

SQUARE-GRID HUMILITY

A Thesis

by

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: LOOKING DOWN AT THEM	3
CHAPTER 3: DISPLACED	5
CHAPTER 4: DE-OBJECTIFICATION	7
CHAPTER 5: THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME	9
CHAPTER 6: "MY NAME IS RENÉ GALLIMARD! ALSO KNOWN AS MADAME BUTTERFLY!"	11
BIBLIOGRAPHY	13

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



Square-grid Humility, 1999-2000

As many argue, the imprint of one's cultural identity is formative in shaping an individual's perception. Having been raised culturally as an African, yet physically being of European descent, questions of identity have always been a driving force within my work. I experienced a non-western environment that was still recovering from a colonial regime and contending with the dynamics of a post-revolutionary state that was trying to resist being a pawn within the Cold War chess game. The heightened awareness of the prevalence of inequitable power relations was instilled in me.

In battling power relationships, the role of the artist is similar to what Ewa Kuryuk calls "a plea for irresponsibility," in that it is "the personal perception to counter the power of some collective belief." She also shares the view of T. W. Adorno as she states that "today the anti-collectivist spirit of art must be treasured even more than in the past because of our culture's tendency to go totalitarian on a deadly global scale."

Thus, she argues "collective standards must be questioned, not confirmed by art."ⁱ This irresponsibility acts to counter the existence of a Manicheanⁱⁱ "responsible perception." In a global state, this is a reaction against the effects of Westernization and its claim to be an authority on "responsible" perception. As such, the Judeo-Christian based Western view claims authenticity on moral and ethical values while the post-

colonial identity dissects the tendency to hold these perceptions.

This paper will focus on an installation titled *Square-grid Humility*. This is an emplacement of thirty busts set in a submerged square ground. To create this effect, a raised platform was fabricated, made up of similar cubes that are assembled together to cover a twenty by twenty foot area. The platforms are treated with commercial brand paint called Red Tile, which is used commonly on cement flooring. The observer's point of view is established as much higher with a downward gaze. The interior of the square as well as the figures will have a white patina that will visually stand out against the surrounding Red Tile patina. The similar patina and postures of the busts will render them a hegemonic collective and it is only through closer inspection that the viewer will notice the individual identities. This installation will be used as a vehicle to address the conceptual concerns presented herein.

In a social context, the installation is dichotomous in that it is both a critic and a celebration of perception. The "white" pigment in the piece celebrates a blank page, a narrative not yet written—symbolizing a perception that is being reconfigured. The "white" pigment also is referential to what Frantz Fanon aptly describes his book titled *Black Man, White Mask*, as the colonized perception, construed within the Western canon.

The bodies in the installation are purposely portrayed as having a hybrid, and androgynous identity. Through the hybrid and the androgyny, the lack of a stereotypical identity unveils a new perception if not a new identity.ⁱⁱⁱ Today the effects of globalization are questionable because of its parallels to westernization. Therefore, having the hybrids painted white would further bring into question the hybrid itself—could this be another western perception?^{iv}

Within the borders of power relationships there exists a wavering or less distinct separation called the in-between space.^v This space is described by Homi Bhabha as the *hybrid hyphenations* in which:

“(The) value of art lies not in its transcendent reach but in its translational capacity: in the possibility of moving between media, materials, and genres, each time both marking and remarking the material borders of difference; articulating ‘sites’ where the question of ‘specificity’ is ambivalent and complexly construed.”^{vi}

ⁱ *The Subversive Imagination* edited by Carol Becker.

ⁱⁱ *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin: Introduction. Using Lacan’s distinction of the imaginary and symbolic stages of development as a conceptual tool in this analysis JanMohamed emphasis the self-contradictions of binary constructions. By recognizing how the binarisms of colonial discourse operate (the self-other, civilized-native, us-them manichean polarities) post-colonial critics can

promote an active reading which makes these texts available for rewriting and subversions.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mikhail Bakhtin refers to languages like Creole, Pidgin English, and other hybrid forms of speech as a source for a new perception through words.

^{iv} In the Introduction of the *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, JanMohamad criticizes both Homi Bhabha and Spivak to be victims of western thought in their analysis of postcolonial discourse. “Spivak’s and Bhabha’s analysis...too deeply implicated in European intellectual traditions, which older, more radical exponents of post-colonial theory, such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, had sought to dismantle and set aside.”

^v Robert J. C. Young in his book titled *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* asserted that “... many colonial novels in English betray themselves as driven by desire for the cultural other, for forsaking their own culture: the novels and travel-writings of Burton, Haggard, Stevenson, Kipling, Allen or Buchan are all concerned with forms of cross-cultural contact, interaction, an active desire, frequently sexual, for the other, or with the state of being what Hanif Kureishi calls ‘an in-between’, or Kipling ‘the monstrous hybridism of East and West.’”

Joseph Kosuth summons a similar cultural gray area in his article “A Long Night at the Movies.” He states that, “We have been taught to look for the differences between political and economic systems to see our future might lie, but it is here where people are being politically disenfranchised, for it is precisely within the implicit agreements on our ‘inevitable’ future that our present is being made-without our say. It is within this cultural space, and not the outdated polarities of ‘left’ and ‘right,’ where a mobilization for survival must begin.”

^{vi} Homi Bhabha

CHAPTER 2: LOOKING DOWN AT THEM

detail of heads from *Square-grid Humility*

Imagine yourself as the viewer, standing on the raised platforms, gazing into the square pit. In the square pit, there are several upturned heads facing you that are buried up to their chests. The gesture of the stretched necks is reminiscent of Michelangelo's marble sculpture *The Dying Slave*, and David's oil painting *Death of Marat*. This gesture of the exposed neck has an element of vulnerability that places the viewer, in the position of superiority relative to the collective bodies, which physically emanate humility^{vii} through the upturned heads and the gesture of the neck. The viewer must inquire: Why are they looking up at me? Or perhaps: Why am I looking down at them?

This positioning opens up a dialogue on the power relationship between the viewer and the bodies. The power relationship defines notions of humility within the context of superior and inferior complexes. In reality, the humility might be what the viewer wishes to perceive as the desired image of an experience.^{viii} The dynamics of this power relation constructs the "experience" of the Other and the viewer becomes the creator of the narration. Thus the bodies become objects to be identified and classified, typifying Western superiority complex that romanticizes the "performance" as an "experience" and not a "thought." In *Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"*, Aijaz Ahmad criticizes Jameson's rhetoric, when he states:

"I find it significant that First and Second Worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism, respectively), whereas the third category—the Third World—is defined purely in terms of an 'experience' of externally inserted phenomena."

"the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it." These classifications into the categories of first, second and third worlds are embellished within Western thought and become defined as power relationships of first, second and third classes. Through incorporated thought conventions defined by a Western binary perception these constructs have been effectively canonized. A good example of this canonization is the concepts of the Primitive and the Civilized. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, in their article "Primitive: Time/Space" assert:

"With regard to temporality the 'primitive' is part of what Roland Barthes termed 'mythic speech,' for the label empties its referent of historical contingency and cultural specificity and instead subsumes it within an unchanging 'nature.' The condition of 'timelessness' bestowed on the primitive also connotes the 'primeval,' for by not changing, the 'primitive' is necessarily in opposition to all that does change or develop, namely, the 'civilized.'"^{ix}

What Ahmad argued was that his homeland, India, is as much of a post-industrial society, if not even more effective within the Global Market, in comparison to other European countries. The Western superiority complex exists as fact while the "experience" in regard to timelessness, is a fabrication.

The dynamics of the exchange are challenged by the psychology of the interaction. George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant*, written during the late colonial era in 1950, unveils this psychological exchange of power relationships. In his story based in Lower Burma, a white police officer is summoned to shoot an

elephant. The officer describes the event, which places him within the expectant position.

“I could feel their two thousand wills pressing forward, irresistible. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd-seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind.”^x

In *Square-grid Humility*, the installation becomes a performance between the viewer and the bodies. The specificity of power is less defined; it becomes articulated through the viewer’s governing perception. As Donna Haraway points out, “It is not whether it is real or imaginary, but rather who is looking at it and from where?” Are our perceptions governed from birth by a pre-existing colonized thought structure? This pre-existing thought structure is inherent in the western perception that perceive a governing code of morals and ethics that is both universal and autonomous. This thought structure became further institutionalized during the industrial era, fuelled and perpetuated by European colonialism. Cultures were stripped of their identity and clothed with *Englishness*.^{xi} Abstractly speaking, it is as if a cloud or veil was spread globally, blinding our perceptions with fabricated canons of truths or learned conventions of thought.^{xii} We still claim to know what is proper and improper, what is good and bad; and what is white and what is black. In actuality, are our claims valid?

Contemporary discourses continue the attempt to unveil these canons of “truths,” yet even postmodernism has been adopted within academia as a new canon,

distinguishing itself and modernity as separate entities when instead, both are forms of transition. An ongoing process of removing layers and finding openings is necessary. As artists and social beings, we have a responsibility to disengage fixated perceptions. As Essop Patel asserts: “For an authentic revolution there has to be an aesthetic revolution, only then will there be cultural revolution.”^{xiii}

^{vii} I was highly influenced by Talal Asad’s book titled *Genealogies of Religion*, 1993. In the book he uses as an example the stages of becoming a Catholic monk to demonstrate a state identity removal.

^{viii} In “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” Aijaz Ahmad criticizes Jameson’s rhetoric which states, “I find it significant that First and Second Worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism, respectively), whereas the third category- the Third World- is defined purely in terms of an “experience” of externally inserted phenomena.” To Ahmad, this “classification divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it.”

^{ix} Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, in their article “Primitive: Time/Space” asserted “with regard to temporality the ‘primitive’ is part of what Roland Barthes termed ‘mythic speech,’ for the label empties its referent of historical contingency and cultural specificity and instead subsumes it within an unchanging ‘nature.’ The condition of ‘timelessness’ bestowed on the primitive also connotes the ‘primeval,’ for by not changing, the ‘primitive’ is necessarily in opposition to all that does change or develop, namely, the ‘civilized.’”

^x *Shooting an Elephant, and Other Essays*, George Orwell, 1950

^{xi} define this term

^{xii} Hegel

^{xiii} *Es’kia Mphahlele: themes of alienation and African humanism*, by Ruth Obee in the chapter titled ‘Formulating a National Consciousness: From Slaves and Noble Savages to Tsotsis and ANC Heroes. (1986, 85).

CHAPTER 3: DISPLACEMENT



To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond, a performance by Zhang Huan at Nanmofang fishpond, Beijing, August 15, 1997, photographed by Robyn Beck.

This image of Zhang Huan's performance *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* was a strong visual influence in the formalizing of the *Square-grid Humility*. There is a powerful voice transcending beyond the solemn expressions in the performance of which Huan called the "ordinary people."^{xiv} In the *Square-grid Humility*, the excavation read directly references the displacement, burial or erasure of identity. An example of this is the European colonialist tradition of removing cultural artifacts from non-western cultures and further objectifying them. Therefore by placing the installation in a museum the piece also becomes a critique of the institution itself. Russell Chamberlain describes this colonist tradition in his book *Loot! The Heritage of Plunder*,

"The sheer quantity of Egyptian artifacts that found their way into the museums of Europe and North America is staggering. ...all bear testimony to an obsession. There are probably more Egyptian obelisks in the capital of Italy than there are in the capital of Egypt."^{xv}

This critique on the Western tradition of the museum challenges its historical context in the Western World. Timothy Mitchell in *Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order* described this objectification not only as a matter of "visual arrangement around a curious spectator, but of representation."^{xvi} Mitchell explains this reduction of the world into "systems of objects" as a meticulous

organization under the guise of "History, Empire, or Progress" that was "to evoke some larger meaning." Under the "certainty of representation," the exhibition of the Other through object and catalogue, "reinforced the effect of two distinct orders of being—the order of things and the order of their meaning, of representation and reality."^{xvii} Such a critique is not disapproving its contemporary existence as an educational tool, rather its function in molding perceptual canons. Fortunately, there have been efforts to re-evaluate the role of the museum today.^{xviii} However if one is to walk through any of the large Western museums, there still remains the lingering grandeur of Western Imperialism.

The physical act of "looting" culture has a deeper impact on the psychological identity of the looted culture and symbolizes a deeper removal or erasure of identity that leaves a void and causes a mental displacement. One example of this is a result of colonialism, and the replacement of a culture within aspects of a Western superior culture. In his book *De-Colonisation of the Mind*, Ngugi Wa Thionge writes on the African Diaspora existing within his own homeland where the perception of a superior Western World lends to a denunciation of one's own culture as inferior. To stress this point, Ngugi Wa Thionge declared *De-Colonisation of the Mind* to be the last he would write in English- his colonizer's language. In a same sense, Jamaica Kincaid, a contemporary Jamaican writer,

describes metaphorically the psychological cultural erasure as having no tongue.

“For isn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is in the language of the criminal who committed the crime... (For) these places you distorted or erased my history and glorified your own.”^{xix}

Chamberlain in his last chapter in *Loot! The Heritage of Plunder* titled appropriately “Whose Heritage?” quoted a woman who yelled at tourists who were taking photographs of a pretty young girl wearing traditional clothes in the high Andes. After the tourists left the young girl standing in a daze, the woman yelled out, “You are stealing that poor girl’s face.”^{xx} Mitchell on the other hand broadens the analysis to discuss the actual objectification of a culture, which leads to its classification and an ingrained stereotype. Edward W. Said asserts in *Orientalism*: “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony...Orientalism is ...less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world.”^{xxi}

^{xiv} *Inside Out, New Chinese Art*, By Gao Minglu, 1998.

^{xv} *Loot! The Heritage of Plunder*, Russell Chamberlain, 1983.

^{xvi} *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 1998.

^{xvii} *The Visual Culture Reader*.

^{xviii} In *Museums and communities: the politics of public culture*, edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, Constance Perin’s article titled ‘The Communicative Circle: Museums as Communities’ asserts that “museums professionals are themselves rethinking disciplinary canons and exhibition methods...” but this is due to the need to reevaluate the history of museums and their role in shaping western convention of thought.

Timothy Mitchell in *Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order* writes about the global hegemony of the West referencing the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris which attracted about 32 million people to commemorate the centenary of the Revolution and to demonstrate French commercial and Imperial power. In his article titled “An object World,” he references an Egyptian scholar who visited this Parisian phenomena of “le spectacle.” There was no equivalent Arabic word to describe this.

^{xix} *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, “A Small Place,” Jamaica Kincaid.

^{xx} *Loot! The Heritage of Plunder*.

^{xxi} *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, “Orientalism,” Edward Said.

CHAPTER 4: DE-OBJECTIFICATION



In addressing these concerns on displacement and attempting to reevaluate perception, it is necessary to explore concepts of de-objectification. Sculpturally this is the illusion of the non-tangible and the questioning of spacious perception. Exploring this concept was necessary to stress the psyche or mental displacement and thus giving the installation a more metaphysical aura, and rendering the space less defined.

In the *Square-grid Humility*, the busts are placed in a white square, allowing the white busts to blend into the environment. Furthermore, the dominant color white simplifies and unifies the square grid. This simplification occurs especially when value is equal, thus losing edges and definition. Therefore, when a viewer sees the installation either from a distance, or unfocused, they only see a white square. The aim is to have the white pigment become intensely overwhelming and visually dissolve the busts within it.

The splash of white pigment is similar to Anish Kapoor's installation titled *A Thousand Names* where he translates the object into space. Homi Bhabha referenced the Kapoor-ish space as

“the making of emptiness—never fails to register a lateral movement, a transitional tremor, that disorders the boundedness of the void... The enigma of the void is now discernible in the intimation of a movement that obliterates perceptual space and supplements it with a disruptive, disjunctive time through which the spectator must pass—“reverse, affirm, negate.”^{xxii}

The transitional, obliterated perceptual space that leads a viewer to “reverse, affirm, negate” conceptually

A Thousand Names, Anish Kapoor defines the experience of displacement. Ahmad Sadri in his article *Adjusting to the World According to Salman Rushdie*, comments on this transitional space. He talks of a similar emptiness of space in Rushdie's work as “inner voids.” He finds that Rushdie's characters “suffer from inner voids, carved out by the corrosive currents of self-doubt.”^{xxiii} Rushdie's inner void (empty space- empty feeling) of displacement which was reflected within the *Satanic Verses* can be understood with his nostalgic comment on a friend's sense of belonging: “How wonderful still to have contact with the house in which you grew up.” Yet at the same time Rushdie remarked that roots are “conservative myths, designed to keep us in our place.” Therefore there is a revealing feeling of celebration of displacement which transcends into a hybrid belonging—a less defined space.

This feeling of emptiness, a longing for an authenticity of the self, is a sentimentality within the psyche of the displaced (the Diaspora).^{xxiv} For it is a state of being rooted away from “a belonging” and placed within the constructs of the Other. In this project (*Square-grid Humility*), space is visually presented as “the making of emptiness.” The square-grid, which denotes being geographically removed and scrutinized as through in a viewfinder, becomes illusive in its translational capacity.

^{xxii} Anish Kapoor, Homi Bhabha, 1998.

^{xxiii} *The Subversive Imagination*, edited by Carol Becker, 1994.

^{xxiv} This is a personal view as well and shared among with other friends in a similar displacement.

CHAPTER 5: THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME



Soweto, *The Fruit of Fear*, Peter Magubane

The initial intention in alluding to copies of bodies was to have them look all the same. It is not until the viewer observes closer that they realize the individual identities. These individual identities portray different racial features and possibly genders. There are three immediate social implications leading to the repetitive reading of identity. These are the reading of the mass, hegemony, and the hybrid.

The first read is the confrontation of the mass, as Lacanian desire of the self to relate in Other. This is exemplified by the Western media's portrayal of the non-Western world as images of 'ghettoized' of African-Americans in the United States. There becomes a social interaction between the westerner and the non-western that is pre-established due to this staged power relationship. In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre says:

"They [the Jews] have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype... We may say that their conduct is perpetually over determined from the inside."^{xxv}

This over determined conduct might be exemplified in such away: A white man on a sidewalk, walking by a group of black men. If the white man has been imprinted by the media image of the "gangsta" black-male, he may fear potential confrontation and will act accordingly. The black-males may be similarly imprinted in this fabricated identity and also perform a role. Conversely, they may be aware of this construction and "play off" this image for amusement purposes. Though not limited solely to these responses, were these individuals to act as such it would characterize this over determined conduct. This illustrates the fabricated identity of a group of people that can exist based on race, religion or gender in the context of Said's Occident and Orient.

The viewer in the installation becomes the Occident or Subject. Within the comforts of the Occident's

world...this concealed Subject pretends it has "no Geopolitical determinations"^{xxvi} and in doing so unconsciously becomes dominantly situated in the hierarchy of perception. They are looking down in scrutiny, fabricating identities and as the narrator, may become aware of the power in their positioning.

The second reading of the installation is that of hegemony. In this interpretation, the dark Baudrillard read of the simulation occurs. The repetition acts as a copy of a copy, losing the source of authenticity. This loss of authenticity or "aura" as Benjamin Walter termed it, is comparable to Michael Ende's gray men from his novel *Momo, the battle of time*. In this novel there is an invasion of a small town by gray men who inflict what Es'kia Mphahlele describes as a mode of living based on "doing" rather than "being."^{xxvii} In so doing, the people in the town evolve into Kafka-esque identities that subside into a Walter Benjamin's mechanical age of reproduction. The fear of being homogenized mentally has been addressed by Mudimbe's *L'odeur du pere*, on how to get rid of the father's abusive smell. For Mudimbe to:

"Really to escape the supremacy of Western thought presupposes an exact appreciation of what it means to rid ourselves of it. It presupposes a knowledge of how far the West, perhaps cunningly, has recreated itself in us. It presupposes also a knowledge of the Western in what has enabled us to denounce the West."^{xxviii}

The third reading is the "hybrid." When the viewer finally sees the individuals within the collective, the spectrum of difference is unveiled. This perception of the similar transforms into the dissimilar. Mikhail Bakhtin writes on the use of language interaction with history, where the language carries within it pre-existing canons of discourse of power. Hybrid languages, such as in Creole and Pigeon English, have

the ability to disenfranchise itself from historicity of words and thus perception. Bakhtin describes how in a single “pidgin” expression, “the voice divides into two voices, two languages. This double-voiced, hybridised discourse serves a purpose, whereby each voice can unmask the other.”^{xxix} An example of this awareness is the use of the English language by Chinua Achebe, who writes of consciously translating words directly from his native language. This act removes the English from its cultural roots and mingles it with a new foundation of reference.

^{xxv} *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, “The Fact of Blackness,” Frantz Fanon.

^{xxvi} *Post Colonial Studies Reader*, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

^{xxvii} *Es'kia Mphahlele: themes of alienation and African humanism*, Ruth Obee. Formulating a National Consciousness From Slaves and Noble Savages to Tsotsis and ANC Heroes.

^{xxviii} *October, The Second Decade, 1986-96*, “Reading Africa Through Foucault,” V. Y. Mudimbe’s Reaffirmation of the Subject, Manthia Diawara. “If we suppose that Foucault is to Mudimbe what the French anthropologists were to Senghor.” Manthia Diawara, in referencing Mudimbe, wrote that this “...is in the sense that the Africans have been empowered by the Europeans to carry on a discourse about themselves.”

^{xxix} *Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, by Robert J. C. Young, 1995.

CHAPTER 6: "MY NAME IS RENÉ GALLIMARD! ALSO KNOWN AS MADAME BUTTERFLY!"



The Dying Slave, Michelangelo, a marble sculpture commissioned for the tomb of Julius II in 1515-1542.

René Gallimard is a French male character in the 1993 film *M. Butterfly*, that is directed by David Cronenberg, and a screenplay by David Henry Hwang. Gallimard falls romantically in love with an “oriental woman” (Madame Butterfly). Eventually the relationship ends when Madame Butterfly exposes herself as a man. Their whole relationship was a fantasy. Towards the end of the movie, Gallimard finally realizes that the “oriental woman” he was in love with only existed in himself. He eventually commits suicide in keeping with the traditional 1904 opera by Giacomo Puccini titled *Madama Butterfly*. He becomes Madama Butterfly. At the last stages of transforming himself into an ‘oriental woman,’ he pronounces: “At last, in prison far away from China, I have found her.... My name is René Gallimard! Also known-as Madama Butterfly!”^{xxx}

The movie exemplifies well Said’s ideas on the Orient and the Occident. In a personal narrative, it unveils the desire and fabrication of the Other. The Other (with the capital O) was first termed by the psychoanalyst and cultural theorist, Jacques Lacan. He states that “all desire is the metonym of the desire to be” because the first desire of the subject is the desire to exist in the gaze of the Other. Michelangelo’s *Dying Slave* reflects this desire. Through what Robert S. Liebert termed the artist’s “autobiographical myth” he interprets the sculpture as containing the image of the “archaic phallic mother.” He relates this Lacanian desire of the Other to understanding the artist’s “... absorption in the Ganymede fantasy served well to stave off the terror of the child Michelangelo in the silent darkness of the motherless night.”^{xxx1} This myth tells the story of Ganymede, the son of the King of Troy, who is desired by Zeus. To disguise himself, Zeus takes the form of an eagle and abducts the boy. Michelangelo is known to have sent drawings of this

fantasy to his young lover Tommaso during the time he was working on the *Dying Slave*.^{xxxii} Through the depth of his psyche revealed in his work, Michelangelo is able to transmit readings that extend beyond the personal to addressing a social realm.

Similar to the two works, David Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* and Michelangelo’s *Dying Slave*, the *Square-grid Humility* acts as a surrogate to the personal addressing the social. The readings on excavating, or burying and the fabricating perceptions of the Other is situated within the realms of a cultural psychoanalysis, as discussed in previous chapters.

To address these social cultural issues that I am alluding to in my work, it is necessary for me to contend with my own autobiographical myth and to question my binary perceptions and prejudices. Similar to Hwang’s character, Gallimard, and Michelangelo, the installation is a self-psychoanalytic process in that it becomes the redemption described by Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*; “Changed I saw the poets and their gaze turned toward themselves. Penitents of the spirit I saw coming: they grew out of the poets.”^{xxxiii}

When I originally began to fabricate the different bodies, I intentionally used the white pigmented square, the similar figural postures of the bodies, the attempted androgyny, and the lack of hair to evoke the similar. The unconscious process occurred in retrospective through the non-use of a model. An expressive stylization is reenacted through this “mimicry without imitation.”^{xxxiv} Most artists are aware of how when drawing a face without a model; we tend to draw the most familiar face we know, which is ours...the artist’s face. That is to say, there is certain likeness to a self-portraiture in all the facial features. This conceptually

ties in with the personal narrative by exposing my inward gaze—my self-psychoanalysis.

Here, I am concerned with following a thought process that uses the art as a vehicle for better understanding one's own identity within the preexisting social constructs, highlighting the fine line between an individual's identity and his/her social cultural identity. Okot p'Bitek, an African writer, states that as a child we are born attached to the mother by the umbilical cord. The cutting of the cord symbolizes the child becoming an individual, who then becomes a member of the society and is prepared to play his/her role within it.^{xxxv} Thus the individual is attached to the society symbolically as to the mother. As with Said's re-figuration of the Lacanian Other as existing within the self as a fabrication; Okot p'Bitek's statement of identity fuses Lacanian's "other" (with a small "o") and "Other" (with a capital "O"). In other words, not differentiating the desire to exist in the eyes of the mother from that of existing in the eyes of society. Both with Said and Okot p'Bitek, the borders within these identities; within the individual and society; within the "self" and "o/Other," are malleable. As we identify ourselves through experience within cultural imprintation, so does society.

Square-grid Humility becomes, as much about a self-portrait as it is a cultural psychoanalysis. The dialogue exists within me. Having been raised within the Shona culture, my Caucasian physical appearance defined me as an Other. I eventually confronted this Other-self

when I moved to the USA for college. Then I became otherized as a foreigner culturally peripheral though not physically. In this context, I am as much the Westerner as I am the non-Westerner. In the installation, I am the several busts gazing towards the viewer. The viewer is myself standing on the raised platform gazing down at the several busts. I am Gallimard and I am Madama Butterfly.

^{xxx} *Ethics after Idealism*, Rey Chow, 1998.

^{xxxii} *Michelangelo, A Psychoanalytical Study of His Life and Images*, Robert S. Liebert, M.D., 1983.

^{xxxiii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxiv} *Franz Kafka: The Reality of Dreams*, by Franz Bauner. He used this quote to describe a similar approach in Franz Kafak's work.

^{xxxv} *Postmodernism/Postcolonialism*, Homi Bhabha. The tableau vivant is a genre particularly suited to the epistemology of the postmodern, where "the referent is lifted but reference remains: what is left is only the writing of dreams, a fiction that is not imagenary, mimicry without imitation, without verisimilitude...(O)n that side of the lustre where the 'medium' is shining" (Derrida 1981, 211) (p.310)

^{xxxvi} *African Philosophy, An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. 1998, Okot p'Bitek in his article "The Sociality of Self" was using this metaphor to rebuke the eighteenth century French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, statement that declared "Man is born Free." To stress this even further, he states that Rousseau was also wrong to claim that "...and everywhere he is in chains." He emphasizes that "Man is not born free, he cannot be free. He is incapable of being free. For only by being in chains can he be and remain "human."

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