

Beginning at the end

Lien Botha

September 2010

One: the collector can keep the muse

Initially the return from Germany was ill-omened. This was not my first journey but it was the first time that I returned so reduced. *A reductive categorization.* The problem was, that this time, my *muse* was stolen. Frankly, i've never been one for the *Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa but now that *Mnemosyne* was absent, I realized it . Inchoate, I was treading water above a deep sinking which sensed me into such lassitude that I could plod small steps only. By the end of August it was evident that something had to be done and thus I managed a decision to contact "the collector" who only invests in *women's stories*, since I knew that he was interested in purchasing the Nan Goldin. It entailed a smaller journey, but dependent on *The ballad of sexual dependency* I booked the flight. His eighty year old secretary shuffled me along a narrow passage through the umbrageous anteroom and into the vault where the Goldin print was unwrapped and assessed on a cabinet which was covered with acid free board (i was assured). Propelled by an uncomfortable silence I noticed an entire box of the white gloves used for handling prints and while he routed a magnifying glass over the explicit surface of Nan's life, I became aware of a torso - sized wrapped object; a bit like Man Ray's *Enigma of Isadore Ducasse*, but less angular. Next, my acute sense of smell kicked in and I imagined that the collector's shrine had fallen foul of some ill deed. Still, the transaction was concluded and I left the collector's house just before dark. Gauteng always seems more dangerous at night- time than in the middle of the day. And yet as I drove past the Acacia trees etched on the highveld plateau, a comfortable relief came to me. Don't let the *muse* return - ever. She will sink you.



Charlene, Sylt, 2010



Rantum Nord, Sylt, 2010



Solstice, Sylt, 2010

Work in Progress: Sylt, Germany 2010



Alexandra



Angela



Dieter



Two: unlucky Lucky 1983 – (2013)

In the early eighties there was a small metal camera with which I made some attempts at bracketing a reality. Looking at some of those images now, it seems as if they do not quite belong to me. Mostly black and white, often not great prints, instruction from the editor: shoot, push process, zap it through the developer, stop / fix 2 minutes, hair dryer 1 minute: it had to fly to make the front page – a car bomb exploded in Church Street. Going back was inevitable, even though that would be one's last choice, until the intervention with Georg Diez and 80*81 compelled me to retrogress.

The great verbs of the sea come down on us in a roar. What shall i answer for? (from Letter VI by WS Graham)



Two sisters, Pretoria North, 1981



Lucky, near Swartruggens, 1982

Three: The Memory of Birds

“One of our tribe, a philosopher, was exiled to Agapemone to purify himself from illusions. First he undertook never to use the past tense again. The past is a lie. Then he gave up laughing, because that would be to imitate trees. Then he decided to stop employing any word with an *a* in it. *A* was the beginning of appearance, of the rot. You know what happened to him? Wadd takes off his sunglasses to show his kohl-rimmed yellow eyes to the red-faced consul. ‘He became tongueless. He went mad. We had him evacuated to Mori. He could only whistle *The Night Journey of a Bird*’” *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution*, Breyten Breytenbach: Human & Rousseau, 1996))



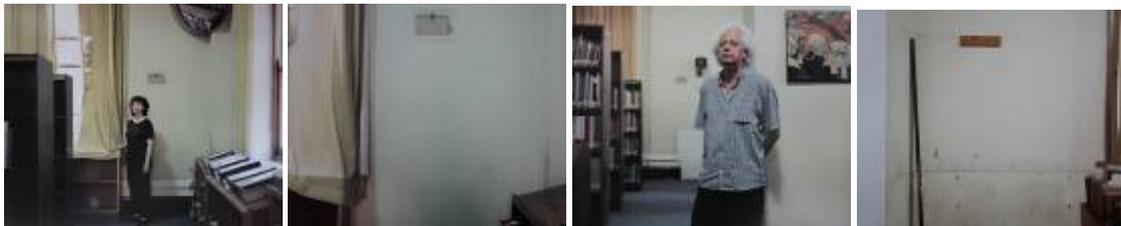
Helene Lambert's book: Parrot Jungle 2009



Maggie Laubser Street, Strand: Parrot Jungle 2009



South African Museum, Cape Town: Parrot Jungle, 2009



Library hours: Kathy Moon, 2004

Library hours: Garton Bower, 2004

Somewhere between practice and theory I have attempted “maps”, perhaps because before the metal recording device there was a word which linked the land to the sky then back to the sea so that *drought* became a metaphor, and *endless* became a soliloquy, and a *shark* became an endangered paragraph.



White stick for the Arctic: inside the house the mother did not build, 2008

Four: Curse your own process into being

There are times when being a practicing artist (in this country) seems so irrelevant by comparison to the many plights within our society, but after thirty years the piece of metal is stuck; the camera and its grey scale is what I know and understand: it is an accomplice. After nearly thirty years, the shutter has become a metathesis of the documentary lens: pursuing the constructed image, the buried image, the installed image and the concordant possibilities of other substrates such as glass, wood and fabric.

Then last year with the advent of my own *digital revolution* I seemed to have lost the “stockpile” of the past thirty years and ended up with a documented narrative which seemed in a sense to

have its beginning and end at the same point, with the difference that so many stories were collected between the ravaged past and the unknown future .



Church Square, 1983, Lien Botha

Five: (Copy, paste and conclude)

The copy, paste, edit, cut and select all, the erasure of photoshop, the landscape as one wishes it to be invisible / visible, the landscape without the memory of the wind or a flood or of a donkey cart trekking across it or of a drought or of a time before 1948 . Images according to our state of “civilization”. The German landscape for instance and by comparison a subject of correlation these days, the Middle East: before and after 9/11, and the altering vision that comes with loss or longing, after death before love, after love before war, after hunger before

hunger - all of that. The camera has the potential of being a third person, an alternative, an option, it is the new “shrink,” the psychologist of the 21st century. Our fast track to conscience are issues driven by the technological hollow, the in- between of Einstein’s gravity and Hawking’s declaration that there is no more need for God. Digital has buried Freud and beyond *blogging* you should be able to cut and paste your own options of the version you prefer on a particular day in a given context.