A TENSION BETWEEN FORM AND NARRATIVE:

RACHEL WHITEREAD'S 'BEDS'

Daniel Ogilvie

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Keith Patrick wrote of Rachel Whiteread's exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 1997 that:

> The paradox is elaborated by the careful siting of her sculpture in the gallery space such that the aesthetic is foregrounded. Once its history is revealed, however, it is impossible to view the work with the detachment demanded by a formalist perspective. Nor is it necessary to know the history of each individual piece, for once the thread begins to unravel one starts to construct our own imagined narratives. Thus Whiteread holds to question the objectivity of aesthetic response, inviting us to read into these seemingly neutral spaces a series of progressively elaborate histories which undermine any simplistic reading of the work as simply an object of formal beauty.[1]

In this essay I wish to examine the tension that can exist between an artwork's formal properties and its narrative that is implied in the above statement. In particular I will look at works by Rachel Whiteread which critics such as Greeves,, Schneider, Patrick and Mullins have agreed have both of these elements present. I will look at why perhaps some of these works may be considered as having more of a formal viewpoint than others, discussing the works placement and orientation in the gallery space.

Rachel Whiteread was born in April 1963, and grew up in London, England. Her mother was an artist and a socialist, her father a geography teacher who was a supporter of the Labour Party[2]. She studied art at Brighton Polytechnic but it was

[1] Keith Patrick, 'Juliao Sarmento and Rachel Whiteread at the 47th Venice Biennale', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, Issue 16, 70-71, (p.70)
[2] Charlotte Mullins, 'Beginnings' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.7. This book was written with the permission and support of Rachel Whiteread.

not until she accepted a Masters course at the Slade school of Fine Art that she specialised in sculpture[3]. Whiteread's influences have been variously attributed to include Eva Hesse, the formal properties of the Minimalists, Carl Andre and Donald Judd, and in interview she has also made mention of Louise Bourgeois and Bruce Nauman, referring to them respectively as her emotional and conceptual sides[4]. Whiteread started by making wax moulds of her own body parts, but by 1987 she started using household objects as representations of the real body, using materials in the casting that still suggested the original part. Her first solo exhibition included the works, *Closet*, *Shallow Breath*, *Mantle* and *Torso*[5].

Between the years 1988 and 1992 Whiteread produced a number of casts of the spaces underneath and inside beds and mattresses, (Figures 5,6 and 8-12). These works suggest familiar recognisable objects, yet I will suggest in this essay that the orientation she chooses to use to display the objects forces us to view the object less literally and see it more as a depiction of something else. This subversion is accentuated by the coloured dyes and her choice of moulding material, here either rubber or plaster, which she uses in the casting. I will discuss this less literal depiction more in Chapter 2 when I discuss the anthropomorphic aspect of Whiteread's work.

Whiteread's casts of the spaces in-between have been critically interpreted as alluding to death or loss, a *memento mori* or death mask[6]. Rosalind Krauss has drawn parallels between Whiteread's work and Barthes' description of the photograph as a memento of death[7]. This interpretation of her work refers to the solidifying of a space that was previously occupied; a freezing in time of a space that was occupied over a period of time. Whiteread's work has also been compared

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[3] URL: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/homepage.html.
[4] Charlotte Mullins, 'Beginnings' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004),, p.8 and in an interview with the Financial Times, January 19th, 2007, URL: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/7e656524-a6be-11db-83e4-0000779e2340.html.
[5] Charlotte Mullins, 'Beginnings' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.11.
[6] Fiona Bradley, 'Introduction' in *Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life*, (Liverpool, Tate Gallery, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p.14.
[7] Rosalind Krauss, 'X Marks the Spot' in *Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life*, (Liverpool, Tate Gallery, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p.76.

to the Minimalist sculptures of Judd, Andre and Morris and such comparisons suggest the work is largely abstract in nature. However the imperfections in the surface of the object, the residue of those that occupied the space cast, prevent the object being solely viewed as such.

In Chapter 1 of this essay I will explore the critical response to these works and the various approaches that these critics have taken to explain the viewer reaction to her work. I feel this quite extensive review is important because each critic, whilst acknowledging the work has some formal properties, then proceeds to interpret the work in a different manner, using approaches that include the ideas of presence and absence, feminism and psychoanalytical methods, social and political histories or anthropomorphism.

In Chapter 2 of this essay I will consider two works by contemporaries of Whiteread, Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, and discuss why it might be that these works have less formal aspects. Whilst all artworks have form, what I wish to emphasise here is that Emin's and Lucas' work do not receive the critical engagement with form that some of Whiteread's work does. I will consider these two works in contrast to Whiteread's and discuss if the more formal aspect of the latter allows the viewer to experience an aesthetic response more readily than the former works, and why this might be so. I will also consider if there are aspects of the work that might be considered anthropomorphic and whether that also induces certain reactions in the viewer and diminishes its formal properties. I shall use Michael Fried's concept of 'instaneousness' here to help with my analysis.

> It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instaneousness* [author's italics], as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to

> see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.[8]

In Chapter 3 I will consider the orientation of the works within the gallery. Whiteread's beds are variously displayed either vertically along their long or short axis or laid on the gallery floor and I will consider if these choices affect viewer reaction to the work and if they affect the formal aesthetic of the work; here I shall use Foster and Krauss's concept of horizontality and verticality[9]. I will also consider if Michael Fried's Modernist concept of 'theatre' is useful in analysing a viewer's response and will discuss the lack of the traditional pedestal for the display of the work and what this means for the works formal properties. Whilst it may seem anachronistic to use terms Fried coined in 1967 and apply it to works created a quarter of a century later, what I would like to suggest is that these terms are not necessarily historical in context; the terms were used to describe the relationship between the spectator and the work of art: it is this relationship that I wish to explore in the essay.

Lastly I will conclude the essay, addressing the question, 'is there a tension in these works between their formal properties and their narrative qualities, and is this tension affected by the choices made in the way the work is displayed'? I will also discuss why it may be that critical responses to these works have largely ignored the formal aspects.

Throughout this essay I will be discussing the artworks with relation to Modernism and Post-modernism so before proceeding further it would be pertinent to define what I mean and understand by the terms.[10]

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[8] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.167.

[9] Lauren Sedofsky, 'Down and dirty - form in modernist art - interview with curators Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois', *Art Forum*, (Summer, 1996).
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n10_v34/ai_18533853/pg_1

[10] Throughout this essay I will refer to Greenberg's Modernism – including that which is sometimes called High Modernism - with a capitilisation to discriminate it from 'modernism', a more generic term for art that engaged with modern life or style.

Modernism, whose principal exponents were the American art critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, valorised art, ascribing it aesthetic value, through a series of value judgements that drew principally on Kant's universality of taste, 'grounds deep-seated and shared alike by all men, underlying their agreement in estimating the forms under which objects are given to them'[11]. Works that were within the Modernist canon, they argued, were isolated from their context, from their conditions of creation. Works that come to mind as being typically within the Modernist canon including paintings by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and Jules Olitski, (Figure 7), and the sculptures of Anthony Caro, although the latter artist was added by Michael Fried and was not explicitly discussed by Clement Greenberg.

By the 1960s it was becoming clear that this idealist project was not to succeed; as Habermas wrote, 'art had become a critical mirror, showing the irreconcilable nature of the aesthetic and the social worlds'[12]. Greenberg's 'rules' excluded an increasing amount of the then contemporary art practise, for example Pop-art and Minimalism, and so these and later art practices became termed Post-modernist, and embraced all latter art practise that in reacting to Modernism's supposed elitism, rooted itself in the context and the conditions of its creation. Work's that fall outside the Modernist canon and became problematic for Modernists, and therefore are termed Post-modern, include works by artists such as Jasper Johns and Donald Judd. Whilst Greenberg's 'rules' are often used as a stick to hit him with, and to attack Modernism and its relevance to contemporary art, it should be made clear that these rules were never considered immutable. As Fried comments, 'If a critic thought such rules existed, he would surely use them to predict what the modernist art of the future is going to look like'.[13] The perceived elitism of Modernism, the preferencing of certain works and artists over others, came about

[11] Craig Owen, 'The Discourse of Others' in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster, (New York: The New Press, 1998), p.67.
[12] Jurgen Habermas, 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project', in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster, (New York: The New Press, 1998), p.10.
[13] Michael Fried, 'Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella', in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.216.

because Greenberg saw those artists as continuing the artistic development started by Manet. This artistic development was allowable because of changes in society, which freed the artist from the iconographic demands put upon him by the artist's patron. Once art achieved greater autonomy it could become 'more and more concerned with problems and issues intrinsic to itself'[14].

Postmodernism sought to deconstruct this position and once again root art in the societal and political events in which it is created and displayed. By removing the elitism associated with Modernism it became possible for the artist to create works that would have previously been determined as non-art or kitsch.

> All values are human values, relative values, in art as well as elsewhere. Yet there seems to have been more or less of a general agreement among the cultivated of mankind over the ages as to what is good art and what bad. [...] Kitsch, by virtue of a rationalised technique that draws on science and industry, has erased this distinction if practice.[15]

Post-modern works also referred back to past, but not in the referential way that Modernist works did. Modernist works were seen as always being a development of what had gone before, a continuation of Kant's autonomous artistic timeline. Fredric Jameson refers to such post-modern referencing as pastiche, a reinvention of the past masters rather than a faithful reproduction of them[16]. Once rooted in society Post-modern art brings elements of that society into its work, for example mass production or consumerism. The baggage that was Modernism's aesthetic is thus dismissed. If the artist is not concerned with the formal aspects of the work, why should we use formalist methods to describe the work? Whilst a large number

[14] Michael Fried, 'Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella', in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.217.
[15] Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.539.
[16] Fredric James, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster, (New York: The New Press, 1998), p.127.

of Post-modern works appear to be concerned more with iconography and narrative, I hope to show in this essay that in some of Whiteread's works, and more in some than others, that a critical engagement with the formal nature of her work can offer a more revealing interpretation of the work as whole. In other words, Whiteread's work has elements that highlight the conditions of its creation, but also has elements that are concerned with the work and the work alone.

CHAPTER 1: CRITICAL REACTION

It is not uncommon in reading critical appraisals of Whiteread's 'bed' works for them to be described merely as stepping stones to later works.

> In comparison with the foursquare factuality of Whiteread's tables, chairs, baths or rooms, these staircases have an element of fantasy about them. If the general family resemblance is to American art of the 60s and 70s – Minimalism in particular -, it is as if in the structural dynamism of the staircases some exotic genes are emerging, of Russian constructivism or perhaps, closer to home, Vorticism[1].

Greeves' article is concerned with Whiteread's later casts of staircases which were created some ten years after her mattress works. Throughout the article she suggests that Whiteread's work has had an increasing formalism about it although she never explicitly says so.

Greeves writes that Whiteread's staircases are 'very much motivated by formal interest', or that Whiteread 'is increasingly preoccupied with the articulation of formal values', but does not discuss the aspects of why this is so or why the mattresses and beds have only a 'foursquare factuality'[2]. Greeves appears to suggest through her use of the terms 'factuality' and 'fantasy' that it is the 'foursquare factuality' or reality of the earlier objects that prevents a formal analysis of them, as opposed to less objective reality of the staircases. The reality that Greeves alludes to is problematic as Whiteread has deliberately chosen these

[1] Susanna Greeves, 'Stairs into Space', in Rachel Whiteread, *Rachel Whiteread, Haunch of Venison*, (Haunch of Venison, 2002), p49.
[2] Susanna Greeves, 'Stairs into Space', in Rachel Whiteread, *Rachel Whiteread, Haunch of Venison*, (Haunch of Venison, 2002), p52.

objects to be metaphors; '... the work is to do with absence not presence. When I was at art school I made a number of pieces cast from my own body, but that kind of direct relationship stopped in 1987'[3]. It is not the objective reality of the work that is on display but the narrative that its physical presence suggests. Because the staircases can no longer perform their function, they go nowhere and they cannot be walked up, their formalism becomes a more dominant factor. Yet if it is this lack of function which gives the staircases their formal property, then why can that not be said of a mattress which is sited vertically against a wall? The staircase is still recognisable to viewer, as is the mattress, but it is only in continued observation of the work that viewer becomes more disorientated and realises that this object is not all that it might have appeared at first sight. In both works Whiteread is actually casting the space that is framed by the object and is not reproducing the object itself. In both the staircase and mattress Whiteread modifies the surface texture and colour of the object and by her framing the cast and through her choice of orientation for its display produces an object that can no longer perform its original function.

Christiane Schneider's article is concerned with Whiteread's outdoor sculptures and she sees Whiteread's method of working as preventing it having any formal properties.

> There is always a direct referent in reality with this method of working, which shows how important the direct relationship to reality is for Whiteread in her work.[4]

Schneider's essay makes a number of references to Whiteread's work being 'figurative' and the viewer being able to associate with the work through the object's familiarity.

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[3] Andrea Rose, 'Rachel Whiteread interviewed by Andrea Rose', *Rachel Whiteread: British Pavilion, XLVII Venice Biennale*, (1997), London: The British Council, March 1997, 29-34, p.34.
[4] Christiane Schneider, 'The Body and the City', in *Rachel Whiteread, Haunch of Venison*, (Haunch of Venison, 2002), p.29.

> It is noteworthy that Whiteread reflects the situation of a mass society with her works in that she prefers to base them on everyday mass products, and that in using casts she is employing a classical process of mass reproduction, although she herself only produces one-offs.[5]

Schneider is suggesting that the casting of recognisable objects and figuration roots the work in reality. Yet Whiteread deliberately distorts this reality, by her distortion of the colour and material, perhaps most markedly demonstrated in her 1991 works, *Untitled (Amber Bed)*, Figure 8, and *Untitled (Black Bed),* Figure 12, and I would argue that these techniques provide a distancing from reality. The casting process involves the destruction of the original object which could be considered to erase that object's previous history, leaving just a form behind. Casting eradicates the objects past narrative and creates a new object, formed in the present, that has no past history. Whiteread can be very careful in her selection of objects for casting, looking for the surface detritus that marks the objects use, but in her choice of material for casting and in her modification of that very surface, she alters that history, or even eradicates it. Whiteread is not making a cast of an object, but a cast of the space adjacent to that object; the past history is not that of the object, but of the people that encountered the object and occupied that space. Indeed, Whiteread's casting of the space underneath a bed as in *Shallow Breath*, Figure 6, produces a form that is everything that the object is not. As Mullins observes, 'You were looking at the solidified air from under a bath or bed rather than the object itself'.[6]

Casting is a process usually used in the mass production of functional objects. The casting process imbues an inanimate object with the life of those that occupied the

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[5] Christiane Schneider, 'The Body and the City', in *Rachel Whiteread, Haunch of Venison*, (Haunch of Venison, 2002), p.29.
[6] Charlotte Mullins, *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.24.

space. Casting is used to produce a one-off object, and the destruction of the original in the process ensures this. The casting process revitalises an old object, brings it into the contemporary, into the modern, (Whiteread's casting process is shown in Figure 13). As Whiteread has intimated, her use of casting is about the surface[7].

Whiteread's modification of the surface texture through her choice of casting material gives her work abstractedness, as Mullins comments.

> The fragments of paint, the soot in the grate, the dents and chips in tabletops – all captured in the surfaces of her early plaster works – disappeared when she cast in resin and rubber, revealing the three-dimensional solidity of the spaces underneath and behind objects.[8]

Mullins suggests therefore that the casting material can remove some the literalness of the object; to increase the viewer's awareness that the object is not necessarily a 'real-world' object, but an object that is suggestive of something else. The distancing that this achieves give the object a more abstract presence, one that emphasises its material and the surface. The objects that Whiteread chooses are not personal objects for her, they are found discarded or bought from second hand shops. In answer to the question; how do you select the mattresses and bed bases you work from? Whiteread answered:

> They are absolutely specific. The earlier pieces I made were to do with the London environment and its general neglect. Old mattresses, bed bases, etc. are very much a part of London's detritus and you see them abandoned everywhere on the streets. I remember seeing a television documentary about a particularly run-down housing estate in

[7] Fiona Bradley, 'Introduction' in *Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life*, (Liverpool, Tate Gallery, Thames and Hudson, 1997) p.14.
[8] Charlotte Mullins, 'Beginnings' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.7.

> Hackney, East London. As the documentary progressed you became increasingly aware of the degradation and poverty in which these people lived. An old blind man living on the estate reported a terrible stench coming from the adjoining flat. Eventually the council intervened and found a man who had died in his bed. He had lain there for two weeks and had sort of melted into his mattress. The corpse was removed and the council cleared his furniture onto the street with the intention of taking it to the rubbish tip. No-one came to pick it up. There was this dreadful image of young children playing on the mattress that the old man had died on. I must have seen that film over six years ago but the images have stayed with me and have possibly influenced me in some way. There are all sorts of stories related to the pieces I make. When you use secondhand furniture it is inevitable that the history of objects becomes a part of the work.[9]

So Whiteread claims that the items she chooses to cast from are chosen for the narrative that they represent even though the casting process and her intervention in that process modify that and even eradicates that narrative.

Even in the case of *Shallow Breath*, Figure 6, which was made in response to her father's death, the modification of the surface and the casting process itself eradicates its history and brings it into the present.

> The first bed piece I made was in 1989, two months after my father died. It was called Shallow Breath. It was cast from the space underneath a single bed. I was beginning to understand how I could control my materials – how the material underneath the bed could be stretched so it was almost like using the bed as a canvas; how by

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[9] Andrea Rose, 'Rachel Whiteread interviewed by Andrea Rose', *Rachel Whiteread: British Pavilion, XLVII Venice Biennale*, (1997), London: The British Council, March 1997, 29-34, p.29.

> pulling the material with the weight of the plaster I could make it undulate. A year later I made a piece using a double bed. I used Hessian again, but stretched it very taut so there was hardly any undulation on the surface; then I made other pieces in rubber.[10]

As Mullins writes, a bed or mattress is a personal object of which nearly all of us have some memory or personal experience.

> We all sleep in beds, were conceived and born there, had fevers on the mattress and feared the monsters in the gloom below. A bed is as much a part of our everyday life as sleep, sex and death, all of which occur on its porous surface.[11]

But the familiarity of the objects is distanced from the viewer as Whiteread steadily removes the previous traces of the object and concentrates on the surface texture, (Figure 15). As Andrea Rose comments, 'The work itself is very formal. There are stories relating to each work, but your approach is to remove the personal and anecdotal in order to create something more neutral'[12]. Whiteread's casting is creating a new object that has form but through her choice of casting material contains more or less elements of the past narrative of the object used to create the past. As such Whiteread is attaining a balance between the new object's form and its past narrative as Patrick observes; 'Given the undeniably formal eloquence of her work, a tension accrues between the physical presence of the sculpture-as-object and the history which precedes it'.[13]

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[10] Andrea Rose, 'Rachel Whiteread interviewed by Andrea Rose', *Rachel Whiteread: British Pavilion, XLVII Venice Biennale*, (1997), London: The British Council, March 1997, 29-34, p.29.
[11] Charlotte Mullins, *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.12.
[12] Andrea Rose, 'Rachel Whiteread interviewed by Andrea Rose', *Rachel Whiteread: British Pavilion, XLVII Venice Biennale*, (1997), London: The British Council, March 1997, 29-34, p.29.. Whiteread answered this point; 'With the bed pieces in particular, and perhaps with *Ghost*, there is certainly an element of nostalgia. But I don't think there is necessarily anything wrong with that. Recently I've tried to become more formal in the way I've been working. In *Untitled (Ten Tables)* there is reference to time and there is some colour involved but it is essentially rather stark and brutal'.
[13] Keith Patrick, 'Juliao Sarmento and Rachel Whiteread at the 47th Venice Biennale', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, Issue 16, 70-71, (p.70).

This tension has also been written of by Usherwood who uses a term coined by Michael Fried in relation to Modernist art works, 'objecthood' in describing the works formal properties.

> There is a tension between the apparent sense of 'objecthood' and the traces of human presence evident on external surfaces and this is not something one finds in Minimalism proper.[14]

These allusions to anthropomorphism will be considered more fully in Chapter 2. Grunenberg sees Whiteread's work as being, 'concerned with domesticity, cultural identity and Englishness', quoting Whiteread; 'As yet, I do not feel equipped to step into another culture and use it'.[15] Reviewing the same exhibition, Lynne Cooke takes another tack. Cooke is concerned with casting method that Whiteread uses and its relationship to the work of the Minimalists.

> The current touring exhibition of fifteen cast works by Rachel Whiteread.... provides a welcome opportunity to distinguish between the reproductive aspect of casting and its iconographical import.[16]

Cooke begins her review by quoting Georges Did-Huberman; 'in casting it is enough to duplicate the reference by contact, without making the optical effort to imitate' and that 'casting is indifferent to the traditional notion of style'[17]. However, Cooke notes that whereas 'so-called natural casts are independently, even arbitrarily formed,

[14] Paul Usherwood, 'The Rise and Rise of Rachel Whiteread', *Art Monthly*, (October 1996), No. 200, p.12.
[15] Robin Rice, 'Review of Rachel Whiteread by Chrisophe Grunenberg', *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol.21, No. 1, (Spring-Summer 2000), p.59.
[16] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.273.
[17] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.273.

Whiteread's casts are, of course, the product of deliberation and forethought'[18]. Cooke does not however conclude that at least some aspect of Whiteread's work is about form; although she notes that casting as a process does require 'any preconceived idea of form', and then notes that Whiteread makes artistic decisions that modify the result, she does not conclude that these modifications perhaps create an object that has some element of form[19]. Cooke notes that 'in that socio-culturally orientated interpretation, the very paradox of making present that which is absent can be overlooked, as can discussion of the technical processes integral to the creation of these works'[20]. I would agree with Cooke that the socio-cultural aspects of Whiteread's work do receive disproportionate attention, but Cooke instead chooses to concentrate on the ideas of the present and absent and on Whiteread's location, 'immediately and incontrovertibly within the legacy of Minimalist sculpture'[21]. What I do agree with is that Whiteread's work is concerned, 'with the phenomenological encounter between the viewer and the object in real space and time', although Cooke uses this to enshrine Whiteread's works with the Minimalist canon; this was also an issue for Modernist works[22]. I certainly agree with Tickner that Cooke's firm location of Whiteread within the Minimalist canon is a misreading.

> Figurative and metaphorical references, and surfaces marked by human gesture, are a kind of heresy in minimalism, but what Whiteread shares with minimalist sculpture is a concern with the phenomenological encounter between viewer and work.[23]

[18] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.274.
[19] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.274.
[20] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.273.
[21] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.274.
[22] Lynne Cooke, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Philadephia', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.137, No.1105, (April, 1995), p.274.
[23] Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 Feb. 2002, Footnote 53, p.45.

I will discuss this encounter more in Chapter 3.

Cvoro, in discussing Whiteread's *House*, is also concerned with the casting process and its relationship to presence and absence, and his discussion is therefore also relevant to Whiteread's casts of mattresses and beds.

> The mechanical authenticity that the cast assumes bears witness to the fracturing of its own condition. Set between the sublime and unsavoury ordinariness, between the "truth" of the object and its insufficient aestheticism, a cast is a parody and euphemism of its original. The unrelenting realism of its arrested image marks a space between impression and imprint, between presence and absence.[24]

Again, unlike with *House*, Whiteread's casts of the mattresses and beds are facsimiles of the original. Whiteread deliberately alters the surface, decides the limits of the casts and chooses how to present to work to the viewer. The balance that Cvoro alludes to, between aestheticism and truth, is thus disrupted in favour of form and aestheticism.

David Batchelor, whilst acknowledging commentaries on Whiteread's work that include, 'psychoanalytic, or semiotic or sociological' chooses to write on what he finds is a motif running through all her work, namely death[25]. Again, it is Whiteread's method, casting, that provokes this and the link to the idea of the cast as death mask; Batchelor also invokes, as has Rosalind Krauss, Barthes' description of the photograph as a memento of death. However later Batchelor writes of the compartmentalising of each art historian's writing about Whiteread.

> Yet, while this type of narration, [on the theme of death], is not inappropriate to the work, it seems oddly insufficient. It is as if once an

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[24] Uros Cvoro, 'The Present Body, The Absent Body and the Formless', *Art Journal*, Vol.61, No.4, (Winter 2002), p.57.

> expressive theme has been identified and attached to the work, there was no space for other themes –whether parallel or alternative or contradictory – to be simultaneously present in the work or identifiable with it. This is an entirely unhelpful limitation to impose on the experience of art.[26]

This quotation from Bachelor crystallises what I believe to be the current sdtate of critical engagement with Whiteread's work. Whilst a formalist approach to her work is alluded to by various historians each prefers to concentrate on just one aspect of the work to the exclusion of others. Bachelor also makes mention of Whiteread's work being 'consistently very static and very quiet'; stillness is one parameter in Modernist works[27].

Lisa Tickner agrees that critical responses to Whiteread's work, 'converge on the themes of witness and loss', and comments that 'this gravitational pull back to 'Witness and Loss' is not so much wrong as limiting and exhausted'[28]. Although Tickner taking a feminist approach to the analysis of Whiteread's work, and in particular the relationship and affect her mother may have had on her work, she concludes with a quotation from a Whiteread interview that there is not necessarily a strong feminist motivation behind her.

> When things change, they become part of the fabric of life rather than something one has to constantly fight against… when people ask if I see myself as a female artist, or whether my work has a part in feminist history, I don't think I'm political in that sense. I see myself as a sculptor and as an artist and I think that my mother, her mother and their

[25] David Batchelor, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Liverpool and Madrid', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.138, No.1125, (Dec. 1996), pp.837.
[26] David Batchelor, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Liverpool and Madrid', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.138, No.1125, (Dec. 1996), p.838.
[27] David Batchelor, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Liverpool and Madrid', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.138, No.1125, (Dec. 1996), p.838.
[28] Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 Feb. 2002, p.31.

> grandmothers worked incredibly hard for my generation to be able to do what we do.[29]

Most tellingly is a quotation from Tickner drawing on work done by Briony Fer.

> Whiteread's work is calculatedly 'and-and' and 'neither-nor'. Casting is neither carving (virile) nor modelling ('feminine'), neither fully form (sculpture) nor fully surface (painting), nor quite abstraction or figuration, reproductive yet inventive, simultaneously iconic and indexical (like the photograph) and *undecidability* – the collapsing of oppositions – is as Fer points out, what Whiteread's work most fully *is*.[30]

Tickner's bringing into question of the undecidability of Whiteread's work is I believe highly relevant and answers the question why so many approaches are taken to the analysis of her work, although none of them do more than allude to the works form. I would like to suggest this may be because, in our Post-modern world, the language no longer exists to describe the form unless we refer back to the work of the Modernist art historians which Post-modernism has been a reaction against.
Again, to quote Tickner:

> ...and interestingly hybrid aesthetic: the gestalt of a quasi-minimalist form which nevertheless registers the contingent traces of human presence; and the suggestion of figurative reference, narrative, even theatricality in objects and surfaces pressed by the casting process into the semblance of modernist form.[31]

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[29] Carey Lovelace, 'When things change: Weighing in on Feminism', *Art News*, May 1997, p.145 quoted in Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 Feb. 2002, p.38.
[30] Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 Feb. 2002, p.35. This quotation from Tickner refers to an article by Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art*, New Haven and London, 1997, p.162.
[31] Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 Feb. 2002, Footnote 54, p.45.

CHAPTER 2: ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND PRESENCE

One aspect of Whiteread's mattress and bed castings that is less present in her later work is the works allusion to the human form. Christophe Grunenberg, reviewing Whiteread's Philadelphia exhibition, finds 'a continuing anthropomorphism in her work, describing her characteristic presentation as "tableau vivant"'.[1] Mullins uses terms to describe the work such as ,'furrowed like a plump belly' and 'surface bubbles give it the texture of bone, its colour like the pallid skin of a corpse'.[2] Mullins' interpretation of the work as anthropomorphic seems to prevent her from viewing the works from any other aspect, as if a formal viewpoint and the figurative one are mutually exclusive. Mullins considers the bed works as 'playing with the boundaries between animate and inanimate'[3]. Interestingly the Modernist sculptures of David Smith and Anthony Caro were also criticised as being anthropomorphic by those that opposed them[4]. Fried did not distinguish between 'good art' and 'bad art' through its anthropomorphism.

> By the same token, however, what is wrong with literalist work is not that it is anthropomorphic but that the meaning and, equally, the hiddenness of its anthropomorphism are incurably theatrical. [...] The crucial distinction that I am proposing so far is between work that is fundamentally theatrical and work that is not.[5]

According to Fried, artworks do not preclude a formal approach because of their supposed anthropomorphism, but only because of their literalness or theatre. Fried's 'theatre' marks a significant division between Modernist and Post-

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[1] Robin Rice, 'Review of Rachel Whiteread by Chrisophe Grunenberg', *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol.21, No. 1, (Spring-Summer 2000), p.59.
[2] Charlotte Mullins, 'Traces of Lifes' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.26.
[3] Charlotte Mullins, 'Traces of Lifes' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p30.
[4] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.840.

modernist works. Morris stated explicitly that 'The experience of the work exists in time'[6]. For Fried a work by Caro or David Smith is not experienced in no time at all but because 'at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest'[7]. Fried was careful to explain that this is also true of three dimensional works such as sculpture; regardless of the viewer's standpoint the work, the work's completeness is always present.

Indeed Fried suggests that it is the Minimalists' attempt to suppress a work's anthropomorphism that leads to the work being theatrical; perhaps suggesting in turn that anthropomorphism and theatre are mutually exclusive. Should this be the case then again it suggests that it is a work's anthropomorphism that controls the way a viewer encounters the works. Works that may have a suggestion of anthropomorphism are encountered in a more instantaneous way. Works that describe a narrative such as Emin's or Lucas's, that have a theatre about them and are encountered by the viewer over a period of time suppress the viewer's reception to their possible formal aspects. Tickner suggests that it is Whiteread's casting method that introduces the anthropomorphic aspect to her work.

> Casting as a kind of anatomy lesson produces uncanny sensations in a viewer positioned in the impossible space between inside and outside, or facing a work that anthropomorphises the spaces of occupation.[8]

Shallow Breath, Figure 6, is the cast of the underside of the base of the bed in which Whiteread was possibly born[9]. Whilst this seemingly personal object seems to contradict the usual impersonal acquisition of the objects Whiteread uses for

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[5] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.157.
[6] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.166
[7] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.167.
[8] Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 (Feb. 2002), p.32.
[9] URL: http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=999999961&artistid=2319&tabview=bio

her casts she distances herself from the work by re-covering the base with Hessian which, when the bed was removed from the cast, left 'brown threads trapped in the surface, resembling fine body hair'[10]. Mullins' proposes that the slats in the bed suggest a rib cage, as does the yellowish, ochre hue of the cast suggest lungs, smoking and old age, referring to the motivation for the work, the recent death of Whiteread's father from heart failure, something Whiteread has also mentioned in interview[11]. Unlike her later works, Whiteread has also chosen to title this work which also provides a clear clue to the viewer that it is more than a literal object and that it is a representation of something. The distancing from the original object is accentuated by Whiteread's titling of the work; Whiteread's last titled work was *Valley*, 1990 after this, 'Whiteread chose to stop providing clues as to how to interpret each piece'[12].

The engagement that Whiteread forces the viewer into, and the association the viewer makes with the object as a metaphor for a human, discourages the viewer from engaging with the object temporally. In other words, the viewer's recognition of the object as a human figure means he or she does not have to look beyond what is presented; does not have to walk around or peer behind the object. The viewer is able to fully engage with the object from a single front on position. This engagement reduces the object to a single plane surface; when the object is presented such that the viewer is distanced and is required to view the object from several positions to fully 'see' the object the multiple views give the object a three dimensionality. The singular engagement is analogous to Michael Fried's 'instaneousness' as he applied it to Modernist abstract painting in the 1960s. Moving the object from the horizontal to the vertical accentuates the form of the object because of the way the viewer engages with the work.

The height and aspect ratio of the work, it is taller than it is wide and of a height similar to that of a standing figure, I would suggest, helps the viewer to associate

[10] Charlotte Mullins, 'Beginnings' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.12.
[11] Charlotte Mullins, 'Beginnings' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.12.
[12] Charlotte Mullins, 'Traces of Life' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004) p.26.

with the work in the same way they would with another person. The size of the object and its aspect defines the distance that the viewer stands with respect to it; the viewer will distance him/her self such that the object can be viewed as a whole. *Shallow Breath*'s size being close to that of a human permits a relationship that is similar to the engagement with a person, a personal relationship. Despite the abstractness of the work, its verticality and size aids an interpretation of the work as alluding to a human presence. However despite this association Whiteread does not invite us to touch the work. The size of the object means we are left distanced a little more than would otherwise be the case and the surface texture gives us a slightly uncomfortable feeling, as if we feel we would be shocked by the touch, by its coolness. The verticality of the piece, and the use of the wall as support, forces the viewer into a particular engagement with the work; a direct face to face encounter that would not be possible if the work was laid on the ground in its original position. In Chapter 3 I will discuss more fully the implications that this method of display has for contemporary gallery spaces. Whiteread's positioning of the object, and the simplicity of its form, permits the viewer to assimilate the form without the need to walk around the object. The anthropomorphic nature of the object and its aspect has a familiarity to the viewer; the object can be matched to a similar one within the mind. As Robert Morris writes,

> In the simpler regular polyhedrons, such as cubes and pyramids, one need not move around the object for the sense of the whole, the gestalt, to occur. One sees and immediately 'believes' that the pattern within one's mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object[13].

Whilst Whiteread's work is more complex than that of a simple geometric form, the association with a previous image in the viewer's mind is, I would suggest, because of the work's aspect and the anthropomorphic nature of the object.

> If the human analogy can be used by the historicist to try to ground the work in the biographical matrix of its author, or to attempt to try to order and fix its "intentions," it can also serve the critic anxious to understand the works formal integration. Here it functions as a kind of physicalist model, with the works putative resemblance to the human body involving not only those conditions of surface and depth, inside and outside, that are supposedly shared by human subject and work of art, but also those formal features that preserve and protect the life of the organism, such as unity, coherence, complexity within identity, and so on. [14]

When Cavell refers to the artwork's 'organism' he is referring to that formal property of art, that element of an artwork that is at once ahistorical and historical; historical in that it part of that Kantian thread through which all art progresses, but also ahistorical in that it is independent of the societal historical timescales which may or may not be progressive. Cavell suggests that the critical engagement with the artwork tends to emphasise the former at the expense of the latter. Terms such as 'unity' and 'coherence' are terms that one could easily find in an analysis of Modernist works as they are terms that refer to the autonomy of the work which was a factor very much at the core of Modernism. Cavell is suggesting that should the work's anthropomorphism be present then both its literal and its formalist reading are also present, yet as I have suggested, contemporary engagement with Whiteread's work is only with the literal.

We can contrast Whiteread's 'bed' works with the work of another Young British Artist, *My Bed*, by Tracey Emin, (Figure 2). By locating the bed in its normal

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[13] Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture', in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.829.
[14] Cavell, Stanley, in Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, (MIT Press, 1986), p.4.

horizontal position, and also placing recognisable objects around the bed, the viewer is forced to view this object more in its social context. The objects surrounding the bed are real and unchanged; memorabilia that are intended to represent events from her life. The literalness of the work seems to distance the work's aesthetic. The stained sheets, the used condoms, evoked a critical reaction that engaged with the excesses of the work, the filth, the smell[15], the personal nature of the work that is reinforced in the title, ***My*** *Bed*, whilst also considering the feminist aspects of the work, and in particular the relationship of the work with those of Mary Kelly, Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneeman[16].

> Artists have been exploring the relation between art and everyday life, and aesthetics has lagged far behind: not because of problems defining art, but because of problems defining the everyday. Art history can turn here to theories from sociology and psychoanalysis that have been crucial for cultural studies; but especially in the Anglo-American world aesthetics seems to have restricted idea of how art relates to the everyday.[17]

Dezeuze appears to suggest that objects that are in the real world, that instill in the viewer a sense of recognition as an everyday functional object, lend themselves to analysis using social or psychoanalytic theories, but do not offer themselves so readily to an aesthetic engagement. The question Dezeuze does not answer is, can these literal works evoke an aesthetic response or can they only be read as a social or political narrative? Is it only works that have a formal aspect that can evoke an aesthetic response in the viewer? Emin's work is intended to invoke a response in the viewer; it is a highly personal work, a life laid bare to the viewer, and Emin

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[15] Or more accurately the absence of smell. The objects in the work and the stains on the bed invoke an expectation of smell, but the work itself did not smell.
[16] URL: http://www.egs.edu/faculty/emin/emin-tracey-emins-my-bed.html.
[17] Anna Dezeuze, quoted in conversation in, *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. James Elkins, (Routledge, 2006), p.71.

wishes to evoke her experiences in the viewer; for the viewer to empathise with the artist. This response however is not what is normally considered the aesthetic response that an artwork gives us; this response, as Fried called it, comes from the instanteneousness of the viewer's encounter with the work[18]. Our aesthetic response to the work is not something we experience over time. Of course, our experience on encountering Emin's work does invoke an instant response, but it is not likely to be one of pleasure and aesthetic response is usually married to a response to the beauty of a work.

> One of the problems of the dominant formalist reception and interpretation of Kant, for example, is that it has led to the idea of beauty being taken as synonymous, for all the wrong reasons, with the notion of the aesthetic in general[19].

Costello suggests that formalist critical engagement with a work can be limited to works that are perceived as 'beautiful'. Such an engagement is therefore precluded from Whiteread's 'bed' works as it requires a stretch of the imagination for them to be called conventionally 'beautiful'. Arthur Danto argues that beauty is but one term that is used to describe the aesthetic response to a work of art; others could include goodness or truth. He further argues that if we were to ask what the aesthetic property means for a particular artwork, 'then I think aesthetics can be a valuable adjunct to the practise of art history, leading into the historical meanings of works'[20]. Danto's argument has useful connotations for the integration of art history and aesthetics for, if we can fracture the association between beauty and aesthetics, it would allow the more artworks, including some of those within the

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[18] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.167.
[19] Dairmuid Costello, quoted in conversation from *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. James Elkins, (Routledge, 2006), p.73.
[20] Arthur Danto in conversation, in *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. James Elkins, (Routledge, 2006), p.53.

Post-modern category, to be discussed in formalist terms usually reserved for Modernist work.

Kantian beauty is instantaneous; as we encounter the work over time we start to deconstruct it, to increase its entropy, to rotate the axis from the vertical to the horizontal, the aesthetic becomes art history. I will discuss the aligning of the art work with the vertical and horizontal axes in Chapter 3. Danto sees aesthetics as being stuck in the past because it is unable to engage with works that are neither beautiful or sublime and wishes us engage with works that 'dainty and dumpy'[21].

> That's true, they are clunky [Philip Guston's paintings]; and "clunky" captures something about what makes his work poignant in a way that "beautiful doesn't – in the way that one might describe Gober's sinks as "silent" or Whiteread's plaster casts as "unyielding" or Twombly's sculptures as "light". In each case, these would be ways of fleshing out what we would have been gesturing toward, rather vaguely, by saying their work is "good" – which, I take it, is all that would be being said were we to call it "beautiful". Given that, these days, beauty is often used as a way of deprecating a work, as when one calls it "merely beautiful" which would amount to calling it empty. Beauty, when predicated of works of art, needs to be invested with meaning by further explanations and elaborations. On its own it's empty as a judgement about the work.[22]

Separating aesthetic response from beauty would allow the inclusion of many more artworks to be included with the framework of 'good' artworks but I do not believe this is especially helpful. If we accept that it is works that give the viewer an instantaneous response – let us not call it beauty for now – that are 'good' then

[21] Arthur Danto in conversation, in *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. James Elkins, (Routledge, 2006), p.55.
[22] Diarmund Costello in conversation, in *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. James Elkins, (Routledge, 2006), p.56. The grammatical oddities in this quotation arise from the conversational nature of the argument.

works that require the viewer to experience them over time, to construct the message or idea behind the work, to construct the language to describe the work whether it be 'light' or 'unyielding' then these works be definition are 'less good'. We move from Greenberg's 'quality' to Judd's 'interest', from modernism to minimalism[23]. If we widen the description of our 'good' category, as happened towards the end of High Modernism, we weaken the category, eventually to reach the point where it is all inclusive and has no meaning at all. The danger with narrowing the category is, as Costello has said, is that, 'a narrow modernist conception of the aesthetic has overdetermined the anti-aesthetic bias of postmodernism'[24]. The danger with widening the category is we are unable to place any value on a work of art, to be able to say if a work of art is good or not. Whiteread has denied that she is creating formal works, yet admits her works do have elements of form. In answering a question about the role formalism has in what drives her work:

> I don't think it does really, I think that proportion maybe is more of something that, proportionalism. No I think that proportion with making the works and that comes very much from drawing and, you know and a sort of physical thing, for me it's to do with being able to move things around and in and out of buildings and whatever, but I enjoy playing with that and I think the formality, you know the works often are very sort of formal looking, but I think that was never an intention. You know it's not that I'm trying to make the straightest line or the most beautiful curve, it really comes from the thing that I'm physically casting and have chosen to cast, so maybe the formalism

[23] Rosalind Krauss has proposed that minimalism, rather than being a reaction against modernism, is in fact its natural conclusion. This is discussed in Hal Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism' *The Return of the Real*, (The MIT Press: 1996), pp.44-46.
[24] Diarmund Costello in conversation, in *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, ed. by James Elkins, (Routledge, 2006), p.57. The grammatical oddities in this quotation arise from the conversational nature of the argument.

> comes from the actual spaces and the interpretation for me but not finally the sculpture, if that makes sense.[25]

In the same interview Whiteread also discusses whether her work is beautiful and in particular refers to a work, *Untitled (Black Bed)*, Figure 12, that she describes are being particularly ugly.

> I could be very specific about a piece which was called *Untitled Black Bed* I think, which was made a long time ago now, and it was the cast of the space underneath a bed and it was cast in two sections and it was a large double bed which could be folded in half to, you know, get it up and down stairs and whatever, bit of kind of utility furniture, and then I made this bit in the area in the middle which I didn't do anything with at all, I just kind of bunged this black rubber down it and it came out as this horrible kind of hairy lip, which was in the centre of the piece, and a friend of mine, an artist called Alison Wilding, I remember came to see me in the studio and she said that reminds me of the stuff you find underneath your fingernail, and I thought that was a really great way of sort of describing something and yeah I think it was [...] successfully ugly yeah and it was very sort of female, there were all sorts of things about it that, that made it deliciously ugly I'd say, yes.[26]

Whiteread's use of the descriptive term 'deliciously ugly' aligns with Costello's wish to engage with works that are 'clunky' or 'unyielding' as aesthetic objects. In this quotation Whiteread does distance herself from the literal interpretation of

[25] Rachel Whiteread in conversation with John Tusa: URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/whiteread_transcript.shtml
[26] Rachel Whiteread in conversation with John Tusa: URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/whiteread_transcript.shtml

the work and emphasises the anthropomorphic properties of the work through terms such 'hairy lip' or 'very sort of female'.

Another question can be asked: Is it the formal aspect of the work that evokes the aesthetic response in the viewer? Is this why Whiteread's work, which perhaps has a more formal aspect, can invoke an aesthetic response as an object in its own right?

Before we attempt to answer that question let us consider another British artist creating a work of realism using a mattress, Sarah Lucas[27]. Her work, *Au Natural*, (Figure 3), is a yellow stained mattress apparently thrown against a wall. The artist's intervention in the work might suggest that she wants the viewer to look further than the literal aspect of the work; however she roots the object in the real world through her humorous invocation of the male and female form lying on the bed. The use of the objects in Lucas' and Emin's work is indicative of the work being about something; the objects interrupt the surface. The identifiable, real world objects, (the fruit of Lucas's *Au Natural* has started to rot), make an interpretation of the work based on its formal properties more difficult. Although some of Whiteread's mattress works, e.g. *Shallow Breath*, have autobiographical references, she seems to be suppressing their overtness in ways that Emin and Lucas do not. If we consider Whiteread's two works, *Untitled (Amber Bed)* and *Untitled (Double Amber Beds)*, Figures 8 and 10 respectively, the viewer response is quite different. Although both show, as with Lucas's work, mattresses slumped up against a wall, Whiteread's intervention into the object's surface texture through her use of rubber for the moulding material and the amber colour she has applied to the mould force the viewer into a more formal engagement with the object by removing some of the original object's literalness. The casting material adds to the sense of the work's anthropomorphism; 'I kept seeing it out of the corner of my eye as I was working and it always gave me shock, as if someone was

[27] Sarah Lucas has been referred to as the 'drinking man's Rachel Whiteread'. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/collective/A6641318).

just sitting there, or was slumped up against the wall'[28]. I would suggest that it is the anthropomorphism suggested by the work that aligns with its formal properties; the work suggests a human presence, something that the literal works of Lucas and Emin cannot because they are so representative of everyday objects.

Considering another work of Whiteread, *Untitled (Amber Bed)*, 1991, (Figure 8), here the relationship between ground and object is diffused as the object slumps towards the viewer; an object that previously provided support now is in need of support itself. The curved object is at once parallel to and intimate with the ground, yet also perpendicular and apposed to the ground plane. The material used in the casting, rubber, and the colour, together with the fluid nature of the work's presentation all heighten the anthropomorphic nature of the work.

Greeves argues that Whiteread has been trying to suppress this aspect of her work, 'it has been part of a gradual elimination of the sentiment and autobiographical resonance more evident in the earlier pieces, but these articles resist considering the formal aspects that this elimination might bring about[29]. Whiteread modifies the objects she uses in her casting rather than using the objects to narrate an incident as Emin has done.

> There is an almost exaggerated wealth of detail to be found on the surface of *Untitled (Domestic)*, but none of it is an impression of the actual space. Whiteread worked obsessively on the invented surfaces of her moulds...[30]

The intervention of Whiteread into the surface texture of the work, replacing the original smooth cloth material with the thickly woven Hessian, removes Whiteread from her association with the Minimalists, as the work appears to have

[28] Mullins, 'Traces of Life' in *Rachel Whiteread*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.35.
[29] Susanna Greeves, 'Stairs into Space', in Rachel Whiteread, *Rachel Whiteread, Haunch of Venison*, (Haunch of Venison, 2002),, p39.
[30] Susanna Greeves, 'Stairs into Space', in Rachel Whiteread, *Rachel Whiteread, Haunch of Venison*, (Haunch of Venison, 2002),, p44.

been made deliberately anthropomorphic. The textured surface distances the reference to manufacturing and as such also distances this work from that of the Minimalists. Her use of plaster for the cast would have allowed every surface texture to be recorded in the surface but Whiteread has chosen to deliberately manipulate that texture. Casting suggests, in Rosalind Krauss's term, a 'structural passivity', not dissimilar to the Surrealist's automatic writing[31]. However Whiteread's interventions, her choice of the boundary for the cast, the material of casting, the change in the surface material to Hessian, and her method of display, all are the artist's conscious decisions, and as such move the work into the realm of sculpture. As Krauss writes, Whiteread 'registers the identity of the object that served as the mould for her casts, indeed to heighten this through a careful attention to surface detail'[32].These interventions by the artist modify the relationship between the artist and viewer, privileging the former over the latter because of the artist's intention. As Tickner comments, 'limiting the shape of the mould – shaping the new work – is an aesthetic decision[33]. Krauss again, refers to the surface as the boundary between life and death, what Barthes refers to as the 'mortiferous layer'[34].

> It is not a preordanined process but a series of judgements. The point at which the object ends and Whiteread's decision-making begins is the transition from a record of negative, socially determined space to a kind of positive, artist-chosen form.[35]

[31] Rosalind Krauss, 'Claude Cahun and Dora Maar: By Way of Introduction' *Bachelors*, (MIT Press, 2000), p.15.
[32] Rosalind Krauss, 'X Marks the Spot' in *Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life*, (Liverpool, Tate Gallery, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p.76.
[33] Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot', *Art History*, Vol.25, No.1 (Feb. 2002), Footnote 44, p.44.
Rosalind Krauss, 'X Marks the Spot' in *Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life*, (Liverpool, Tate Gallery, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p.77.
[35] Robin Rice, 'Review of Rachel Whiteread by Chrisophe Grunenberg', *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol.21, No. 1, (Spring-Summer 2000), p.60.

It is Whiteread's intervention in the casting process that gives the object its form. Whiteread eradicates the narrative ingrained in the surface of the cast through her use of casting material or introduction of a different surface material or through the changed orientation of the work from its functional position.

By placing the work vertically Whiteread is forcing the spectator to encounter the work in much the same way as we would a painting. The lack of figuration in the surface gives flatness to the object. In this respect, that the object is not suggestive of anything, the work accentuates its formal properties. The lack of figuration is not to be confused with lack of representation. By removing figuration from the object the viewer is drawn to the properties of the surface, which Whiteread has been so careful to manipulate with the Hessian used in the casting process. Whiteread's manipulation of surface texture is suggestive of form to the viewer. Something is invoked in the viewer because of the similarity of the object to memories and recollections that viewer has previously encountered in their life. The vertical aspect, the surface texture that is free of figuration; all remind the viewer to encounter the object as a single entity, and not one to be read as an assemblage of different parts. This autonomous single entity is reminiscent of Modernism's internalism. I am not suggesting that Whiteread's *Shallow Breath* should be read in the same way we might read a Jules Olitski painting, (Figure 5), seen by Greenberg in 1966 as the epitome of High Modernism[36]. Abstract painting is more easily adopted by Modernism because of its lack of figuration, but also because it has no relationship with the actual ground as it usually hung on a wall some distance from the ground and perpendicular to it. I will discuss the work's relationship with the ground further in Chapter 3.

[36] Olitski's exalted position within Modernism is now contested, but Greenberg called him the greatest living artist during the Venice Biennale in 1966.
(http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20070310/ai_n18711303 and David Carrier, 'Abstract Painting and Sculpture: New York', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol 137, No.1102, (Jan. 1995), p.52.

The vertical presentation also discourages us from considering the methods used to create the work. The cast resembles a mattress, the four holes of the legs of the bed a reminder that this is, in fact, the cast of the space underneath a bed; or rather, if we consider the mechanics of its creation, the cast of the space above an upturned bed. However the verticality of the work pushes these considerations into the background and it is the formal aspect of the work that comes to the fore. By putting the object against a wall it prevents the viewer from visualising the method of its creation. Although the shape of *Shallow Breath* suggests a mattress, the hardness of the surface also allows us to 'see' the object as something other; the hardness does not invite us to lie on it anymore.

The texture in the surface also gives the viewer more reason to examine the work. A plane flat surface does not bear close examination, but the texture in the surface gives the viewer interest, in the same way that the application of paint onto a canvas does. The texture draws the viewer into the work; gives the viewer reason to stand and stare, to engage in the work.

CHAPTER 3: THE ARTWORK, THE VIEWER AND THE GALLERY SPACE

At the Southampton City Art Gallery, although currently not on display, is one of Whiteread's mattress casts, *Untitled, (Freestanding Bed)*, (Figure 9). This work, made in 1991, is cast in dental plaster although it has a core of polystyrene. The work is presented vertically, with its long axis parallel with the ground. This work was also loaned out for the Vienna Biennale, during which it received the following comment from Keith Patrick, 'the paradox is elaborated by the careful siting of her sculpture'[1]. In reviewing the history file associated with this work it was interesting to note that there are no instructions from either Whiteread or her agent as to how to position the work in the gallery space. When talking to the gallery curator he commented that the logistics of moving the piece and safety of the viewers took precedence as the work is extremely heavy and rather delicate. He also commented that the work is actually displayed on a small plinth to aid its carriage[2]. The first impression on meeting this work is unimpressive. By placing the work on its long side the average adult viewer has to stand back to engage properly with it; the work is approximately chest high, even on its small plinth. By moving the viewer back, a lot of the surface texture of the work is lost, (Figure 15); should the viewer wish to inspect the surface then they have to constantly move forward and back from the work.

> The mattress is untitled but displayed upright on its side. Apart from being composed of an unusual material, the object looks like an ordinary mattress. The point is not to remind us what mattresses look like, but to set a familiar item at a distance; to bring it out of the bedroom and into the realm of ideas. Perhaps it is about comfort and

[1] Keith Patrick, 'Juliao Sarmento and Rachel Whiteread at the 47th Venice Biennale', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, Issue 16, 70-71, (p.70)

[2] In the photograph, Figure 9, the work is shown away from the gallery wall and also without it plinth, but, according to the curator this is not how the work is displayed within the gallery exhibition.

> pain; or about displacement and expectation; you don't expect mattresses to be made of plaster. Perhaps it points to a social irony: everyone sleeps on a mattress, but only the disposed sleep directly on a mattress: civilisation is sheet-thin. It is the ideas rather than the object which we are supposed to be excited about. [...] The avoidance of surface charm has cast increasing weight on the underlying ideas.[3]

According to Armstrong, by using an everyday object in the work and by emphasising its previous use through the choice of casting material, Whiteread forces the viewer to look beyond the form of the object to consider what the ideas behind what the object represents are. In other words, Whiteread's choice of casting material and object force the viewer to engage with the object as a conveyer of the artist's ideas; the object is to be viewed as narrative. Whilst agreeing with this stance I would also like to consider more the way the object is displayed in the gallery space. The work is displayed against the gallery wall although there is no artist instruction to do so in the history notes. Such a display emphasises the surface of the work as the viewer is prohibited from seeing the back of the cast, although that surface also has features that could viewed as equally interesting, (Figure 16). So it appears that it is the front surface, the surface which has been in contact with real people, the surface that contains the story of the people that occupied that space that is the surface that Whiteread wishes to emphasise. Everything about the display of the work points to this being a work about what Armstrong calls the 'idea behind the work', and less about the work as a formal object.

A work that is similarly displayed, *Untitled (Air Bed II)*, also displays the same properties. Of similar dimensions to Untitled (Freestanding Bed), the work, by being placed against the gallery wall, forces the viewer to engage with the surface of the work. The material used in the casting of this work, polyurethane rubber,

and the dye used to colour the cast heightens the anthropomorphic properties; the work is perhaps suggestive of intestines. But the height of the work, just 120cms, and the long vertical axis prevent direct instaneousness recognition of the work as being suggestive of human form. The surface texture alone is not sufficient to trigger Fried's 'instaneousness', and again the work requires time for the viewer to assess; again the work requires the viewer to engage with Armstrong's 'idea behind the work'.

Krauss, together with Yve-Alain Bois, also a co-editor of the October journals, have together championed this concept of the 'formless' or *L'Informe*. In curating an exhibition at the George Pompidou centre in 1996, Krauss and Bois took four concepts associated with Modernism; verticality, elision of matter, exclusion of temporality and structure, and contrasted them with horizontality, base materialism, the pulse and entropy[4]. I would like here to consider in particular the relationships between verticality and exclusion of temporality and horizontality and entropy. I will suggest that the verticality and horizontality of the work are the literal aspects of the work as displayed in the gallery space whilst 'exclusion of temporality' equates with Fried's 'instaneousness' whilst increasing entropy equates with Fried's 'theatre' or Armstrong's 'idea behind the work'.

Krauss and Bois are attempting to deconstruct the pillars of Modernism, to relocate certainties into a place where nothing is certain. Krauss and Foster align Modernism with the vertical axis. Post-modernism deconstructed Modernism; in Krauss's terms as the axis moves from the vertical to the horizontal we find increasing entropy. Both Foster and Krauss are removing the perceived elitism and autonomy of Modernism.

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[3] John Armstrong, 'Installation Blues', *Prospect*, (March 2000), 38-41, (p.41).
[4] Lauren Sedofsky, 'Down and dirty - form in modernist art - interview with curators Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois', *Art Forum*, (Summer, 1996).
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n10_v34/ai_18533853/pg_1

> Thus was formal modernism plotted along a temporal, diachronic, or vertical axis: in this respect it opposed an avant-gardist modernism that did intend "a break with the past" – that, concerned to extend the area of artistic competence, favoured a spatial, synchronic, or horizontal axis.[5]

Post-modernism shifted from a criterion of quality to one of interest[6]. Post-modernist art historical methods were an attempt to embrace all of the art practices, art practices that were excluded by Modernism. In Figure 1 I have attempted to graphically represent the horizontal and vertical axes. I have chosen labels for the axis that represent the two opposing positions of horizontality and verticality that I have briefly introduced. I am not suggesting at this time that the axis can be quantified in any way; the important parameter is the angle between the axes which I have indicated as increasing entropy in the direction of the horizontal axis.

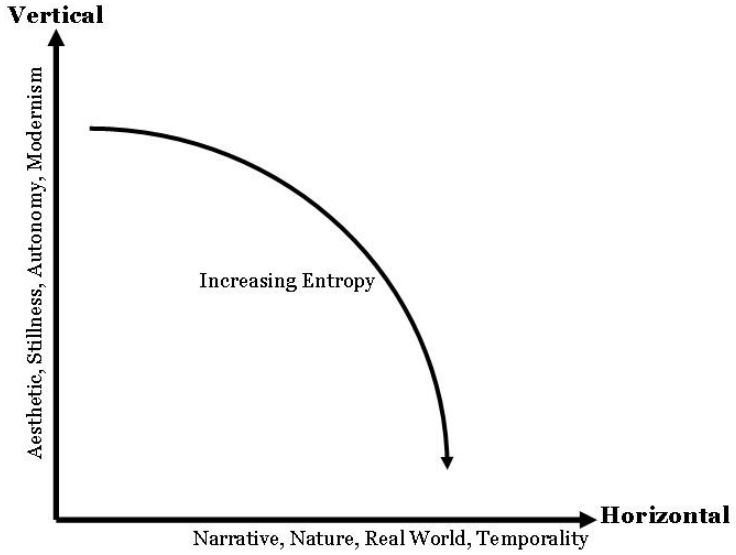

Figure 1 Representation of the Horizontal and Vertical Aspects of a Work of Art

[5] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, (The MIT Press, 1996), p.xi.
[6] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, (The MIT Press, 1996), p.xi.

We can also place a timeline on the above graph. The deconstruction occurred during the 1960s, and as such, as Whiteread's works that we are considering in this essay, were executed in the late 1980s –early 1990s, they are firmly within the period of Post-modernism. It is not surprising therefore that these works should be considered in that respect; they do not, at first encounter, appear to have much in common with Modernist works, we might think of Jackson Pollock or Mark Rothko as exemplars of the practice, after all. Whilst I am not suggesting a simple direct relationship between the vertical placement of the work and the verticality of Krauss and Foster's axis, I would like to suggest that it is possible, by excluding the vertical aspect of the work, we are excluding some aspects of our encounter with it that do align with that axis. In other words, if we accept that Post-modernism is a deconstruction of Modernism, should we also accept that there are no formal, Modernist aspects of a work remaining, even if that work may perhaps have been deliberately aligned by the artist with that space?

Consider the viewer's reaction to another of Whiteread's 'beds', a later work from 1992, *Untitled (Air Bed II),* Figure 5. This work is similarly located against the wall of the gallery and is the rubber cast of an air bed. However this work is presented with its long axis along the floor, which, I would suggest, locates it closer to how it would normally be presented as a functional object. In other words, although the cast of the object has been placed against a wall, its presentation horizontally is closer to its original functional position than if it had been placed with its long axis vertically, as with *Shallow Breath*. For the viewer to 'see' the object as a whole he has to distance him/her self more and as such this creates a less personal relationship. Comparatively *Shallow Breath* is more vertical than *Untitled (Air Bed II)* and I am suggesting is more aligned with the vertical axis of Krauss. This relative judgement is also aligned with the works increasing anthropomorphism as discussed in Chapter 2.

A work of Whiteread's from 1991, *Untitled, (Amber Bed)*, Figure 12, is presented in a vertical aspect against the gallery wall; Whiteread allows the work to slump lazily along the floor towards us, coming forward into the viewer's space. The work

therefore occupies both domains, but the intrusion toward the viewer, to my mind, allows the horizontal aspect of the work to dominate; the vertical aspect of the work is distanced away from the viewer by the forward jutting of the bottom of the work. In this work the literalness of the work dominates.

Whiteread's cast of the underneath of a bed, *Untitled (Black Bed)*, (Figure 12), also destabilises our conventional perceptions. Her use of material, here fibreglass and rubber, her use of dye (black), and the ridge lying across the bed prevent us from associating with the object in the way we would like; as a comfortable place to rest and dream. The horizontal aspect of the work, and its position away from a wall or boundary permit us, indeed invite us, to walk around it, thereby slowly engaging with it over time. The positioning of the work in the gallery, and the freedom with which we can engage with the object therefore becomes an inherent part of the object itself and the viewer becomes a participant in the work. This engagement with work over time and the engagement of the viewer in the work equates to Michael Fried's 'theatricality' or 'literalism'; 'the experience of literalist art is of an object *in a situation* [author's emphasis] – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*….'.[7]

In comparison, if we consider again the Whiteread's work, *Untitled (Air Bed II)*, Figure 5, the engagement by the viewer is more limited as the work is presented vertically and is installed against a wall. The material, polyurethane rubber, colour and texture of work are more inviting and indicative of the original purpose of the object; however its verticality prevents us from considering that aspect. The engagement with the work is more instantaneous than if it is presented horizontally and the viewer is more distanced and is no longer an active participant. It is the formal aspects of the work that are accentuated.

If we contrast Whiteread's *Shallow Breath*, (Figure 6), with her work *Untitled (Yellow Bed, Two Parts)*, (Figure 11), we notice that although both works are

vertically presented the engagement with the viewer is non-the-less different. The latter is work is slightly inclined against the wall and this, together with the two part nature of the cast tend to diminish the 'instaneousness' of the work. The work appears more literal and less anthropomorphic as a result and the viewer's engagement tends to be with object as a narrative. Again, to align the work with Figure 1, *Shallow Breath* has a greater vertical element whereas *Untitled, (Yellow Bed, Two Parts),* being experienced more over time as a narrative has increased entropy and is more a sum of the parts that an integral whole. As such, the latter work is more aligned with the horizontal, Post-modern axis of Figure 1.

There is an alignment possible between the orientation of the artwork and the engagement and experience of the viewer, and also with the theoretical frameworks that underpin these. A work that is essentially horizontal in nature is experienced as a narrative over time; a work that is essentially vertical in nature is experienced instantaneously. A horizontal work engages with the context of its surroundings and creation, a vertical work is autonomous. A horizontal work invokes and aesthetic response, a horizontal work less so. Some of Whiteread's work under discussion lies between these two polarised positions, whereas others sit more securely in one or other framework.

The rotation of the axis from the vertical towards the horizontal increasingly fragments the associations of the vertical axis. Stillness, associated with one of the ideals of Modernism starts to become something that is played out over time. Stillness and temporality can therefore be seen as opposites that can be associated with the vertical and the horizontal respectively.

This latter conclusion is also supported by the idea of a formalist work's lack of site specificity; Modernist works were seen as having a fixed meaning that was irrespective of where they were placed[8]. Whiteread's works that have a more vertical presentation, such as *Shallow Breath*, produce a more instantaneous

[7] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p.839.
[8] Miwon Kwon, 'One Place after Another: Notes of Site Specificity', *October*, Vol.80, (Spring 1997), 85-110, (p.85).

reaction in the viewer and the work is more autonomous and less site specific. Whiteread's works that have a more horizontal aspect, such as *Untitled (Black Bed)* engage the viewer more over time and are therefore more part of the real-world environment in which they are situated and are therefore more site specific.

Another aspect of the display of the work that Krauss considers is the pedestal. Rosalind Krauss uses Georges Bataille's definition of the word 'formless', as a dèclasser, to merge or lower the sculpture's vertical axis to the debased condition of a 'mere' sculptural base[9]. Writing of Giacometti's sculpture, *Suspended Ball*, Figure 4, she notes that by locating the sculpture closer to the horizontal axis;

> the twofold result of this move was, first, to make the representational field of the sculpture continuous with the real world – rather than lifted "above" or "beyond" it – and, second, to stress the transactional nature of this lowered, horizontalised object, which, like the pieces in a game of checkers, not only elicits an interaction on the part of the player(s) but locates the state of play within the temporal unfolding on the game itself.[10]

Krauss suggests the Giacometti sculpture, by removing the pedestal, has relocated itself from the traditional vertical space into horizontal space, and in so doing diffusing both spaces; the historical preference of the object over its situation, the figure over the ground, the high over the low, but also the theoretical positions pertaining to both[11]. Krauss locates the horizontal and vertical as in opposition to each other, citing the preference given by the Gestalt psychologists to the vertical

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[9] Krauss, Rosalind, *Bachelors*, (The MIT Press, 2000), p.5.
[10] Krauss, Rosalind, *Bachelors*, (The MIT Press, 2000), p.4.

[11] Krauss, Rosalind, *Bachelors*, (The MIT Press, 2000), p.4.

over the horizontal, and by inference, because of the association of the former with form, the preferencing of form over context and situation.

Krauss writes of the 'normatively vertical axis of free-standing sculpture' which Giacometti's work relocates within the real world, stressing the 'transactional nature of this lowered, horizontalised object'[12]. Krauss suggests that the pedestal distances the figure from the real world, thereby objectifying it, and in associating the work with the horizontal, she suggests, it gives it a temporal aspect. These ideas support my proposal that the alignment of Whiteread's works, whether predominantly horizontal or vertical, also align with the viewer's interaction with the work. A work that is predominantly vertical nature is more likely to invoke an instaneousness reaction in the viewer based on a memory of previous form, whereas a work that predominately aligned horizontally is more likely to be engaged with over time, and is more likely to engage the viewer as a work of narrative or ideas.

Fried agrees that Giacometti was perhaps the first to remove the pedestal from sculpture, citing the work *Woman with Her Throat Cut*, (1932)[13]. However he points out that such a decision to remove the pedestal could be viewed as 'artistically trivial' should it have been the simple removal or otherwise of the base. I would like to suggest that the lack of a pedestal in Whiteread's *Shallow Breath*, Figure 6, further emphasises the anthropomorphic nature of the object that I discussed in Chapter 2. By contacting the object directly with the ground, the vertical is emphasised by its direct perpendicularity to the horizontal plane of the ground. It is in this suggestion of a real person that Whiteread distances herself from the Minimalists, their deliberate unlikeness to nature emphasising the form. The lack of pedestal also allows a more direct association between the viewer and the object, and for the object to suggest to the viewer its metaphor of a being person.

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[12] Krauss, Rosalind, *Bachelors*, (The MIT Press, 2000), p.4.
[13] Michael Fried, 'Anthony Caro's Table Sculptures, 1966-77', *Art and Objecthood*, (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.202.

Our encounter with a person on a pedestal, one may think of a speaker on a stage or on the theatre, is a much less personal contact than the direct one offered 'face to face'. Size is also important in this respect. Our encounter with *Shallow Breath* would be very different if we were forced to look down or look up to the object. The choice of an object that is approximately human sized is therefore important if the artist wishes us to see that object as a metaphor for a human form. Whiteread's use of casting prevents her from reducing or enlarging the object so her choice of object to use as a metaphor becomes more important.

Krauss suggests that Giacometti's removal of the pedestal 'makes the representational field of the sculpture continuous with the real world – rather than lifted "above" or "beyond" it'[14]. *Shallow Breath*, a cast of an object that conventionally occupies the horizontal plane, that is parallel with the earth, has been given a more vertical aspect by being propped against a wall. But *Shallow Breath* is still in direct contact with the ground and has no pedestal; it is as if the piece continues to root itself in the real world by doing so. The sculpture's pedestal removes it from the real world, as Fried remarks, with regard to Caro's table sculptures,

> From this point of view, an ontological one, it is as though Caro's abstract sculptures, large and small, grounded and tabled, inhabit another world from the literal, contingent one in which we live, a world which so to speak everywhere parallels our own but whose apartness is perceived as all the more exhilarating on that account.[15]

The autonomy of the artwork, also associated with Modernism - Krauss's pedestal isolates the work from its context and surroundings - becomes the real world, the context in which the artwork was conceived and created in. Fragmenting and

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[14] Krauss, Rosalind, *Bachelors*, (The MIT Press, 2000), p.4.
[15] Michael Fried, 'Anthony Caro's Table Sculptures, 1966-77', *Art and Objecthood*, (University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.205.

dissolving these positions also fragments and dissolves the theoretical frameworks that underpin them, which was the aim for Krauss: she wished to break away from Modernism's aesthetic. Krauss, however, did not just relocate the work on another axis, as other art historians had done, but left it floating between the axes.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have considered the tension between the form and narrative of Rachel Whiteread's casts of beds and mattresses. In particular I have looked at why certain of these works seem to have a different balance between these two aspects whilst also considering why art historians seem to preference discussing the works in relation to the latter whilst largely ignoring the former.

In Chapter 1 I reviewed some of the literature relating to these works. Greeves notes the 'foursquare factuality' of Whiteread's 'bed' works whilst also noting the 'fantasy' of her later staircases. Schneider notes that the use of 'everyday mass objects' roots the work in reality, a notion I contested because of Whiteread's intervention in the creation of the artwork. Rose notes that this intervention, 'removes the personal and anecdotal', leading to a work that 'itself is very formal', whilst Patrick also notes 'the undeniably formal eloquence of her work'. But while mention is made of the formal aspect of her works the authors then decide to analyse other aspects of her work, for Batchelor the motif of death, for Cvoro the relationship between presence and absence and for Tickner the influence of her mother in the work's creation. We have therefore an agreed recognised mix of the formal aspect on the one hand and a narrative aspect on the other, yet it is the latter that is preferred in the critical analysis. To quote Bachelor again,

> It is as if once an expressive theme has been identified and attached to the work, there was no space for other themes –whether parallel or alternative or contradictory – to be simultaneously present in the work or identifiable with it. This is an entirely unhelpful limitation to impose on the experience of art.[1]

[1] David Batchelor, 'Review: Rachel Whiteread. Liverpool and Madrid', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.138, No.1125, (Dec. 1996), p.838.

I would like to conclude that the reason why the less formalist approach is privileged in articles on Whiteread's work is that the language to discuss the more formal, abstract aspect of the work has been lost in the fracturing of art practice that occurred between Modernism and Post-modernism.

> The general rejection of the mystical memories associated with the early modernism of Mondrian and Kandinsky, and – more recently – the savage criticism of both the ideal of Action Painting and Greenberg's formalism, have not yet led to the construction of a generally acceptable theoretical framework within which to set abstract art[2].

Although Carrier is referring to abstract art, his comment is relevant, I suggest, to all contemporary art practice. Modernism was an amalgam of art criticism, art history and aesthetics. Post-modernism fractured that by including art practices that were considered outside of the Modernist canon. This widening of what was considered art, and to also include artworks that could not be considered 'beautiful', left behind the language of aesthetics. As Costello and Danto suggested, the framework used to describe a viewer's aesthetic reaction to an artwork needs to be made more inclusive and to include works, such as Whiteread's 'beds' that are not conventionally beautiful. If this framework can be put in place it will allow the art historian to engage with the work and its more formalist aspects.

In Chapter 2 I compared Whiteread's 'bed' works with those of two other contemporary female artists, Emin and Lucas, and discussed why it may be that Whiteread's works emphasise more their formal aspects. I argued in this chapter that it is Whiteread's perceived anthropomorphism in her work that leads to this emphasis whilst for Emin and Lucas, their works deliberate prominence given to everyday objects leads to the work being perceived more literally. Although

[2] David Carrier, 'Abstract Painting and Sculpture: New York', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol 137, No.1102, Jan. 1995, p.53.

Whiteread uses a method of mass production for the creation of her work, namely casting, her modification of the surface texture and her choice of casting material distance the work from the everyday object used to create it. I noted in this chapter that it is useful, in my opinion, to draw on terms used by Michael Fried such as 'instaneousness', to describe the viewer reaction to the formal nature of the work.

In Chapter 3 I looked at the viewer's interaction with the work in the gallery space, and the contrast between the encounter with works such as *Untitled (Black Bed)*, (Figure 12), *Shallow Breath*, (Figure 6), and *Untitled (Freestanding Bed)*, (Figure 9). The former is laid on the ground, *Shallow Breath* is presented with its long axis vertical to the viewer in a similar manner to that which a viewer might encounter another person, whereas the latter is also presented vertically to the viewer but with its long axis horizontal. I argue in this chapter that the verticality of presentation leads to a more formal engagement by the viewer whereas the horizontal presentation of the work invites the viewer to engage with the work more temporally; in this I found Michael Fried's concept of 'theatre' in his criticism of Minimalism as a useful term to analyse the nature of the differing encounters. I also look at the correlation between the works presentation within the gallery and Krauss and Foster's concept of horizontality and verticality, and conclude that there is an alignment between the works presentation and the dominant theoretical framework that can be used to describe it. In short, a work's more vertical presentation aligns more readily with a formal analysis whereas a works more horizontal presentation aligns more readily with an analysis based on the work's ideas and narrative. The work's location between the vertical and horizontal axis, the angle that is subtended, also aligns with the position of the fulcrum of tension that Patrick alludes to and which I use as the title of my dissertation.

It is this balance between the two theoretical approaches that creates the tension that Patrick describes whilst the work's presentation to the viewer and its

emphasis or otherwise of its anthropomorphic nature positions the fulcrum of the tension.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 2 Emin, Tracey, *My Bed*, 1998, Mattress, linens, pillows, objects. 79 x 211 234 cms. The Saatchi Gallery, London. URL: http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/tracey_emin_my_bed.htm

Figure 3 Lucas, Sarah, *Au Natural*, 1994, Mattress, Waterbucket, melons, oranges and cucumber. 84 x 167.6 x 144.8cm. The Saatchi Gallery, London.

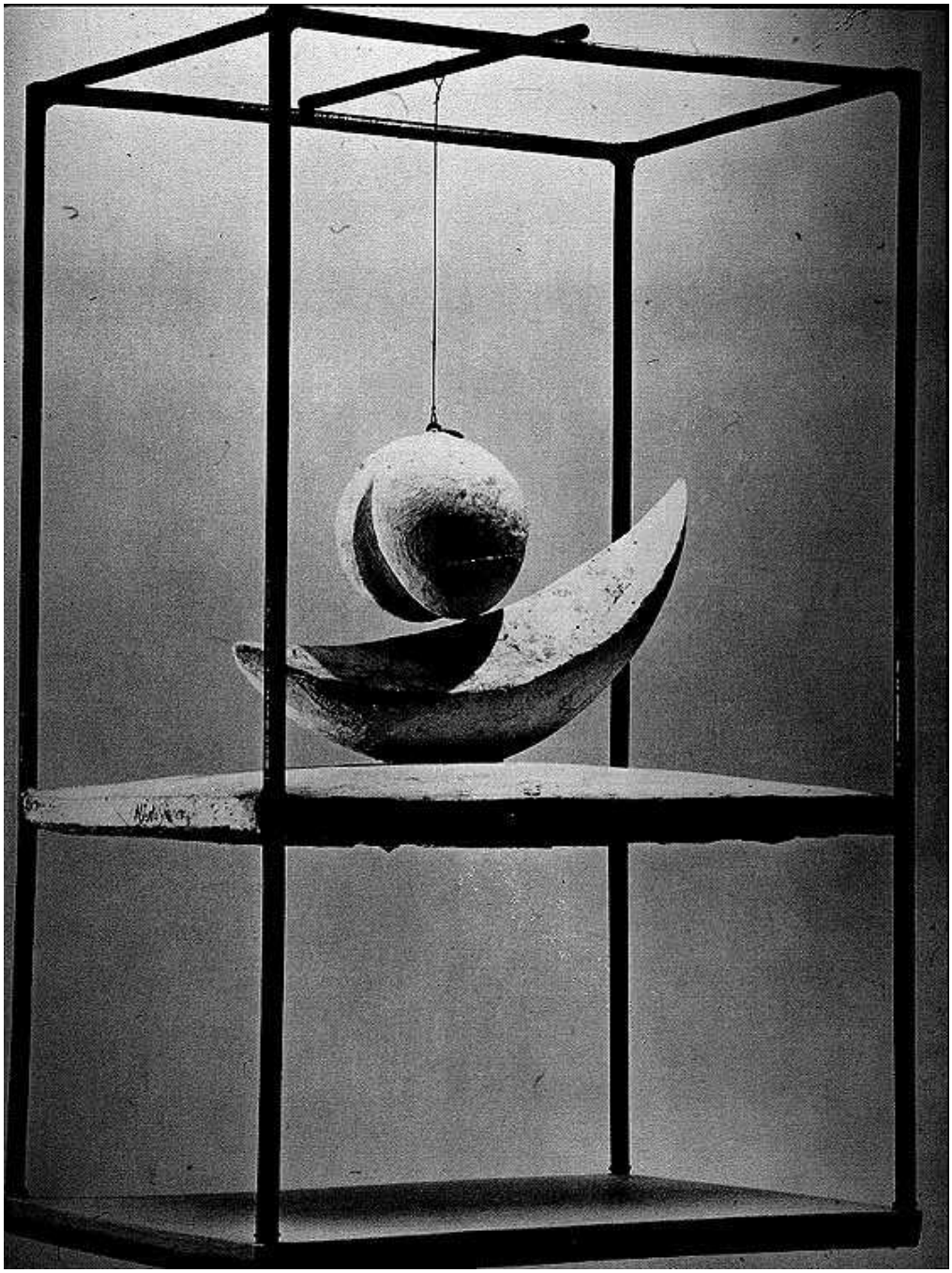

Figure 4 Giacometti, Alberto, *Suspended Ball*, 1930-1, Plaster and Metal, 24 x 14 ¼ x 14 inches. Kunsthaus, Zurich, Alberto Giacometti Foundation.
URL: http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/images/405bg.jpg.

Figure 5 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Air Bed II)*, 1992, Polyurethane rubber, 120cm x 197cm x 23cm, Tate Gallery.
(Image from *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, ed. Chris Townsend, Thames and Hudson, 2004, p.21.)

Figure 6 Whiteread, Rachel, *Shallow Breath*, 1988, Plaster and Polystyrene, 18cm x 191cm x 93cm, Private Collection.
(Image from *Rachel Whiteread*, Charlotte Mullins, Tate Publishing, 2004, p.13).

Figure 7 Olitski, Jules, *End Run*, 1967, Water-miscible acrylic on canvas, 81 x 48 inches, Collection of the artist.

Figure 8 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Amber Bed)*, 1991, Rubber, 129.5cm x 91.4cm x 101.6cm. Museé d'Art Contemporain de Nimes.

(Image from *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, ed. Chris Townsend, Thames and Hudson, 2004, p.63.)

Figure 9 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Freestanding Bed)*, 1991, Dental plaster and polystyrene, 104cm x 183cm x 23cm, Southampton City Art Gallery.

URL: http://www.artfund.org/images/artwork/003829_003366_0.jpg

Figure 10 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Amber Double Beds)*, 1991, Rubber and high density foam, 119.4cm x 137.2cm x 104.1cm, Private Collection.
(Image from *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, ed. Chris Townsend, Thames and Hudson, 2004, p.62.)

Figure 11 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Yellow Bed, Two Parts),* 1991, Dental Plaster, 167.6cm x 68.6cm x 35.6cm.
(Image from *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, ed. Chris Townsend, Thames and Hudson, 2004, p.34.)

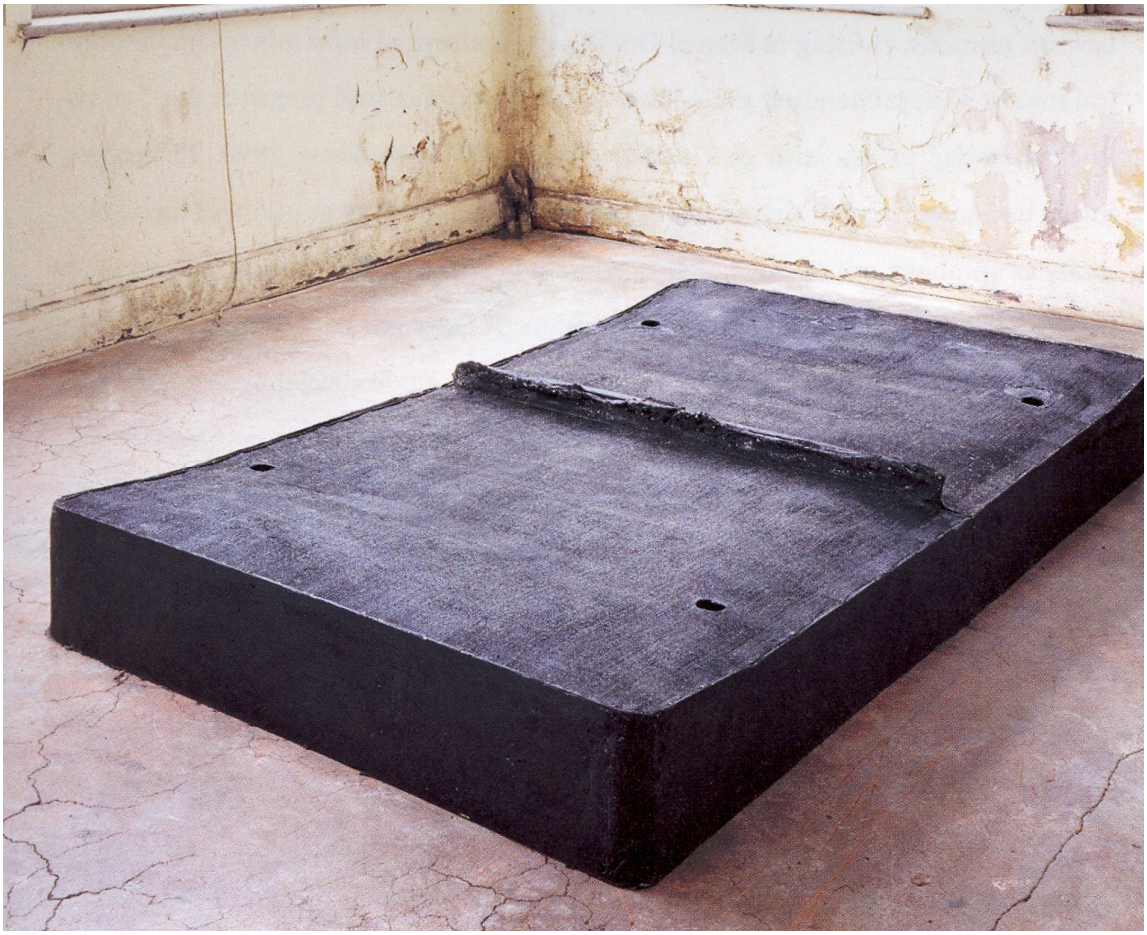

Figure 12 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Black Bed)*, 1991, Fibreglass and Rubber, 30.5cm x 188cm x 137.2cm.
(Image from *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, ed. Chris Townsend, Thames and Hudson, 2004, p.9.)

Figure 13 Whiteread, Rachel, *Shedding Life*, p.13.

Figure 14 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Grey Bed*), 1992, Rubber and Polystyrene, 508 x 2388 x 1524cm, The Carol and Arthur Goldberg Collection, *Shedding Life*, p.37.

Figure 15 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Freestanding Bed)*, 1991, detail of surface texture, Dental plaster and polystyrene, 104cm x 183cm x 23cm, Southampton City Art Gallery. (Photo: Author)

Figure 16 Whiteread, Rachel, *Untitled (Freestanding Bed)*, 1991, detail of rear of cast, Dental plaster and polystyrene, 104cm x 183cm x 23cm, Southampton City Art Gallery. (Photo: Author)

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