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Balancing act: An investigation of the in-between space used by selected contemporary artists in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

After endless contemplation on the idea of 'word and image', the following expression of J.W.T Mitchell in *Word and Image* (1996: 56) brought insight:

> '[W]ord and image'… a pair of terms whose relations open a space of intellectual struggle, historical investigation, and artistic/critical practice. ***Our only choice is to explore this space*** (own emphasis).

I shifted my position from the forlorn act of peeling to one of creative exploration. Not necessarily exploring the specific space between word and image, but rummaging 'the space between'; always hovering amid opposites. This space provides an opportunity to confront and debate the many issues that stem from the relations formed in its fluidity. It is a space that informs my thinking. It is a space of conversation. I see not only my writing, but also the art that I scrutinize as conversation. *My* conversation is captured in the linear structure of this thesis, but the conversation of art is dynamic. It is informal and flexible – following not one path, offering no answer, giving the potential at each moment for surprises and transformation. The idea is to ponder contemporary art's **dialogue**, the manipulators thereof and the indispensable factors constituting this notion: space, grammar, medium, criticism.

The notion of dialogue assumes a **listener**, a **participant**, an **audience**. But who is this audience with whom ideas are conversed, and what language do you (presumably) use to communicate the necessary? I have chosen to investigate these questions, the purpose and plan of art, with relation to a selected group of artists: an individual, Terry Kurgan and a collective – Stephen Hobbs, Marcus Neustetter and Kathryn Smith, known as The Trinity Session.