a portrait of my fiancé, Marcio, which is derived from a snapshot photograph that I took of him, caught with his mouth open (see Figure 4.17). The fluidity and gestural mark in this painting returns the stilled instant in the photographic source to the animated moment of my fiancé being unaware that I was photographing him. The portrait, with its green-tinged skin and the enlarged, darkened area around the eyes, appears to me to be like a fantastical notion of how an alien might look. Unlike the deeply affective and emotional painting of my grandmother, this is a light-hearted painting. The title of the painting, *Mars*, is Marcio’s nickname, yet also refers to the planet Mars, linking the portrait’s Martian-like appearance to the planet from which Martians are said to come, in a quirky and playful manner. If Brenner plays a linguistic game in her work *Mark* (Brenner 2002:34), where the title of the painting refers to both the mark making employed in the painting and the name of her sitter, in *Mars* I also play on words, where the title refers to something otherworldly, as well as the subject’s name. I incorporate the notion of alienation and difference in the conceptual meaning of this portrait.
This theoretical thread links back to the bigger research project as a response to the transcendence of the painting from the photograph, in that the source is removed and alienated from the thing that it has spawned, namely the painting.

4.3.3 Father

*Father* (2013) (see Figure 4.18) is a large-scale painting in which I explored the material personhood of my father in terms of his outward appearance. The colour and relational aesthetic decisions that I made in this portrait are based on my visual perception of my father. When I think of my father, in terms of colour, I associate his essence with the colour blue. This could be to do with the fact that he has blue eyes, and that he mostly wears blue shirts, but perhaps it is also an affective perception which I struggle to pinpoint, such as an association of his cool-temperedness with a cool colour palette. Many of the other paintings of my father in my larger body of work are also painted in a blue palette, although I only realised this in retrospect (see Figures 4.20 to 4.22). The red accents that are seen in the portrait reference my father’s skin, which has a red appearance as a result of deep dermatological burns, caused when my father’s sunspots were removed. His skin has been a constant source of embarrassment for him over the years, yet those closest to him seem not to notice it at all. My father’s
skin is exactly that, the skin of my father, and a surface that I know personally. The rough and blotchy texture of the painting calls to mind the texture of his skin. The portrait appears as if it is in a state of morphing and transforming, and it lends itself to the notion of metamorphosis and ageing. The portrait is large in scale, and thus has a dominating presence. However, the pose is quiet and contemplative, referencing my father’s equanimous, even-tempered, and calm presence. I painted the eyes and the ears smaller than they are in the source image, and I enlarged the hand that is seen in the foreground. There are certain connotations associated with my father’s hands, as they are the hands that carried me as a child, the hands that have crafted, modelled, and created, and the hands that helped me make the very canvas on which I painted his portrait. These aesthetic decisions are an exaggeration of relational elements according to my perception of my father’s physical outward appearance, such as the size of his hands in comparison to mine, as well as my perception of his inner being, and my relationship with him.

Figure 4.18: Jenny Pomeroy, *Father*, 2013. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 180 cm (photograph by author).

Figure 4.19: Jenny Pomeroy, Source image for *Father*, 2013. Photograph, 21 x 15 cm (photograph by author).
4.3.4 Fairest of Them All

_Fairest of Them All_ (2014) (see Figure 4.23) is a large-scale painting of my sister, where the palette is predominantly white. I accentuated and placed emphasis on the mouth and the eyes by painting them in strongly saturated crimson and Windsor blue, respectively, while essentially bleaching the rest of the painting, except for light grey, pink and dirty-blue tones which show through scumbled areas of white paint. I omitted the nose, and I did not attempt to define the borders between the face and the background, other than with directional brushstrokes and thickness of paint. The nose disappears into a storm of white brushstrokes, which was not only a formal decision, but a conceptual one as well, as my sister has an aversion to the form, shape, and size of her nose.

The neutrality of the white palette was inspired, as with the portrait of my father, by the outward appearance of my sister, and my perception of it. My sister has a fair complexion, and the pasty whiteness of the oil paint lent itself to my interpretation of her milky-white skin. Initially, I had considered painting the background dark, as it is seen in one of the source images from which this painting is derived (see Figure 4.24a), from which I visualised she would loom, in order to emphasise her paleness. I experimented with the idea of a white background, by painting the background of the source image white (Figure 4.24b), and I decided that I preferred the emphasis on the paleness to filter through
the entire format, bleaching the background almost entirely. The eyes and the mouth were not left unaffected by the flurry of white, as I sliced into the upper lip with a thin slither of white paint and broke the form of the bottom lip with swathes of white brushstrokes. Likewise, I carved into the eyes with a tempest\textsuperscript{40} of white paint, in order to disrupt the beauty of the eyes. The title of the painting references the fairy tale \textit{Snow White}, with the word “fairest” referring to the light complexion of my sister’s skin, as well as speaking to her attractiveness.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{jenny_pomeroy_fairest_of_them_all_2014_oil_on_canvas_180_x_127_cm}
\caption{Jenny Pomeroy, \textit{Fairest of Them All}, 2014. Oil on canvas, 180 x 127 cm (photograph by author).}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{jenny_pomeroy_source_images_for_fairest_of_them_all_2013}
\caption{Jenny Pomeroy, Source images for \textit{Fairest of Them All}, 2013. Photographs, 21 x 15 cm each (photograph by Lindy Pomeroy, used with permission).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{40} The emotive words, such as “storm”, “flurry”, and “tempest”, that I have used in my analysis of \textit{Fairest of Them All} are not used only to describe mark making, but also embody the depth and intensity of sisterhood and particularly my relationship with my sister.
4.3.5 Veiled Voices

*Veiled Voices* (2014) (see Figure 4.25) is a diptych where I explored the verticality of mark by smudging and wiping away the surface layer of paint, in order to distort and stretch elements of the faces through a streaked, veiling mode, which partially conceals, disguises, and obscures the faces. I began by painting the subjects in an expressive style, leaving clumps of paint to sit on the surface (see Figure 4.26). While the oil paint was still wet, I dragged a large dry brush over the painted surfaces, in a vertical direction, working the veiling in an upward and downward direction, and applying light pressure. The veiling imitates a camera blur and emphasises potential movement of the figures, creating the impression of motion and stasis at the same time.

![Veiled Voices](image)

**Figure 4.25:** Jenny Pomeroy, *Veiled Voices*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm each (diptych) (photographs by author).
Figure 4.26: Jenny Pomeroy, Process photograph of *Veiled Voices*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm each (diptych) (photographs by author).

Figure 4.27a&amp;b: Jenny Pomeroy, Source images for *Veiled Voices*, 2014. Photographs, 21 x 15 cm each (photographs by author).
I chose to depict my mother and Marcio with their mouths open, as I perceive the two of them to be oral characters, who make themselves heard. The two subjects have strong voices, both metaphorically and literally. Marcio achieved his Grade 8 baritone singing with distinction, and my mother is a teacher, and thus projects her voice with authority. I contend that the strength of the work lies in its ambiguity: it is not clear whether the figures are singing or screaming, laughing or shouting. The non-illusionary texture of the vertical veiling also suggests ambiguity in terms of where the figures are situated. The streaked surfaces that I achieved in these portraits resemble the painting style of Gerhard Richter, who also paints from photographs, and who achieves the characteristic blur in his paintings by either lightly sweeping his painted surfaces with a soft brush or smearing the surfaces with a squeegee or a spatula. As Sanford Schwartz (2002:sp) asserts, Richter not only paints from photographs, but also references the mechanics of photography, such as the blurring of images captured, “so that the properties of painting and of photography can seem completely jumbled together”. Richter’s subjects often become almost indecipherable, yet, according to Robert Storr (1977:151), he “summons the subject by depicting its imminent disappearance”.

I painted these portraits in a palette of emerald green, dirty greens, browns, fleshy reds, oranges, and pinks, and I glazed them with a lemon-yellow hue, which adds to the luminosity of the lighter areas of acid green. The dominant colours of green and red in the palette are a complementary pair, and they thus accentuate each another. I painted the backgrounds dark green and glazed them, so that the figures emerge out of the dark space. I broke down certain boundaries with glazes, and I left other boundaries clearly defined, in order to create a visual tension of receding and approaching.

4.4 Self-reflexivity

Self-reflexivity (2014) (see Figure 4.28) is a series of 34 small-scale self-portraits, which may best be seen as a painting exercise, and which falls within the praxis methodology of my research. The series of paintings is directly influenced and supported by the theoretical investigations of my study, where I deliberately instigate transformations, and transgressions from the photographic source material. The series is produced through organised, calculated and rational preparation and direction. However, it is not a cold exercise, as this is as much an exercise in discovery as are some of the other paintings in my body of work. Spontaneity and impulsiveness are, however, secondary to the mental processing that takes place when I paint, and the conscious sense that I have of the way I paint each one of the
small studies, and why I paint each one the way I do. Thus, the series acts as a diagram, mapping different techniques and modes of painting, as well as different ways of problem solving, with different solutions and outcomes. The exercise grows atomistically, branching out in different paths.

This series of paintings was completed in the first semester of my second year of research, after I had already completed a body of exploratory and intuitive paintings. I decided to return to the theoretical underpinnings of my study, in order to investigate the notion of purposefully initiating changes from the source material, which is different from the instinctive and perceptive way in which transformations were allowed to transpire in the painting processes that I have discussed up to now. I selected a denotatively accurate formal portrait photograph from which to paint, and I copied the photograph as faithfully as I could. I then painted a second painting, employing as my source the naturalistic painting that I had produced as an imitation of the photograph. I continued in this way, where the third painting was painted using the second painting as my source, and the fourth painting was painted from the third, and so on, until I had a row of seven paintings. I deliberately engineered slight shifts in colour and painterly

Figure 4.28: Jenny Pomeroy, Self-reflexivity, 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm x 34 (photographs by author).
style suggested by the immediate previous painting and, as a result, the brushstrokes gradually became more visceral, the paint became thicker, and colours became more saturated with each study. These seven paintings (see Figure 4.29) thus document the visual shifts that were intentionally and deliberately instigated, mapping the degrees of difference between the initial photographic source material and the final painting, which become greater with each painting. The result is that the painting at the end of the row is a portrait which only vaguely resembles the photographic source. There is a distinct difference in appearance between the gloss-printed photographic image and the texture of the oil paint on the visible weave of the canvas in the first painting, and the oil paint was applied more thickly with each painting.

At particular points during this process, I instigated and carried out separate new studies in response to specific paintings in the series. These investigations include a pixelated study (see Figure 4.30), three monochromatic studies, which vary in contrast from greyscale to black and white (see Figure 4.31), three studies where I inverted the colours in varying strengths of saturation (see Figure 4.32), two studies in blue, where the eyes are painted naturalistically, and the rest of the face is less detailed and is painted more loosely (see Figure 4.34), four studies using large directional brushstrokes (see Figure 4.36), four paintings in red, where the face moves towards abstraction (see Figure 4.37), three studies in veiled brushstrokes (see Figure 4.39), and two abstract investigations using turpentine to deliberately warp the facial features (see Figure 4.40). Transgressions and transcendences are markedly visible, particularly in the right-hand side of this experiment, where colour is shifted considerably, and the materiality is explored in a fluid and expressive manner. While I still did not necessarily know how each painting would turn out, there was a certain degree of planning involved in terms of the colour and the style employed. I experimented with saturation of colour and colour filters, tonality and contrast, brushstroke, surface texture, materiality, and line. I acknowledge that there are infinite possibilities for each painting path, and that the experiment could easily have yielded hundreds of paintings branching off in all directions. For this reason, I bracketed my experiment in order to delimit this investigation to a focused series of 34 paintings.
Figure 4.30: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photograph by author).

Figure 4.31: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).

Figure 4.32: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).

Figure 4.33: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photograph by author).

Figure 4.34: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).

Figure 4.35: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).
Figure 4.36: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).

Figure 4.37: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).

Figure 4.38: Jenny Pomeroy, *Self-reflexivity* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 23 x 30.5 cm each (photographs by author).
This series of paintings not only acted as a cognitive experiment in which I could plot degrees of difference and transcendence from the original photographic source, but it also offered potentially new and different solutions for other paintings in my body of work. In the presentation of this series, the gaps in between the individual paintings index specific jumps and shifts between the paintings. The possibility of another painting between two paintings is indicated by there being a bigger gap between the two paintings, and significant shifts in tonality, colour contrast, and texture are indicated by a divergence from the straight line, such as a rise or a dip in the linear structure of their presentation.

The title of the series refers to the way in which I reflect on my own thought processes and painting processes in this exercise. The series is reflexive, too, in that the paintings are self-portraits, and thus, they are self-referential in their iconicity. According to Charlotte Aull Davies (1999:4), “[r]eflexivity,
broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference”. In this light, the relationship between reason and result, cause and effect, which occurs in this painting process, maps the way my methodology of praxis moves between the theoretical underpinning and argument on one hand and practice on the other.

4.5 Famil(y)ar Faces

Famil(y)ar Faces (2014) (see Figure 4.41) is a series made up of 21 portrait paintings, which are exhibited as a banked group. The marks and colours in the individual paintings in this series play off one another, and as a result, the sum of the whole is, as with Mother, Brother, Me, greater than its individual parts. Each painting is treated differently, and the paintings are not all painted to the same degree of completion. Some paintings are more naturalistic than others, and some surfaces have been built up to a greater degree than others, yet, as a whole, the paintings create conversations with one another in terms of materiality and colour. The facial expressions vary from those of contemplation to those of laughter, and the gazes range from concentrated stares to an avoidance of eye contact. As with Self-reflexivity, the paintings in this series suggested certain possibilities for larger paintings. I thus viewed the process of painting this series as a space in which I could experiment in employing different techniques and modes of painting, which would index my subjects’ interiority and identity in each portrait. Famil(y)ar Faces is a response to Dumas’ series of banked portraits in The Next Generation, where each subject is treated differently, suggesting the notion that the content of a painting is intertwined with its materiality, while simultaneously reading as a whole. Similarly, the way in which each of my subjects is painted and the colours that I employ describe or provide details into the subjects’ individual personalities or characters, while at the same time still reading as a group.
Since the process of painting is such a significant part of my practice (see Figure 4.42), and I have realised that any painting in the series could have had multiple visual resolutions or end points, I documented the individual steps involved in the process of one of the paintings from this series (see Figure 4.43). I photographed the emerging painting after each of the 217 brushstrokes and gestures that I placed on the canvas, which I made into a stop frame video. The video is looped in such a way that the painting evolves and then unravels, in an ebb-and-flow of becoming and disintegrating. In the exhibition presentation of Fam ili(y)ar Faces, I exclude this portrait painting and replace the physical painting, as an object, with a projection of the video, which documents the process of development of the painting. The phenomenological process of making is highlighted by the inclusion of the video within this field of stasis and finalisation, that is, the group of portraits. This presentation is not only valuable for viewers to gain insight into my painting process, but it is also beneficial for me as a painter, as I found that I learned about my own process of painting through assessing the video from a distance, as opposed to being physically embedded in the painting process.
Figure 4.42: Jenny Pomeroy, *Famill(y)ar Faces* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 40.5 x 50.5 cm each (photograph by author).

Figure 4.43: Jenny Pomeroy, *Famill(y)ar Faces* (detail), 2014. Oil on canvas, 40.5 x 50.5 cm (photograph by author).
4.6 ‘Sourcey’ paintings: The exhibition

My MTech exhibition is divided into two spaces, both physically and conceptually. The exhibition takes place in the FADA Gallery at the University of Johannesburg. The gallery has two levels, which I used to my advantage to separate my exhibition into two components. The upstairs level is curated in a conventional white cube manner. Exhibited in this space are all my large-scale paintings, as well as a collection of a few smaller paintings that do not belong to any particular series. The upstairs level is suitable for the presentation of my larger paintings, due to the expansive white wall space that the area offers. The paintings are exhibited on the clean white walls of the gallery space, and are allowed space to breathe in the convention of contemporary exhibitions of work, where a single painting often occupies an entire gallery wall. The large interior space lends itself to my larger paintings, which require the viewer to stand back in order to gain distance when viewing them. Due to the ‘loud’ nature of my paintings in terms of colour and materiality, the paintings also demand the white cube convention in which to be exhibited, so as to minimise visual distractions.

The downstairs level of the gallery is dedicated to a demonstration of my painting process as a physical and phenomenological activity as well as to my reflexive study of painting from photographic source material. This is a visceral space of contemplation. The photographic source images from which I paint play an important role in my end products, and thus they occupy the space below my formal exhibition of paintings.

One of the ways in which I incorporate the photographic source images in my exhibition is through a second video, which is projected onto a large canvas. The video is titled Sourcey Paintings (see Figure 4.44), and visually tracks the translations and transformations inherent from the photographic source image to the painting, for each of the larger paintings in my body of work. The video reveals the changes between the source image and the painting by slowly morphing from the photograph to the painting. The source material gradually shifts and changes into the painting, and the skins of the subjects begin to disintegrate and decay, as the photographic image transforms into the painterly portrait. The images distort and become abstracted, as remnants of the photographs remain, while other parts of the painting replace the source image’s iconic faithfulness. Unlike the video installation as part of my Famil(y)ar Faces series, this video does not document my performative painting process. However, it does index my process of painting from photographs, and it demonstrates the degrees of difference between the photographs and the resultant paintings. The smooth transitions between my
photographs and my paintings in the video, which are barely noticeable due to their gradual morphing, belie the shifts and difficulties that I encounter during my process of painting. The video is a unique amalgamation of my source material and my paintings, due to the fact that neither the starting points of my process (my photographs) nor the end points (my paintings) have ever occupied this state of hybridity.

Along with my two exploratory series of paintings, *Self-reflexivity* and *Famil(y)ar Faces*, in this downstairs space of the gallery, I exhibit my photographic source images, which display all their indexical elements together with my ink drawings and printed reproductions of other artists’ paintings, in a recreation of the source image wall in my studio (see Figure 4.45). *Self-reflexivity* is exhibited on the
floor space below these photographs, images, and ink drawings, referencing the way in which many of my paintings in my larger body of work are painted on the floor. I further subvert conventional modes of display by exhibiting my palette (see Figure 4.46) on the wall. The idea of process is highlighted in the Famil(y)ar Faces series, by the stop frame video which documents the painting’s progression.

Figure 4.45: Jenny Pomeroy, Source material wall II, 2014. Photographs, reproduced images, and ink drawings, 200 x 300 cm each (photographs by author).
Hans-George Gadamer (cited by Van Alphen 1997:240) states that “the strength of a portrait is [...] judged in relation to its supposed essence not [just] in relation to the looks of a person”. In this chapter I have described how I endeavour to capture the essence and presence of the subjects in my portrait paintings through the materiality of paint. I have shown how medium serves as content in my paintings as much as the figurative image depicted does, and how paint is both medium and subject matter in my portraits. I have explicated my painting process in terms of my physical, phenomenological involvement and embodiment therein as a performative practice, as well as in terms of my process of painting from photographic source material. Furthermore, through the visual analyses of my works, I have provided insight into the relational aesthetics of my paintings, from a personal perspective.

My paintings are consciously aware that they are paintings, and have a self-conscious status as artworks. By assigning agency to my portraits in this way, I reveal my conviction in my portraits as paintings in their own right, and not imitations of photographs, in that I do not attempt to copy my
photographic source images faithfully, but allow for, and engineer, transgressions and transcendences to occur between the source images and the painted portraits. O’Toole (2014:31) states that

[a]s photography increasingly dematerialises, the once taut balance between constructed image and haptic object is being radically reformulated. And yet the portrait itself endures. While it is possible to own a camera and never photograph a human subject, all the significant technological leaps that propelled the history of photography have, arguably, somehow, implicated the portrait.

The implication that photography has had on my painting practice is that it has liberated my painting process beyond mimetic imitation. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004:71) elucidates, the purpose of painting is not merely to point the viewer towards a photographic representation of an object (or a subject), as this would suggest that the meaning itself would not lie in the painting, but in the subject or the object that it signifies. I do not feel the need to depict my subjects naturalistically or faithfully in terms of the photograph from which they are derived, but rather seek to mediate and reveal true portraits of people I know intimately from an affective, subjective, and phenomenological perspective. A photograph offers a likeness, while a painting presents connotation, essence, being, and presence, and, perhaps in the eye of some beholders, the auratic.
4.8 Other paintings in my exhibition

Figure 4.47: Jenny Pomeroy, *The Painter*, 2014. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm (photograph by author).

Figure 4.48: Jenny Pomeroy, *Heidi*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 152 x 91 cm (photograph by author).

Figure 4.49: Jenny Pomeroy, *Blue Brad*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 26 x 20 cm (photograph by author).

Figure 4.50: Jenny Pomeroy, *Study of Father*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 35 x 46 cm (photograph by author).
Figure 4.51: Jenny Pomeroy, *Studies of Mother*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 26 x 26 cm (photograph by author).

Figure 4.52: Jenny Pomeroy, *Studies of Brad*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 26 x 20 cm (photograph by author).
Figure 4.53: Jenny Pomeroy, *Baby*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cm (photograph by author).

Figure 4.54: Jenny Pomeroy, *Veiled*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 30 x 23 cm (photograph by author).
In my research, I have drawn on key components of Walter Benjamin’s (2008:5-14) notion of the aura, in order to facilitate my location of auratic moments within specific portrait paintings by Marlene Dumas. These components, as well as the notions of other theorists who have contributed to a contemporary understanding of the relationship between the aura and photography include; the authenticity of works of art, the loss of the aura through reproduction, the distance between the viewer and the artwork, spatiotemporal aspects of the ‘here and now’ of the artwork, and the relationship between the aura, photography, and portraiture. Throughout my study I have explored, through the work of Dumas, other selected artists, and my own work, how and where translations, transgressions, and transcendences occur within paintings in response to their photographic source images. I have done this by identifying where critical degrees of material difference in visual translations of the selected artists’ paintings occur, producing painterly transcendence. I argue that it is where the physicality of the paint on certain canvases transgresses the iconicity and flatness of the photographic source image that auratic moments might occur.

I have established my theoretical framework by strategically deploying phenomenology by means of material embodiment in the painting process, and semiology in terms of the indexicality of this process, in order to locate how resulting transgressive transcendences from photographic source images might embody auratic moments within selected paintings. If the translation from a photograph to a painting is a given, what is not a given is that these translations are transgressive. Through a close analytical reading of specific works by Dumas, I have shown where transgressions occur in such a way that they facilitate transcendence from the photographic source image in spatiotemporal terms, their context, and material embodiment. It is in paintings which are visually, technically, and conceptually loaded with what I call presence that, I argue, the auratic occurs: in the occluded space of remoteness and proximity (see p98); the experience of being-thereness as opposed to mere seeing, which includes reproductions (see p100); the reception of both allure and abject repulsion (p101); a painting’s conceptual instability and uncertainty (p108); and the ambiguous interplay between the physical and metaphysical (p114).
Within the dialogical relationship between the foci of my study (photographs and paintings), and the embodied process of making portrait paintings from photographic sources, I have explicated the practical component of my research. In this resultant body of work, I have explored the translations and manifestations of trace and mark as index on the surface. I have centred my discussion of this body of work on the visual translations and transcendences of the paintings from their photographic sources, and the deliberate shifts inherent in my paintings, which are purposefully transformed from their sources. I have explicated my process of painting as performative, and I have explained my methodologies, which involve exploratory, spontaneous, intuitive, as well as rational ways of working. I have unpacked the content of my paintings in terms of the perceived presence that I contend the works embody in terms of material and relational aesthetics. I have attempted to trace, in my own work, spaces of translation, transgression, and transcendence between photographic sources and paintings and, in specific places, find congruence with the work of my selected artists. In doing this, I contend that I have unpacked and closely engaged the aims and objectives of the study.

Given that the history of portraiture is conventionally rooted in likeness, verisimilitude, and fidelity to the sitter, I accept and acknowledge a potential discomfort zone in my body of work, characterising tension, ‘ugliness’, and possible displeasure, which are qualities of transgression (and potential transcendence) which also lie in the work of Dumas. I argue that painterly mark, process, and materiality are as much the subject matter as the source material in Dumas’ portrait paintings, as well as in my own work. While painterly marks may present certain self-consciously ugly, unresolved, and floating surfaces, it is my contention that these ambiguous, unstable moments – which do not conventionally ‘hold’ – are where the presence of the subject is realised and where the subject’s inner and outer (physical and metaphysical) being resides.
SOURCES CONSULTED


Freschi, F. Dean of the Faculty of art, Design, and Architecture, University of Johannesburg. 2014. Interview by Barbara Freemantle. 8 April. Johannesburg.


