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Public digital art and publics: The case of Hotel Yeoville (2010)

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Introduction

One of the key things that drew me into the specialised study of Digital Art in Interactive Media,[1] was the possibility of using this medium creatively to engage with my immediate community and the world at large. For example the informal technologies that have been present within South African townships and peri-urban spaces of portable analogue radios with varied technological appendages that reconfigured a particular cultural aesthetic within African communities. Although not directly related to digital technologies, this form of media speaks to the influences of technology culture in townships and semi-urban spaces. I realised that there is a creativity operating on the periphery of formalised creative practises and I related this to my own social position as a young woman living in South Africa, particularly to how this impacts on the way that vulnerable communities can be mobilised or even exploited through these forms of technology. I've always wished to test this medium in relation to the positioning of historically marginalized groups, and thus became interested in the project *Hotel Yeoville* (2010) because it relates directly to the area of my interests.

While studying the Digital Art in Interactive Media course, I also reached a point of realising that what I was learning was a creative medium operating within a cultural realm that was not the most inclusive, and most certainly not equally accessible to all communities within the context of South Africa. I was interested in finding out, therefore, if the project *Hotel Yeoville* was able to break through these socio-economical and cultural limitations. I was interested in finding out how this project possibly opened up newer understandings of how digital art medium can be used in more equitable, transparent, and meaningful ways.

The majority of postcolonial academic writings on digital art has stemmed from an African American context, which can be compared to the South African context on many levels. However such writing in the US lacks a connection to the social, political, and cultural contexts specific to the dimensions of South Africa. This I understand as an absence, or gap, in the sense that it creates a vacuum of particular histories and theories

[1] Interactive media refers specifically to digital computer-based technologies with the ability to respond to human interaction.

that would enable us to critique digital art in South Africa, and furthermore encourages a shallow engagement of this creative medium when it comes to the representation of disenfranchised groups. This research is mostly motivated by this absence. I hope that it will start bridging the gap of knowledge on this kind of study and contribute to the scholarship on digital art specific to South Africa.

The project *Hotel Yeoville* run by Terry Kurgan was a public digital art project that consisted of an installation with varied digital interactive activities in the Yeoville Library. The project also had a community website which was active during course of the installation, and still remains active online. Yeoville boasts a majority population of pan-African[2] nationalities of which most are African immigrants. The project engaged the Yeoville community on their day-to-day lives, an engagement somewhat distant from the mainstream media's depiction of African immigrant communities always in disarray and turmoil as result of xenophobia. Thus, this project presented an opportunity for me to develop a specific engagement that focused my interests in studying the impact of digital art in marginalised communities.

I will refer to the Yeoville community as a pan-African community, based on the multi-African national networks that are present in this suburb. The use of this term (pan-African) will serve the purpose of highlighting the intra-continental and African diaspora connections existing here.[3] Although African immigrant groups are isolated, singular groups of interest in this study, I acknowledge that when speaking of pan-African communities this is potentially inclusive of all African ethnic groups, including black South Africans. In developing this writing around the African immigrant groups of Yeoville, I build a case for understanding how a project like *Hotel Yeoville* could be inclusive of any social groups that are subjected to particular social exclusion in South African.

[2] 'Pan-Africanism is an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide. In the *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide* (1965) Collin Legum explains it as a 'casting aside by Africans of subservience to foreign masters in all forms, and [a] confident assertion that African interests are paramount, are expressions - perhaps even the fullest expression - of Pan-Africanism' (Legum 1965:14).
[3] Intra-continental in this research refers to a framing within the borders of or in the interior of a continental land-mass, in this case the African continent.

Terry Kurgan, the artist leading the project is familiar with the journey of migration as her own family moved from South Africa to the United States of America for 10 years of her childhood, but has since returned to South Africa. Her family lived in Yeoville and has witnessed the extreme transformation that this suburb has undergone over the years (Williamson 2000). Specialising in fine art, Kurgan entered the South African art scene with printmaking being her initial choice of artistic medium. She later grew greatly interested in photography, with her photography exhibition, *Family Affairs* (1999) garnering much interest and criticism in the South African art industry. There was some controversy surrounding her work, based on the discomfort evoked by her engagement with the private space, for which she was accused of transgressing the privacy of her subjects, her children (Williamson 2000).

The controversies in her work generated a rather more glaring question of how public and private spaces are perceived and to the assumed standards of public ethics that start to operate. None of this is possible, however without the idea of a public that Kurgan intends to address, or a public that Kurgan speaks to, with, or from. Kurgan has continued to engage such concepts with her more recent exhibition titled *Public Art/Private Lives* (2013), where she presented works from previous exhibitions along with a new body of work from her public art project *Hotel Yeoville*. The *Hotel Yeoville* book was also launched at this exhibition.

My approach to this research is inspired by international art history studies, more specifically the history of visual arts. The specialised study of art objects in art history offers an exploration and understanding of the different culture and societies through the study of art objects. This study of culture and society greatly influences the direction that art practices take from the present into the future thereby affecting new artistic movements that continue to emerge. My intention in this research is to position firstly the *Hotel Yeoville* project within a theoretical and art historical account; and second to position the marginalized group of African immigrants presented through the *Hotel Yeoville* project; and thirdly, as a group that has a stake within the project *Hotel Yeoville* through which one can formulate an understanding of them.

Art objects are a cultural product, that "embody aesthetic features and production technologies that are deeply enmeshed in each artisan's local traditions", as Pimpawan Kumphai puts it in her thesis *Cultural Products: Definition and Website Evaluation* (2006). And therefore requiring "some level of hand production nevertheless for expediting the process, molds, machines, and a variety of other mechanized tools [that] may be used for processing raw materials, forming products, and finishing artisanal wares" (Kumphai 2006:46). Art objects are shaped into meaning based on varied social, political and cultural factors.

Hotel Yeoville is an art object. Digital art - as with many other art forms - can produce an art object deeply enmeshed in local traditions with tangible and intangible outcomes. The interweaving of both the intangible and tangible aspects of public digital art becomes increasingly important in this regard. The medium of digital art in the *Hotel Yeoville* project offers a tool from which to assess the impact of digital art in the pan-African communities such as Yeoville, and more specifically to African immigrant groups.

In Kumphai (2006) points out the complexity embedded in cultural products when she states;

> Cultural products are produced for various reasons. In the western hemisphere, making cultural products seems to be a leisure activity but in the developing world, the main reason appears to be economic ... In many developing countries, agriculture is the main source of income and producing cultural products is a secondary income source (Kumphai, 2006:45).

This statement bluntly draws a distinction how cultural products are perceived and valued in western countries as opposed to developing countries. This further validates the concerns of my research as I frame a postcolonial undertaking within South African digital art. Understanding this background of cultural products paves the direction this study aims to take and asks questions around what one can distinguish as the cultural context and the art object which I consider to be employed in - and flowing from - the *Hotel Yeoville* public digital art project. I acknowledge that the broad study of culture is not what will be unfolding here; rather, this research will look into a specific aspect of an art object, namely how the public relate to public digital art. Although this research is

introduced by framing the cultural product, engaging discourse on the cultural product serves to introduce the importance of the key areas of this research, which are publics and public digital art as a form of cultural engagement. The need to frame a social context that speaks to the socio-economic, cultural and political factors of the public is to probe for a more in-depth engagement of the art object in a specific context.

Understanding the public activity of African immigrant groups through *Hotel Yeoville* is what uncovers in this body of writing. The strategies employed in the project to engage the African immigrants living in Yeoville, are incredibly important in outlining how groups of great social disposition are engaged within the practise of public digital art practise. It is ultimately the creative mechanism that I will be looking at. I do not engage the *Hotel Yeoville* participants and by default do not engage the African immigrant participants. This is due to the scale of this research and the difficulty faced in accessing these participants. As a result this research does not particularly represent the perspectives of the African immigrant groups of Yeoville. This is an aspect that can be taken further in a different body of work. I measure the strategies of engagement (used in *Hotel Yeoville*) in relationship to theories on how a public is formed, as public digital art is essentially a tool that affords a platform for these groups to be heard. I employ Michael Warner's extensive theory on *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), which offers a thorough unpacking of what constitutes the sovereign character of a public, formed by circulating public discourse through networks of individuals with shared influence. Whilst looking at the strategies of engagement I largely refer to Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) in order to reflect a postcolonial paradigm within the project as I uncover a form of exclusion and alienation in South Africa that is very specific to the African immigrants.

Purpose of the study

Apart from my personal interest in the topic, this research is partly motivated by the lack of scholarship that focuses on public digital art practice, particularly those that prioritise African immigrant minority groups in South Africa. Pursuing a study of this nature is essentially a form of acknowledgement of the cultural differences that differentiate social groups within South African society. The limited research on public

digital art makes it hard to engage with this field from a social, political and cultural perspective, particularly one specific to the South African society. As mentioned earlier, I wish to contribute to this (new) field of scholarship.

I am not aware of any other public digital art project that directly engages African marginal communities, more specifically the pan-African community of Yeoville, so there is little that I am able to draw on or compare my research to when writing about this project. Through this study I hope that nuances that define this public digital art project within a South African context will emerge, and more topics like mine will be posited within studies that are critically and intellectually engaged.

My choice to look at the *Hotel Yeoville* project as a case study was based on the rarity of this combination of public art and digital interactive media in a Johannesburg suburb such as Yeoville. Since the project was participatory - I discuss the methodology below - it bore a strong digital interactive element. This is where I hoped to test notions of a public participation and investigate how the mechanisms that are put in place allow for multiple exchanges and networks to be formed.

I am aware of the 'digital divide' that dominates discourses concerning the techno-sphere within South Africa and the African continent at large and of how this term is often employed in relation to economically marginalised groups.[4] However, I argue that when technology is engaged from an artistic perspective it may reveal patterns that are contradictory to the much-discussed digital divide framework. The digital divide exposes patterns of inequality, and is of value in understanding social patterns that evolve from these disparities. Digital public art encourages an alternative engagement of technology and society that starts to reveal other possible patterns. By virtue of the way the digital divide is a legitimate framing of the technological reach in society, it creates a language and understanding of technology as existing in society in binary modes, those with access and those without. Socio-economically marginalised

[4] "Di-gi-tal Di-vi-de: the gulf between those who have access to computer and the Internet, and those who do not" (http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/digital-divide?q= digital+divide, accessed 21 August 2013). With the current capabilities of digital technologies that allow for the Internet and virtual networks to be hosted on varied interfaces and devices, it has made the discourse around access slightly difficult to pin down to computer technology.

groups more often fall within the category of 'without access' and this impacts on how technology is seen or spoken about when it comes to specific groups. The technologically marginalised are seldom written about, spoken of, and documented in relation to their creative appropriations and (re)inventions of technology. Due to their limitations of access to technology marginal groups are often denied or not acknowledged for their creative engagement with technology as art objects. This further heightens misconceptions around marginalized groups not having a sense of ownership of their presence in the digital art realm. A project such as *Hotel Yeoville* thus makes a bold inception in the creative industry, as they offer grounds to contest the understanding of technology and its reach, and open up new concepts through which art practise can be explored.

Methodology

This research was developed with two parallel methodologies, within an overarching paradigm of qualitative research. The first and most important methodology was interviews and participant observation: I conducted four interviews with the *Hotel Yeoville* project team members who were closely involved in the realizing of this project. The second methodology was exploring the historical and theoretical context, and I say more about this below.

My first visit to the installation was in June 2010, where I initially introduced my interest in a close study of the project to the facilitators on the site, and from there I was connected to Terry Kurgan. Kurgan then outlined the magnitude of the project and the team, and from this I was able to formulate a list of questions, which I would use for my interviews with the project team. This questionnaire included questions address their individual contribution to the project; their individual thoughts on the purpose of the project; what informed the choice of mediums used in the project; and how they became involved in the project. The project team consisted of creative practitioners such as artists, web designers, animators, and built environment professionals. The same questions were posed to each member of the team. I used this 'standard' interview approach in order to allow an in-depth understanding of the operating mechanisms of

the project and to enhance the validity of my findings. The interviews did however develop into a discussion, encouraging a greater exchange of information.

Later in the research period I attended the *Public Art/Private lives* (2013) exhibition on the opening night, where the book *Hotel Yeoville* (Kurgan 2013) was officially launched. I read about the *Hotel Yeoville* project in numerous reviews and essays in print publications, on the Internet and in academic journals, which I used to gain an in-depth understanding of this project.

I also consulted academic writing on digital art in the public realm and writing on how marginal groups identify as publics. Engaging the relevant literature on digital public art, marginal and minority groups allowed for a theoretical framing for this research. I then searched for writing more specifically about African immigrant groups in South Africa along with the digital art practice in this country. The reflection of the creative mechanism (*Hotel Yeoville*) as both public digital art and a product for public discourse, allows for an outcome that is sensitive and specific to the Yeoville pan-African public.

Chapter summaries

Chapter 1, titled 'Strategies of engagement in *Hotel Yeoville*', looks closely at the creative mechanisms employed in the *Hotel Yeoville* project to engage the Yeoville community. I first give a background on the history of the area, whilst looking closely at the contributing factors of its degradation of Yeoville by the financial sector that resulted in further attracting unemployed occupants. I use this history to demonstrate the organised strategies that assisted in creating the alienation and exclusion of African immigrants living in Yeoville. I then look at the varied activities the *Hotel Yeoville* project presented to the public, attempting to extract from these activities elements that might lead to a postcolonial reading of identity. I use Homi K. Bhabha's writing on postcolonial identities in *The Location of Culture* (1994) extensively in this chapter, in order to understand how postcolonial analysis impacts on our understanding of what influences the types of cultural product that come out of this space. I also look at the writing of Arjun Appadurai's in *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990) where I negotiate through his writing an

understanding of the African immigrant groups as mobile identities which at any point are equally influenced by global economic flows that directly affect their cultural and social activity.

Chapter 2, 'A public in the making', looks at what renders the formation of a public. I validate the choice of looking at this particular term on its own before addressing the creative formula of public digital art in *Hotel Yeoville*. I examine in some detail Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) in which he highlights key functions and attributes that define publics, and I test these propositions by Warner on the activities of engagement observed in *Hotel Yeoville*. Here I am mostly interested in the aspects that point to the sovereign character a public assumes when it is formed, and how a public operates amongst each other as strangers. I further this notion of strangers by looking at Julia Kristeva *By What Right Are You a Foreigner?* (1999), who further unpacks the alienating distinction of a stranger that is foreign and a stranger that is familiar. From this negotiation of stranger-hood the chapter looks at the formation of networks amongst strangers. I also make use Jacqueline Hagan's study *Social Networks, Gender and Immigrant Incorporation: Resources and Constraints* (1998) where she looks at networks amongst strangers in immigrant communities that enable a survival support system in foreign countries, all of which I specify to the *Hotel Yeoville* online archive and content capturing processes that I argue seeks to emulate the already existing networks of this community.

Chapter 3, 'Publics and the formation of an 'Us' in *Hotel Yeoville*', is a continuation of the unpacking of Warner's frameworks of publics, however the focus is on the complexity of the shifting mindset of an individual identifying as a public 'us'[5] and how this is situated in the *Hotel Yeoville* public art project. I draw from Hilde Hein's writing in *Public Art: History and Meaning* (2006) where she outlines the distinction between private and public art practice, where public art rather adopts a moral dimension in relation to a public. I further this examination by looking at Boris Groys' essay, *Multiple Authorship* (2008), as he outlines a complexity inherent in the negotiation of authorship in public art practice and I apply aspects of his propositions to the *Hotel*

[5] Participants that presented their life stories were given the opportunity to acknowledge their ideas of an 'us.'

Yeoville project. In examining the content publicised through the *Hotel Yeoville* community website I further test Warner's premises on 'discourse capturing attention', 'poetic world making' and counterpublics (Warner 2002:57-86) all of which assist in developing an understanding of how enabling the *Hotel Yeoville* project is towards the public discourse of African immigrant groups that I identify as counterpublics.

Chapter 1: Strategies of engagement in *Hotel Yeoville*

In this chapter I outline the components that formed the *Hotel Yeoville* project. I initiate this outline by giving an overview of the project along with the history of the Yeoville suburb in order to give a sense of a historical context. The project outline in this chapter is structured into subsections themed around key functionalities of *Hotel Yeoville*. By looking at the tangible aspects of the creative product, the installation and website I also offer a progression that is routed from the project as a cultural product leading into a broader engagement with theoretical study, which then starts to address the intangible aspects. Drawing closely on Homi K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994), I navigate the engagement specifically from an understanding of marginal African communities. Bhabha has a particular interest in subaltern[6] communities and the varied cultural expressions by minority groups in challenging dominant cultures or creating spaces of cultural difference, and he represents strongly the positioning I wish to engage in the *Hotel Yeoville* project. Bhabha is particularly critical of postcolonial identities, a position in which most African immigrant groups become placed in the South African public sphere. This is a positioning I can partially identify with from a gender perspective: as a woman I am subaltern in the historical context of women positioned as secondary citizens (by men), a subaltern position still experienced today. However, as a South African this renders a different outcome for me from that of African immigrant group identities, as I am not regarded as a foreigner.

I also refer in this chapter to Arjun Appadurai's study in *Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy* (1990) of the mobility of postcolonial identities and employ what he terms 'scapes' that are forever fluctuating in the presence of migrant bodies, cultures, and shifting politics, and draw on Appadurai to show how this becomes a mapping of an individual's sense of identity. In my concluding analysis of the narratives produced through the *Hotel Yeoville* project I look at how the practice of public art

[6] By subaltern this is a specific reference to societies that were historically colonized and currently grappling with a post-colonial existence, this also includes diaspora communities. At the heart of subaltern discourse is identifying societal trends and traits that sustain colonial dynamics in the postcolonial era, and therefore rendering certain groups as colonized (Bhabha 1994).

negotiations capture public narratives, and to aid this discussion I use Hilde Hein's *Public Art: History and Meaning* (2006).

1.1 The inception of *Hotel Yeoville*

The *Hotel Yeoville* project was a public digital art initiative that took the form of a community website (see Appendix, Figure 1) and an exhibition installation located in the Yeoville Public Library. The exhibition was active from February 1st 2010 to August 31st 2010, and the website continues to remain active online.

The exhibition consisted of two installations situated in different locations within the Yeoville Library. The first was an installation that was situated in an enclosed space, on the upper floor of the Yeoville Public Library, on the south facing wing and looking onto the busy Raleigh street of Yeoville. The space was divided into four booths where varied digital interactive activities took place. The space boasted an array of colours, with pink as the main theme colour. Images of people, wall paintings, and text filled the walls of the booths (see Appendix, Figures 2-10). Although the installation space was distinctly colourful, it worked harmoniously with the rest of the library. The booths were placed in such a away that none of the booth entrances were directly facing each other, encouraging curious visitors to wander about and discover the exhibition spaces, as can be seen in the exhibition layout shown in the Appendix, Figure 10. Each booth had a specific use and each had its own title: the Video Booth, the Love Booth, the Journey Booth, and the Directory Booth. Facilitators were available at the exhibition site to guide participants if they were in need of assistance.

The second installation was a booth located outside of the enclosed area by the library study space, which was a large open room used as a study area. Study desks and chairs populated this area.

The *Hotel Yeoville* community website (still active in 2014) is set up in a similar fashion to the themes of the installation as they were presented, but there are more themes: it has a photos page, a directory page, a videos page, and then - deviating even more in titling - a maps page, a stories page, and a resources page. The website houses the

virtual archive from the exhibition and also presents additional features that extend beyond the exhibition, such as the launch of the book *Hotel Yeoville* (2013). Although the website houses a great deal of the content produced through the exhibition, there is also content from the exhibition that was excluded, therefore making the website only partially a representation of the exhibition. The website makes extensive use of social media applications,[7] and open software such as blog applications, Youtube, Flickr and Google Maps.[8]

1.1.1 Purpose of Project

This project was geared at creating a space where the Yeoville community, targeting African immigrants who lived in the area, could network and engage with fellow community members and exchange skills or make creative statements. According to Kurgan the project was inspired through the observing of varied events (Appendix, Interview Kurgan). These events were primarily concerned with the narrow representation of African immigrants by media, the demographic shift in Johannesburg inner city observed from Kurgan's previous project *Joubert Park (2001)*, and the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Through this project she intended to create alternative representations of African immigrant groups, whilst availing an online resource hub for this community.

The representation of these groups by the media became a reoccurring concern in Kurgan's work. According to Kurgan representation can be instrumental in generating public misconceptions of marginal groups, the spaces and platforms that generate public knowledge and imagery in South Africa have repeatedly depicted African immigrants as abject dehumanised bodies (Appendix, Interview Kurgan). In *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants & Islam in Egypt* (2009) Michael Gasper outlines the political agency that unfolds when a group participates in representing their identity.

[7] The Oxford Dictionary describes social media as "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking" (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/social-media?q=social+media, accessed 4 January 2014). These networks allow for a culture that mimics the real world practice of socializing, granting the individual user a degree of power in the filtering and exchange of information.

[8] Open software or Opensource Software is free software. Although licensed, the softwares are available to the global community to use and distribute. Open Software is based on a culture and principle of granting the global community equal right to information.

He provides an informative historical account about Egyptian society that illustrates how the representation of a collective identity by the 'afandi class was strategically used to sustain a status quo of the passive Egyptian peasant class amidst the threat of foreign political influence.[9] The 'afandi class enjoyed a great deal of influence in the intellectual realm due to their economic dominance in knowledge production in the education system, religious doctrine, and governing institutions, where they were able to create a façade of representation of the peasant class in order to distract the peasant class from political agency, which was a growing trend in foreign nations.

> It is important to point out at the outset that the inauguration of this national political subject in Egypt was the product of social struggle. In order to show the workings of this struggle, these pages trace the contours of the provisional structures of Egyptian social relations at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The book then proceeds to illustrate the ways in which emergent middle classes created the illusion of consensus and unity around their corporate interest and political vision through representations of other marginal groups- specifically the peasants. The middle classes eventually cast the peasants as the timeless repository of Egyptian-ness and then linked that repository to their own political and social aspirations. In short, the representations of peasants were essential in legitimating and lending authority to the social ambitions and the political position of what became the nationalist elite (Gasper 2009:5).

This illustrates that visibility does not equate to constructive representation, and depending on the type of visibility certain types of people can be rendered invisible. I will elaborate further on this under the subheadings that follow. Gasper's study on representation and the political realm provides insight that I relate to Kurgan's frustration with the media coverage of the xenophobic attacks. This particularly relates to how African immigrants were framed within this form of violence, displacement, and horror. These also become the only kinds of representation of African immigrants that took prominence in the South African media. Such representations hold hostage those particular social groups from a discourse of social progression. I argue that the visual images that circulated with the purpose further reinforced these problematic representations.

[9] "'Afandi … was the term used in Egypt in the early twentieth century to refer to the urban, educated middle class of native Egyptians" (Gershoni & Jankowski 1995:11).

This project also came out of a partnership between Kurgan and the Africa Centre for Migration in Society at the University of the Witwatersrand. This positioned Kurgan's project within a particular field of migration studies, focussing on the migration of Africans to South Africa. Kurgan later invited professionals from other respective fields to put together the creative product *Hotel Yeoville* in the Yeoville Library, which was crucial in developing aspects of the project that required a different skillset from what Kurgan was able to offer.

1.2 The history of the Yeoville suburb

A report by the S4 Project (2013) at Brown University on Johannesburg outlines that Yeoville emerged in the nineteenth century during the great gold rush of the mining industry in Witwatersrand. The report (S4 project 2013) added that Johannesburg central business district (CBD) served as a large hub for inner city dwelling for the (initially) white workforce fuelling the mines. As the industry expanded and demands for housing increased, suburbs such as Yeoville were created to accommodate the growing white middle class that desired a slightly off-centre location away from the noisy centre accounts the S4 Project (2013). Unexpectedly, "the wealthy residents never came to Yeoville and instead it became home to a largely lower-middle class and working class population. It also became one of the predominately Jewish neighbourhoods of Johannesburg" (S4 Project 2013). Kurgan shares a stake in this history, being a second generation Jew from a family that settled in Yeoville straight from Europe during this phase. Thus I suspect elements of nostalgia towards the suburb may have also aided her particular interest in Yeoville. The report by the S4 Project (2013) at Brown University highlights the way the area developed a transit character as it became a popular arrival site for new Jewish immigrants, more specifically those coming from Eastern Europe. The demographic of this community has transformed greatly, however, although it still maintains its popularity as a destination of arrival for immigrant groups. The pan-African community that now occupies the suburb changes it; the character of the neighbourhood has transformed in economic class, in diversity, in race, in density, and in the market preferences of residents, all of which suggest a shift of general culture.

The Yeoville and Bellevue Development Trust (2013) website[10] documents that throughout the 1990s the suburb developed a stronger pan-African character, with the early part of the 1990s seeing Yeoville become a popular destination for many iconic anti-apartheid political figures. The trust (Yeoville and Bellevue Development Trust 2013) explains, "there began a dramatic demographic shift, with population of Yeoville changing from 85% white in 1990 to 90% black in 1998" (2013). With the change came a slow urban decay of the suburb for a variety reasons, a major one being the 'red-lined' area declaration of the suburb by banking groups.[11] This meant that a great deal of the population now living in Yeoville, mostly African immigrants, live as renters and seldom home-owners. A news report from the Business Day titled *South Africa Banks to continue Redling Dysfunctional Areas* (2002) reads:

> SA BANKS will not yet abandon the controversial practice of redlining specific property areas, saying that as it stands it would be "irresponsible" to start lending to people in certain "dysfunctional" areas. A declaration signed by government, labour, business and the community this week committed all parties to bringing financial services to the poor, including a provision to end discrimination (Rose 2002).

In an extensive economics report by Afeikhena Jermone & Ademola Ariyo, titled *Infrastructure Reform and Poverty Reduction in Africa (*2004), they list a number of reasons why banks resort to redlining measures, these are some of the reasons:

> In general, poor customers are relatively costly to serve for several reasons. First, higher commercial risk and billing costs may be associated with revenues collection efforts from customers with limited ability to pay. Second, as poor neighbourhoods are often located in topographically difficult sites; this can increase the technical complexity of providing utility services. Finally, poor households often consume relatively small quantities of service, whereby the fixed costs of services provision are spread over relatively smaller number of units of demand. Cross-subsidies may exacerbate this problem by reducing the amount of revenue that can be collected… entrants may be tempted to cream skim, or acquire only customers that can afford tariff that is no less than the real cost of providing for them… One form of this is 'red-lining' where whole neighbourhoods or geographic areas that enjoy

[10] http://www.yeoville.org.za/index.php

[11] An organized agreement amongst banking groups in South Africa, that refused 100% mortgages to prospective property owners in the Yeoville suburb.

> service while other (typically) less profitable are essentially ignored, unless government is willing to subsidize the operators (Jerome & Ariyo 2004:15).

This I regard as a form of being 'made invisible' that has been directly created by the banking system. Bhabha speaks of such invisibleness that is experienced by othered identities; the concept of invisibleness is socially rendered, he says, through an 'othered body' not being seen (1994:79). Being 'seen' speaks to the idea of being acknowledged as human, and therefore being rendered as familiar. Being 'seen' is what I liken to being present but not actively part of something. In the later chapters I grapple with how the Yeoville community was made a part of the *Hotel Yeoville* project, which is largely a discussion around authorship within the public art realm.

Bhabha then develops the notion of invisibleness by stating that "[i]nvisibility erases the self-presence of that 'I' in terms of which traditional concepts of political agency and narrative mastery function" (Bhabha 1994:79). The urban decay of Yeoville is, then, partly the outcome of tactics by bank institutions that observed the demographic shift as a financial risk within the property industry, and their denial of property ownership further heightened African immigrants invisibleness. A form of adaptation to such organized strategies of exclusion are readily visible in the isolated nature of pan-African networks that fuel these communities, resulting in very specific modes of communicating opportunities, services, community activities - all necessary for this community to survive. Even these networks operate under the radar of visibility within the public sphere.

Before one can begin to address the disposition of the African immigrant populous in South Africa, it is important to identify how the private sector has contributed to their invisibility, which is not a self-induced social condition. I argue that issues of socio-economic disparities experienced by African immigrant groups do not take place in isolation but rather each stake of society has a contribution in this outcome. This is the contribution of corporate industry. This directly determined how African immigrants could live in Yeoville and perhaps going as far as determining the general living conditions. Such restrictions by financial institutions on pan-African communities, illustrates largely the attitudes and misconceptions held against such market spaces.

Thus the ability to generate economies is still observed as something exclusive to select groups in society, whilst other groups remain framed as 'developing'.

Yeoville is unique in that 40 000 inhabitants are immigrants of different African nationalities, as stated on the community website.[12] Although a majority of the 2008 xenophobic attacks were observed in townships, the Yeoville suburb is (now) located in the inner city of Johannesburg.[13] Media coverage of the xenophobic attacks in 2008 was mostly taken from township areas, so the inner city African immigrant dwellers were minimally represented. The Yeoville community whether directly affected and indirectly affected by the xenophobic attacks of 2008 offer great insight, however on the experience of the African immigrant groups living in South Africa. *Hotel Yeoville* as a space engages such a community, and they offer a more complex representation than the media constructs of these groups.

1.3 Location of *Hotel Yeoville*

The *Hotel Yeoville* exhibition was set up in the Yeoville Library in central Yeoville, for the purpose of making it accessible to the Yeoville community. This intervention generated a bulk of the content that can be accessed from the community website.[14] The exhibition was strategically placed in the Yeoville Library, as a space that would assist in legitimising the integrity of the project, and offer protection for the project facilities as well as ensuring a degree of safety for the *Hotel Yeoville* team facilitators and participants. The benefit of placing the project in a public library was that the library is municipal property, and therefore events hosted in this space are presumed to be of public interest. As an enclosed municipal site, the library was a convenient entry point to engaging the Yeoville community, with the added benefit of a relatively controlled and secure environment.

The enclosure of the installation presented on many levels an escape from the reality the Yeoville community experienced on the ground, to the extent that the project on its

[12]http://www.hotelyeoville.co.za/about
[13] Townships are segregated areas of habitat designated during Apartheid to people of colour in urban areas. These areas were underdeveloped and highly populated and often found on the periphery of major cities.
[14] www.hotelyeoville.co.za.

own created a cultural nucleus within the library that was somewhat foreign from the cultural activity taking place in the surrounding areas, and even distant from the library culture it was physically located within. I diagnose the site as a cultural nucleus, first because of the enclosed, secure infrastructure allowed for, which meant the project team were in control of opening and closing times, which didn't always reflect the opening and closing times of the library. Second, the project encouraged more sociable activities that were in direct contradiction to the library's policy (and that of libraries in general) of silence. People could talk to each other, to negotiate group photos and video recordings. The infrastructure also allowed for the containment of noise within the space, preventing it from filtering into the rest of the library. Third, on the occasions that I visited the site I became aware of the immediate demographic contrast between the public using the library facility and those visiting the installation site: there was a greater concentration of white people and other race groups mixed together within the installation site, whereas the main library area was populated with black Africans. These three factors made for a more visible unfamiliarity or a sense cultural distance from what is commonly experienced and observed of the streets of Yeoville.

The project made grounds for an alien state of public art within this community, earlier I touched on the rarity of public art using digital technologies in Yeoville, however the very use of these technologies aids my argument on this cultural nucleus formed by the project. I base this proposition on the fact that the dense Internet café patterns observed in this community are all business ventures, and therefore access to the Internet is affected by financial access. *Hotel Yeoville* presented free access to technologies that in day-to-day life in Yeoville would be acquired at a cost, which further heightens this nucleus activity. This highlights the paradoxes of public art as illustrated in Hotel Yeoville, the project grants visitors access to online networks however the culture of internet access in the Yeoville creates a disjuncture.

1.3.1 Location and nationality

One of the underlying themes of the *Hotel Yeoville* project was the stress on location and time, best expressed in the questions inscribed on the walls of the installation: for example, 'So where are you from?' 'Places we have been. Places we have seen. Places

and people we have left behind. Places we hope to see again. But don't forget the place we are right now'. Thus the location of this exhibition was utilised in such a way that it demonstrated the diversity of the people that currently occupy and navigate Yeoville.

There are three notions of location that emerge through this project. Firstly, locating the project as a way of strategically reaching the Yeoville community, which was really about the placement of this project. Secondly, accommodating peoples' sense of location that is constantly shifting (as a series of transit points), which is well demonstrated in the month-end van and truck brigade that dominate Yeoville streets offering a plethora of moving services to relocating Yeoville residents. Here location illustrates the socio-economic factors that are a breeding ground for such living instability. Then thirdly, there is location outside South Africa, which brings to mind questions of nationality and the pan-African networks reaching far beyond the African continent, which provide a main source of economic flow for the Yeoville community. This pan-African network generates economic opportunities although operating under marginalised circumstances. In this respect a food blogger notes:

> For some reason it is very hard to find plantains to buy in Johannesburg. Considering the large African diaspora in this metropolis one would assume plantains would be readily available in any Woolies, Pick n' Pay or Shoprite, but not so. Especially considering you find Spanish avocados, Italian tomatoes and Zimbabwean strawberries on those shop shelves. It is sometimes possible to find plantains at the Yeoville Market, or at the street market stalls downtown. I have been told plantains have to be smuggled into the country though, and last time I went to check in Yeoville there were none. I think this is because plantains bring some kind of crop disease with it, but I am not sure and have not been able to verify this (Koblack 2012).

These opportunities although adding value to the Yeoville community, are still not enough to improve the communities' local economic status beyond the low-end income bracket. Note how the illegalisation of this plantain crop the blogger mentions further deprives a community of African diaspora from obtaining their cultural foods. My point here is to re-establish the postcolonial discourse and demonstrate the social exclusion of these pan-African communities based on their locative histories as Africans.

It is important to note that *Hotel Yeoville* - although this is not explicitly acknowledged by the team organisers - persuaded the participants through the varied activities to

constantly negotiate between different references of location. For example, in the Google maps booth, a map application allowed you to map your journey beyond South Africa. In other spaces such as the photos booth, participants were able to take pictures of themselves and add a note about the experience of living in Yeoville and beyond, whilst others could note their thoughts about the *Hotel Yeoville* project, etc. For this project, tracing a locative history beyond the South African borders was essentially a form of visualizing the mobile patterns of African immigrant populations. Mobility on its own opens a world of complexity that cannot be overlooked when addressing a community that embodies this complexity. Pan-African communities, African diasporic or African immigrant populations are all the product of mobile masses of Africans that move through global and continental networks.

Essentially the above demonstrates the multifaceted points of location that emerge from each individual participant in the project, as many document different points of origin on the continent and beyond. I suggest the *Hotel Yeoville* website anchors these dispersed locative points to one concept of offering a new kind of representation of the African immigrant groups. Within the focus of location is an underlying reality of mobility, and this creates a social phenomenon of mobile identities.

Identity based on nationality makes for a strange and reductive framing of a community and mobility, and I elaborate on this in Chapter 2. It is strange in that in many ways the national identity can fall short of capturing the essence of being a citizen of a nation, let alone a non-citizen. However, for postcolonial identities a more peculiar phenomenon occurs once outside the frame of national boundaries. Homi Bhabha puts it eloquently in *The Location of Culture* (1994) as follows:

> Fanon recognises the crucial importance, for subordinate peoples, of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories. But he is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that 'roots' be struck in celebratory romance of the past or by homogenising the history of the present. The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary: a bridge where presencing begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world - the unhomeliness - that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations (Bhabha 1994:13).

For Bhabha, those postcolonial expressions of subordinate identities are visible when these interventions express the experiences of unhomeliness of subordinate identities. My understanding of 'beyond' and 'the estranging sense of relocation,' is something that was minimally captured in the *Hotel Yeoville* project. The project was successful in bringing attention to the strong relocative and mobile activity happening within Yeoville and extending beyond to the rest of the African continent, from a perspective of African immigrant subjects, of which some alluded to an estranging sense of relocation. For example in the maps page of the website, a man from Chad shares about his dislike for South Africa and his longing for home (see Appendix Figure 7). This image highlights Bhabha's sense of unhomeliness in the experience of relocation. As he elaborates,

> To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself … taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of incredulous terror. (Bhabha 1994:13).

The hostility surrounding African immigrant groups in South African is well outlined in the study conducted by Vadi Moodley and Brij Maharaj titled *New African Immigration to the Durban Region* (2000:150), where they state that government sees migration and immigration as a negative economic threat to South Africa which further adds to the widespread stigmatising of these groups. This stigmatising and hostility I link directly to this notion of unhomely in Bhabha's writing; "The unhomely relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence", Bhabha (1994:15). However, their social exclusion goes beyond the postcolonial experience of the greater South African society, as they (African immigrant groups) find themselves completely foreign to the dominant nationalist culture they are surrounded by.

In their most recent reflection of the *Hotel Yeoville* project Terry Kurgan and Alexandra Dodd in *Checking in to Hotel Yeoville: Undoing xenophobia through fresh constitutions of self in trans-national public sphere* (2013) they state "Rather than predictably focusing on the marginalised and unwanted 'other,' the curators avoided works that directly depicted the victims of xenophobia and, instead, turned the spotlight around to examine what binds 'us' and what sets us apart," (Kurgan & Dodd 2013:3). The choice to not

engage the unfavourable aspects of a pan-African community of Yeoville in the *Hotel Yeoville* project was a strategy to extract alternative representations from African immigrants groups that depict this group in a positive light. In contrast to this, looking at Bhabha's unpacking of the term 'unhomeliness', seems more appropriate in understanding the discomfort of migrating identities across national spaces. The representation of abject bodies of African immigrant groups mentioned by Kurgan & Dodd is a symptom of this unhomeliness, is what the project partly stemmed from, although the project doesn't probe into the experience of unhomeliness as such. In trying to convey an alternative representation the project was advocating, rather, an opposing representation of African immigrants. This approach I argue as potentially as regressive as what it intends to challenge, and the difference lies in the involvement of the group in question (African immigrants). This involvement becomes more apparent when looking at the points or measures of inclusion the project organisers allowed the Yeoville community.

Moodley and Maharaj (2000:153) in their study explain that African immigrants relocating to South Africa are mostly draw into the country to find employment; secondly to escape war/conflict; thirdly to study; and four other reasons such as start a business, escape poverty at home, and live in a democratic country. They further state that African immigrants are mostly in search of opportunities when they relocate, and often find refuge with friends or relatives (living in various neighbourhoods) who are already residing in South Africa. I argue that these presented reasons for African immigration isn't the only reality that should garner all the attention, and that a project such as *Hotel Yeoville* through creative intervention creates the potential for a different study to outline. Looking at the locative movement of all people equally illustrates a one-sided observation of this social phenomenon; what seems to be lacking is the complication of these immigration patterns.

I am particularly interested in what Bhabha's concept of the 'dangers of the fixity' and fetishism of identities offers as a formula to complicate mobile identities (1994:13). The 'dangers of fixity' in my understanding is to do with the lack of multiplicity and flexibility in the way identity is socialized, engaged and even governed. The fetishism, I believe speaks directly to socialized and legislated commitment to this fixity; and in a

postcolonial engagement is to expose the colonial agenda that underlies this fetishsing of subaltern identities. The notion of a multifaceted individual with fluctuating sense of self (that I later explore using Arjun Appadurai's 'scapes') that determines her/his social, political and economic access is once again bringing attention to the undertones that influence cultural production whilst completely pluralising a nation, public and community. In other words my point of departure is that although a public such as the pan-African community of Yeoville may be subjected to varying degrees of social exclusion from South African society, each community member offers a different perspective of this collective experience.

Arjun Appadurai's view on the disjunctures of global flows is somewhat different. In the essay *Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy* (1990) he introduces an interesting concept of studying individuals as temporal identities that are consistently realigning or realigned to what he coins the five major 'scapes'. These are ideoscapes, financscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, and ethnoscapes. Appadurai looks at the continuous movement of people globally as a telling point of the de-territorialisation of nation-states. He (Appadurai 1990:295) adds that boundaries are ruptured as global flows of culture continue to increase through the movement of people and the capabilities of technology: which adds further insight into pan-African communities' perseverance in South Africa despite the on-going xenophobia from South African society - it is all part of a global phenomenon. These disjunctures produce degrees of hybridity in the creation of selves and identities.

> The new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models… The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics which we have barely begun to theorize (Appadurai 1990:296).

What I derive from Appadurai's study is that the pull factors to metropolis spaces, such as Johannesburg for the post-colonial subject, maybe the obvious economic opportunities, however more interestingly there are also political and cultural pull factors. I am proposing that there are even more specific pull factors that exist within a pan-African community situated with the metropolis, that present the possibility of

language and cultural preservation[15] as well as exchanges. Through the varied visual entries loaded onto the *Hotel Yeoville* community website one starts to get a sense of some of these possible pull factors from the perspective of Yeoville residents, although they mostly remain as first level entries.[16] For example in the stories page of community website an entry by Petros Ngubo gives an account of his experience of being introduced by his Nigerian friend to Egusi a traditional Nigerian dish; and in exchange Ngubo introduces his Nigeria friend Phuthu, a South Africa maize meal dish. Such entries are instances of disjuncture that does not fit the dominant narrative of African communities existing under cultural tensions. However the duration of the project solidifies these entries as a temporal expression of these identities of an ever-evolving local situation.

Location bears great significance and influence on the choices individuals make about their movement across different countries.

> But the critical point is that the global relationship between ethnoscapes, technoscapes and financscapes is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable, since each of these landscapes is subject to its own constraints and incentives (some political, some informational and some techno-environmental), at the same time as each acts as a constraint and a parameter for movements in the other (Appadurai 1990:298).

Earlier I demonstrated a case of strategic social exclusion by bank institutions of African immigrant groups. It can be brought back here in order to understand the financscapes that this minority group is faced with. Yet this form of financial disenfranchisement is not the only defining factor of this minority groups' ability to participate in the economy. Pan-African communities due to their historical disposition have constantly had to adjust or resort to informal structures in order to circulate finances. What is unmistakable is the culture that emerges from pan-African communities as these communities manoeuvre around such obstructions, and herein lies the creation of a cultural aesthetic, an aesthetic that is distinct and somewhat distant from what I argued earlier of the *Hotel Yeoville* project. The disjunctures within financescapes apply equally

[15] Cultural preservation in this sense I m using to idicate a situation that allows and sustains the pluralistic existence of cultural identities.

[16] First level entries are entries submitted by participants of the *Hotel Yeoville* project that were the initial responses to the instructions and guidelines of the project. They do not incite conversation or reponses which were possible through the social media technologies.

to mediascapes and technoscapes, which begins to suggest a different understanding of how it is that in a community such as Yeoville, that is over populated with Internet cafes, the Shoprite wall[17] on Raleigh street remains a strong mode of communication. This suggests a blend of different communicative methods that operate within this community that cannot simply be translated onto different platforms.

In wanting to offer support and further expand on the already existent Yeoville networks, *Hotel Yeoville* strongly honed in on the communicative method of the Internet that was suggested by the overwhelming presence of Internet cafes. The project successfully captured the histories of relocation of the participants; however, it did not show a strong networking around future and present re-locative activities. For the purposes of representation I find this approach of capturing histories to have worked more harmoniously with this objective than trying to provide a functioning tool for tracing current networks of the Yeoville community. Representing these histories of relocation was essential in the way the project guided or instructed participants.

1.4 Capturing the transit nature of Yeoville

The use of the title *Hotel Yeoville* implies a temporary place of habitat, a hotel, a place where people are in constant transit. This may hold true for some living in Yeoville, although this contrasts with the traditional purpose of suburban life, which is about settling down and home making. The title is effective in expressing both the sentiments of the people in transit making their way to unknown destinations and those settling within the suburb. For those who participated and interacted with the project - who were not living in Yeoville during the course of the exhibition - the exhibition was an experience that offered a point of entry into a world that was foreign, however distantly or closely related to their world.

In their article *Checking in to Hotel Yeoville: Undoing xenophobia through fresh constitutions of self in trans-national public sphere* (2013), Kurgan and Dodd look at themes of alienation associated with African immigrant groups. They specifically draw

[17] The Shoprite Wall in Yeoville serves as notice and classfieds information surface. The wall is saturated with an array of notices and post used by the residents of Yeoville to keep information regarding community activities, services and opportunities flowing amongst Yeoville comments.

on two major film productions that artistically and metaphorically captured the theme of alien-ness or rather un-homeliness experienced by many African immigrant groups:

> It is perhaps no coincidence that writer Rian Malan's latest salvo, Resident Alien, and Neil Blomkamp's blockbuster science fiction were both released in 2009, only one year after a wave of xenophobic attacks… in territories where porous borders are contested, the term 'alien' has come to be used as glib euphemism to describe immigrants. Both narratives take this term and explore the full imaginative terrain of its meaning (Kurgan & Dodd 2013).

The situating by Kurgan and Dodd of these narratives in relation to the *Hotel Yeoville* project, was particularly to position the project with other creative interventions that have encouraged degrees of societal reflection and questioning on the matter of exclusion and alienation of immigrant groups. However *Hotel Yeoville* serves a different function of actually countering this representation, "*Hotel Yeoville* through the capillary medium of digital interactivity, attempted to forge a healing response to the bruised atmosphere of muted hostility and fear that lurked beneath the surface of public life in South Africa," (Kurgan & Dodd 2013:2).

Besides the strong theme of people in transit, the title of *Hotel Yeoville* inevitably bares similar reference to the title of the film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) based on Rwandan genocide. Based on the true story of Paul Rusesabagina, a hotel manager who housed over a thousand Tutsi refugees during the nationwide genocide attach by Hutu militia against the Tutsi ethnic group, *Hotel Rwanda* is an acknowledged creative product that captures a fragment of the collective memory of the Rwandan genocide. Jeffery Olick (1999) reveals an interesting angle on collective memory in a group dynamics, in the essay titled *Collective Memory: The two Cultures* he argues that;

> …it is impossible for individuals to remember in any coherent and persistent fashion outside of their group contexts… Group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never experienced in any direct sense (Olick 1999).

Through the creative product, *Hotel Rwanda,* the collective memory of the Rwandan genocide becomes globally cemented as reference or memory of this event; for many

who were and remain distant from this land, the film captured visuals that form a part their mental archive. The association with *Hotel Rwanda* comes quickly and almost instinctively for any creative initiative that is phrased or titled as 'Hotel' and especially one that engages with a pan-African community. The violence that characterised the film, which depicted events in the Rwandan genocide, was similar to the media accounts of the xenophobia attacks in South Africa; both were the products of cultures and societies that are somewhat foreign from dominant cultural groups. Both were instances of black on black violence, the one framed as ethnic cleansing[18] and the other as xenophobia. Although the political, geographic, economic and cultural dimensions that define these locales are distinct, at the heart of both these devastating events (the Rwandan genocide and the South Africa xenophobic attacks) are the reoccurring representations of abject black African bodies. The irony and the similarity of these titles raises the possibility of the *Hotel Yeoville* project, ironically, being associated with the dominant colonial ideology it was attempting to divert.

Essentially the *Hotel Yeoville* project linked a variety of histories of relocation under a title that suggests the transit theme. Each creative or factual response to the varied activities is anchored to an engagement of relocation and identity, and this is where an alternative representation was envisaged by the project organisers. Each individual participating is crucial in forming this alternative representation.

1.4.1 Capturing narratives

The notion of capturing narratives of individuals, I propose, is synonymous with capturing their individual expressions of their identities and histories, which is to give each these expressions a voice on a public platform such as *Hotel Yeoville*. I examine the notion of voice through Ananda Mitra's essay *Marginalized Voices in Cyberspace* (2001). Mitra uses the term 'voices' as metaphors for speaking of and representing oneself including, in this context, voices in the virtual world. For Mitra the presence of a marginalised voice in virtual space creates alternative voices to be acknowledged by a

[18] "Ethnic Cleansing: the mass expulsion or killing of members of one ethnic or religious group in an area by those of another" (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ethniccleansing?q=ethnic+cleansing. Accessed 18 January 2014).

dominant culture. While I am not entirely convinced by her gauging the presence of a marginal identity in relation to the acknowledgement by dominant groups, her study raises some interesting propositions. The metaphoric 'voice' of the marginalised places attention on the problematic dynamic between the marginal and the dominant, and this is critical to engage in spaces that are intended to capture the autonomy of voices of the marginalised.

The *Hotel Yeoville* project is such a space, introducing the narratives of the marginalised African immigrants to the global virtual community. The content that is presented in the community website is not the entire reflection of the content that was produced through the installation. This is due to the fact that the *Hotel Yeoville* website had a content manager whose task was to filter the content of the website. There is therefore a degree of curiosity that materialises around the content that was excluded since there are no criteria of the filtering made available to the public. Is the web content judged on technical quality, the content, or a combination of both, and whose autonomy is being compromised? This makes for a tricky ground to address the metaphoric voices of participants. The engagement of voices is what prompted me into a more detailed study of publics, because the idea of vocalising didn't seem to incorporate the exchanges that were progressive dialogues. Dialogue and discourse aren't hereditary to vocalising. Amidst these acts of vocalising there was also a strong white populace present throughout the project, which I purposefully do not engage fully, due to my particular interest in the African immigrant groups and the social exclusion they particularly faced.

I have been intrigued by the function that the Internet grants the project and the plethora of narratives represented; of the way the Internet is able to store these narratives in virtual space as timeless instances. In other words these narratives now form a part of the online resources that can be extracted anytime from the Internet, and used as a reference in understanding Yeoville. There are very little responses or engagement with the narratives from the online community, which further demonstrates a thinking of people that is not shifting (for those within, distant and in-between from Yeoville). These narratives now form a part of the past for the Yeoville

community, and this now shifts the discussion to a consideration of how narratives come into the collective memory category of Yeoville.

1.4.2 Narratives in public art

Where narratives and public art are concerned the artistic outcome alludes to collective memory. In *Public Art: History and Meaning* (2006), Hilde Heins demonstrates this by looking closely at historical practise of public art. In Heins analysis of memorial sites she says that the function of such sites is to capture a symbolic moment of history for the current generation and future generations; the memory of which is often implied to be of public importance. What is revealed is that such sites may not be effective in preserving 'the truth' as historically many were used as tools of propaganda. However they successfully manage to provoke a degree of public interest and devotion. The advancement of technology, to Heins, encourages new ways of seeing and allows for new perceptions of what has always been there. Through technology, traditional objects can be dissected visually and reorganized to reveal different perspectives; the possibilities seem endless. The vulnerabilities of public art Heins lists firstly as the transition from centrality (the public art project from the initiator/s standpoint) to the reception of a multitude of identities affected by various social factors; secondly, physical damage and relocation; and lastly, the shifting social climate.

Although *Hotel Yeoville* was neither a permanent site within Yeoville nor intended for such memorial purposes, there are grounds to see it as a function of collective memory of the experience of African immigrants living in South Africa, especially when the project produces a book. The book in this sense replaces the monument site, and presents a physical memorial (document) that forms a part of the traditional literature archive; and the degree to which history is made permanent through a published book is strengthened by this. To this moment I am yet to encounter a creative project on the Yeoville community that produced a published book, and therefore *Hotel Yeoville* has foregrounded such a practise.

Later I delve into the *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) text by Warner, which unpacks how a public is established. The reason I mention this here is that I put forward the

hypothesis that circulation of public content is part of the narrative formation of a public. Circulation accounts for how thoughts and ideas move through communities and evolve that public. A suggested underlying aspect of the *Hotel Yeoville* was creating the circulation - as this would serve as the lifeline of the project - of public discourse amongst the voiceless foreign national groups and immigrants living in Yeoville and beyond. And this is the potential that could be realised through the functions of the website. So essentially there are two types of narrative forming through the project: the narrative of Yeoville that is fixed in the book and therefore captures a collective memory, and the narrative that exists on the community website, that has the potential to evolve.

1.5 Addressing the misrepresentation of African immigrant

Throughout this chapter I make repeated reference of Kurgans attempt to address the misrepresentation of African immigrant groups in media. And the project does produce from the African immigrant groups representations that do begin to create alternatives to the dominant mis-representations. However the project does not display a very distinct strategy of engaging this particular practise of media, creating a disconnect in this regard. The narratives produced through the project are a great demonstration of a community existing and in some instances thriving, on the periphery of society. The history of the disposition-ing of African immigrant groups is a valid concern especially in light of the xenophobic attacks in South Africa, however the counter narrative needed to assert its presence in the local media in a more explicit way. Perhaps this is where the projects public status may offer a more organic form of addressing this very concern.

Chapter 2: A public in the making

This chapter is concerned with understanding a 'public', and how the *Hotel Yeoville* project engaged differently constituted publics. The *Hotel Yeoville* project addressed a public by virtue of the fact that it was a public digital art project. Identifying a public and understanding what constitutes a public is at the core of this investigation. The choice to unpack the term 'public' acknowledges what Michael Warner in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) emphasises about a public not being misread as a group or audience of people but rather read as a delicate balance between exchanges, people, and a freedom to mobilise. Such thinking illustrates the very particular activity of engagement that happens when people are referred to as a public, and these are the nuances that this chapter delves into with the *Hotel Yeoville* project. In other words indeed a public is made of people, yet that is not enough to frame it (a public); the real emphasis is the sociability of a people.[19] Sociability does not equate to social dynamics but rather encompasses it along with many other defining factors, which will be fleshed out in this chapter. In Warner's text an overarching theme can be extracted and made useful to this research, that if one were to simplify a public it is a bottom-up model of social activity. Themes of activism, social change, development, and service directly speak to this model of bottom-up, where the masses drive the agenda and not the other way round. The link from recognizing a public to later realising how a public art form can engage a public is the trajectory that is unfolding in this research.

The *Hotel Yeoville* project made extensive use of digital media as a creative intervention, using tools such as interactive technologies and the Internet, which transgress space, location, and time. In the first chapter I looked closely at the location and space, and this chapter will be laying greater emphasis on the time factor, with Warner as a guide to fleshing out and examining the key public of the *Hotel Yeoville* project. My premise is that the public is the African immigrant community that occupies Yeoville as a majority, yet it is a minority in the greater frame of South Africa.

[19] Sociability is the act of being social, an understanding in line with Georg Simmel's statement that "[s]ociability is the art or the play form of association, related to the content and purposes of the association in the same way as art is related to reality. While sociable interaction centers upon persons, it can occur if the more serious purposes of individual are kept out, so that it is an interaction not of complete but symbolic and equal personalities" (Simmel 1949:254).

2.1 Who is the *Hotel Yeoville* public?

Warner extends on a debate circulating in academia around the phenomena of the public being a peculiar cultural artefact. His stance is that the practice and understanding of the term public as observed in general use, resembles more of an 'imagined' idea of what or who the public is, hence Warner's referral to the public as imagined (Warner, 2002:49). My understanding is that it is important to note that this notion of 'imagined' is more a commentary on the non-real, intangible qualities that constitute a public, not to be understood in the sense of 'fantasised', but emphasising the inaccurate practise of assumption that is often employed in the understanding of this term. The public in this sense becomes something that is partially imagined and partially an observable scientific truth. Furthermore, "[t]he public is a kind of social totality" (Warner, 2002:49) by which Warner means a public represents a varied mass of people that is constantly shifting and reshaping. One could conclude that therein lies the dysfunctional attribute of the public phenomena: it is very reductive and inevitably alienates any group or people that are of an alternative existence. Warner then alludes to the lack of flexibility in the way a public is often defined or understood further limits the way society can exist (Warner 2002:51). He explains that this fixation on nationhood, up to the present day, serves as a benchmark in understanding or isolating a people's sociability. He then deviates to add that people's sociability extends beyond this definition, and demands equal attention to a people's context (Warner 2002:52). The thinking that Warner invites in looking at publics is the prioritising of the voices of the masses that form publics and the way these voices shape and define a new and current understanding of that public.

My interpretation of Warners (2002:49-52) framing of publics, is the importance of distinguishing between *a* public and *the* public, as *a* public does not equate to *the* public. An example of this I derive is of the gay community (and this applies to any other community), the gay community through its engagement within the public sphere becomes *a* public, however the gay community is *a* public that forms a part of *the*

greater public. In the case of *Hotel Yeoville*, the African immigrant population is a minority group in South Africa.

The *Hotel Yeoville* exhibition was strategically placed in the Yeoville Library so the content of the project was of greater relevance to the African immigrant population living in Yeoville. The benefit of placing the project in a public library is that it opened itself to a possible fluid movement of people of varied social standing. What is strongly evident in this project is that although the access points were open to a broader community and a broader public, through the online platform it spanned to a global community. The targeted public was not strongly identified although it was implied to be African immigrants.

Unpacking the technicalities of the term 'public' requires a firm point of departure, to find grounds to engage the hypothesis that the *Hotel Yeoville* public was truly the African immigrant public possibly interested in shifting the misconception around their social identity. A public is more than just a mass of bodies. A group of people can often be identified through the use of terms such as 'audience' or 'crowd', and these terms can be quantified as they are empirical (Warner 2002:55). Warner (2002:56) states the same does not apply to a 'public' because the term has both empirical and notional qualities. Warner (2002:57) puts it that the essence of a public lies in a balance between a rhetorical address and the real concept of reception by the people. In short, the term public derives meaning that interplays between the non-real and the real. With this thinking Warner does not aim at reaching a resolution but rather opens this term up to a more complex and unresolved state. This is useful with regards to my earlier emphasis on the intangible aspects that form a part of the public digital art form, and likewise with *Hotel Yeoville*. This open state of a public parallels well with what I explore earlier in Arjun Appandurai's notion of mobile identities which are temporal hybrids highly affected by global flows.

Warner puts it that a common thread needs to be established amongst a group of strangers in order to identify them as a public, which becomes the subject of a shared interest amongst that group of people. He then emphasises that this common interest does not completely define the individuals that form that public (Warner 2002:52). For

instance I may be vocal and involved with the equal rights of the gay community and therefore form a part of that public, but that does not mean I am gay, nor does it mean that I am not involved with other forms of human rights activism. Individuals within the Yeoville community needed to also identify with the need to address their misrepresentation by the media, in order to identify themselves as a part of that public, and find purpose or understanding in their participation. On the 'About' page of the *Hotel Yeoville* website it reads:

> *Hotel Yeoville* is a collaborative, multi-platform, long-term public art project based at the Forced Migration Studies Programme, a graduate programme at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg … The majority of Yeoville's estimated 40 000 inhabitants are migrants and refugees; micro communities from many parts of the African continent. Often isolated and excluded from the formal economy and mainstream South African society, their dominant engagement is with each other and with home in far away places.[20]

The statement above is the most prominent publicised framework of the project. Why the assertion that the *Hotel Yeoville* project had a public or could be engaged as public discourse? Firstly, the *Hotel Yeoville* exhibition was categorized as a public art project by the project organisers, and by several publications. Secondly, the participants of the *Hotel Yeoville* exhibition space were referred to as a public, not (for example) an audience or a crowd. This possibly speaks to the type of dynamic the project was geared towards with those who visited the *Hotel Yeoville* exhibition, and those who made use of the *Hotel Yeoville* community website as highlighted earlier. Warner outlines several premises of what he considers to be the modern idea of a public.

2.2 The Importance of Self in self-organised public

Throughout the Introduction and three chapters here I shift from identifying the African immigrant groups, to considering a pan-African community and then eventually to discussing the *Hotel Yeoville* public, and hence groups, community and publics. This is precisely because each one signifies a minor yet important distinction from the next. When emphasising the African immigrant group, this is mainly to highlight the other-ed African nationalities in South Africa. The use of the term pan-African community is

[20]http://www.hotelyeoville.co.za/about.

largely to emphasis an economic hub and network of Africans, inclusive of black South Africans, that exists on the periphery of formal economic institutions. The *Hotel Yeoville* public is then a public discourse surrounding a pan-African existence of the Yeoville community, with an underlying political tone of negating the media's misrepresentation of African immigrant groups, all the while extending its (public discourse) reach to the global community.

In the first premise Warner states that "a public is self-organized" (Warner 2002:50), and he develops this thought by putting forward the idea that "a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (Warner 2002:50). He therefore adds discourse derives purpose in itself. This thought illustrates a degree of circularity - what Warner calls a kind of 'chicken-and-egg' circularity - to which he adds that a public exists by virtue of being addressed by an addressee. The question I grapple with is then what comes first: the addressee or those being addressed? The addressee in the *Hotel Yeoville* project would be the project organisers who through their efforts created a platform in the form of an exhibition and a community website, where discourse could take place amongst a *Hotel Yeoville* public.

Kurgan had demonstrated a growing interest in immigrant populations after working on her photography project *Joubert Park (2001),* a public art project; although at the time she had not isolated her interest in African immigrants specifically. Through *Joubert Park* she observed that the photographic content collected over the years by small business photographers in the park - a portrait collection - illustrated an archive of changing inner-city demographics. Kurgan became conscious of the shifting immigrant populous in Johannesburg, and it is following the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa that a direction started to develop and take shape in her work towards a creative intervention that would be in response to this catastrophic public event. *Hotel Yeoville* was, therefore realised partially in response to this event, and to Kurgan's curiosities about immigrant populations, which would later become focused on African immigrants specifically.

> The project grew out of a particular moment in South Africa in 2008. In the aftermath of the 2008 xenophobic attacks on foreigners, the media were flooded with images that evoked horror, pity and sadness but also focused

> my attention upon how most images of migrants to South Africa are located within a particular discourse of violence, displacement and abjectness; disconnected not only from their history, but also from the experiences and histories of those who consume their images. (Appendix, Interview Kurgan).

The *Hotel Yeoville* public, as mentioned above, was deeply engrossed with content surrounding the situation of the African immigrant population of Yeoville, including the pan-African community. An underlying aim of this engagement was to affect a change in the public representation of these groups, implicating the broader South African public in the process. The project presented an overwhelming African immigrant presence, but as highlighted in Chapter 1.4 the project did not explicitly engage the media neither did the project assert its presence in the South African public sphere. Although there were black South Africans that participated in the project, their entries largely demonstrated their exposure and experiences with African immigrants that were positive, and I further speculate that media representations wouldn't influence their thoughts towards the African immigrant groups as their exposure allows them their own opinion. On the other hand the greater South African public that is not exposed nor encounters this positive aspect, such an address (*Hotel Yeoville* discourse) still remains out of reach, this greater fraction of the public remain highly influenced by negative and dehumanising representations of African immigrant groups. How I come to this understanding of 'out of reach' is based, firstly on the fact that the xenophobia attacks in South Africa are most evident in townships and squatter camps and this public does seem to be engaged through this project. Secondly the internet café culture observed in Yeoville cannot be confirmed to be the same as there is no study on this, however the lack of this study or consideration once again points to the fact that the address was not truly engaging the South Africa public where the xenophobia mindset remains.

I now look closely at the African immigrant presence engaging the *Hotel Yeoville* and dissect their engagement. A public "must first of all have some way of organizing itself as a body and of being addressed in discourse" (Warner 2002:51). Warner explains that a public displays a sovereign character as it is able to self-organise and self-create independent of any form of institutional structure, this is vital in *the* public being a space where alternative identities can emerge that offer different or challenge existing frameworks of identity. Of the members of the *Hotel Yeoville* project team interviewed,

only Terry Kurgan and John Spiropoulus could identify with being first generation immigrants of Jewish and Greek communities in South Africa, the other interviewees did not mention or draw any similarities between their identities and those of the Yeoville community.

> I'm first generation so my parents would have come here during the Second World War fleeing the Nazi Europe. Most people of my age and stage, from Johannesburg lived in Yeoville when they were students or their grandparents lived in Yeoville when they came here from the old countries or from Europe. Yeoville's always been a neighbourhood where migrants sort of start their lives in Johannesburg, and it is particularly such a neighbourhood now. (Appendix, Interview Kurgan).

In this regard the African immigrants living in Yeoville, the organisers of the project, and the online global community all form a part of the 'self' as they are the *Hotel Yeoville* public. However the project organisers played a greater role than the other two in influencing and directing the discourse. The cultural, economic, and political distance or difference between these three distinct groups forming the *Hotel Yeoville* public is a difference not closely considered. The project demonstrates what I would like to posit as three different positions of engagement: the Yeoville community were engaged by populating the *Hotel Yeoville* platforms with information regarding their livelihoods; the *Hotel Yeoville* organisers were instrumental in organising the content and placing it on the community website; and the global online community were engaged by being presented to, or rather this group came closest to, resembling an audience.

Most of the organisers did not identify with the lived experience of the African Immigrant population living in South Africa, especially in light of the xenophobic violence that exists in the country. The *Hotel Yeoville* platforms were potentially spaces where such dialogues concerning these tensions could be engaged or expressed, and perhaps outsiders could be afforded a lens in to look at a different kind into understanding this particular phenomenon. However this was never stated as an agenda of the project, and therefore finding a common ground or interest amongst these differently constituted groups was something of an elusive quest. In addition to this language was equally a limitation as the project was largely conducted in English, which automatically denied and discouraged a multi-lingual expression of this Pan-African community that once again had to resort to colonial languages.

The common ground provides the potential for momentum to develop around the discourse that is not contrived. Warner identifies this momentum in the reflexivity of the discourse. “A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (Warner 2002:51). In other words a public may lay dormant and be unaware of itself or its ‘public-ness’ until addressed (in speech or writing) to insight a public discourse. The idea here is that pockets of thought/expression from the addressee find their way to the recipients who matter, who in turn engage with the address as individuals. In identifying Kurgan and the *Hotel Yeoville* project team as the addressee I do not mean the Yeoville community was non-existent. I just illustrate that there was possibly no discourse similar to that initiated by the *Hotel Yeoville* project – or no other project that used extensive digital media - and therefore it follows that through the *Hotel Yeoville* project a circulation of discourse amongst a public was to take shape. How this particular project differs from other projects operating in the same neighbourhood or suburb is in the extensive use of interactive media and online media as communicative tools. I would like to put forward that the use of such technologies introduces a unique form of discourse amongst this public, different from existing projects, which do not demonstrate such intense use of Internet and interactive media technologies, specifically in the Yeoville community.

Warner (2002) then links this idea of self-organization to what he observes as the opposite end of the spectrum, to a form of powerlessness that is often identified amongst marginalised groups. Being powerless in this regard is to not be an equal in a public you form a part of. This is a prevalent challenge for subaltern voices or identities, asserting themselves as a public often to assert a sense of belonging. Being an African immigrant in South Africa is not acceptance of this challenge of belonging.

The contradictions of influence within the *Hotel Yeoville* organizing structures span from material limitations to historical distortions of race relations. The material limitations were evident in the struggle to sustain the project over a longer time frame, as the resources that fuelled the project became exhausted and no longer available. The resources of the project were intended to provide a supportive role to the discourse

that was to take place amongst the *Hotel Yeoville* participants, and therefore it was critical how the *Hotel Yeoville* project addressed its public.

Another factor to consider is the online limitations that directly influence what people are exposed to as their online cultural practices. For instance, people of low economic standing who use the Internet to maintain communication between distant family members may prioritise cheaper online activities such as instant messaging or email over online video channels or video calls. Such nuances are imperative in understanding the cultural differences that may influence which online tools are preferable to either group. This contradiction on some level legitimises the setback to the *Hotel Yeoville* discourse, as it weakened the address, or put in simple terms, it weakened the reach. Internal contradictions were more located in the disparities (mentioned earlier) around race and economic standing, and how race was clearly distinguished along colour lines when it came to decision making and influencing the direction of the project, especially with regards to how content was prioritised, themed and circulated.

2.2.1 Public art founded on an anti-public history

From a brief look at the history of public art one can see that it is mostly framed around political propaganda and ideological dominance, which is the opposite of the bottom-up model being tested through my research. This observation points to a history that foregrounds public art practise; moreover it reiterates the nuances that can frame public art practises, which then propel my interest in unpacking the public in a public art intervention. My main concern is that the practice of public art should speak to the sociability of a public, yet these ideas do not sync well at this point. In *The Contradictions of Public Art* (1997) Malcolm Miles attempts to problematize public art, drawing attention to the dysfunctional history of public art where the terms 'public' and 'art' are treated as divorced subjects. This is further entrenched as academic practises show similar patterns where the art field/institutions fail to engage other social studies in expanding their dialogues around the public, which is rather ironic as all art forms are situated within cultural practice, and on the other hand politics cease to exist without culture. The understanding that there is no general public that one can speak of but rather there is a diversity of publics, is where Miles (1997:98) initiates his

discussion, and he explains that the diversity of publics is identified not by location but the public realm. Warner speaks of a public that cannot be quantified, demarcated, nor framed through scientific measures and therefore this is well in-sync with Miles acknowledging that a public exists beyond parameters of location.

Miles looks at the article *Out of Order: The Public Art Machine* (1989) by Patricia Philips, from which he extracts an interesting argument put forward by Philips on public art, where she states that a public is psychological and not a location. This is where the true essence of public art should be, engaging with the public on psychological levels yet situated in a balance between collective values and personal interests. Philips further highlights, notes Miles, that to go beyond the geographical aspiration of a public also means "to include the invisible operations of huge systems and the intimate stories of individual lives" (Miles 1997:100). These ideas are valuable not only in highlighting the invisible nature of public networks of marginalised groups but also in exposing the power whether political, economic, or social that can be realised through invisible public networks.

A concern that Miles raises in his writing is the lack of critical engagement with other social sciences in developing the public art field, which in turn affirms the stronghold of a dominant ideology in the field. Without the presence of alternative voices in the way that public art is engaged the dominant ideology goes unchallenged and remains an ideological norm. A dominant culture at play may not be aware of its ideological supremacy, unless there is a visibility counter and alternative ideology. The history of apartheid was instrumental in distorting racial dynamics in South Africa, with the dominance of western culture propelled by white social groups. Addressing the remnants of this political structure of inequality in the creative field is a progressive step towards transforming the field to become inclusive.

What I am suggesting is the potential of an ideological, cultural and political distance to be a cause of this disturbing history of apartheid. Race dynamics in a public project should not be ignored, in the same way that dominant culture should not be disregarded. As highlighted earlier, decision making was largely the responsibility of white middle class art practitioners; there was very little emphasis in the initial stages

on how African immigrant groups were involved in mapping out the creative object. When speaking of a self-organising activity, such concerns of race come to mind especially when they are treated as non-existent.

2.3 Orchestrating strangers

The notion of a stranger raises questions on how a stranger becomes a formulated idea within the public realm. African immigrants living in South Africa are generally rendered by society as strangers, and this is exerted by the social exclusion practised in state governance, the private sector, and the general public. However, what unfolds here, in understanding stranger relations, is that there are varying degrees of strangers and along this spectrum of degrees a stranger can be regarded as harmless at one end, or at the opposite end, as an absolute threat. This brings to the fore the outlining and differentiation of a stranger in relation to an individual, and a stranger in relation to the public. The psychological shift from the point of view of the individual to that of a public is one that presents itself in a very interesting way through the *Hotel Yeoville* project. When people are acknowledging themselves a public, what are they then complicity acknowledging within this stranger dynamic?

Warner's 'A public is a relation among strangers' (Warner 2002:55) addresses how public discourse circulates amongst a group of strangers, in other words when a particular thought has been presented or addresses a public the activity of engaging, dispersing and diffusing of this thought is circulation. Here he asserts that the discourse often resonates with each member on a personal and private level. This suggests that the thinking may be different when an individual responds or reflects than when a public does. Essentially the *Hotel Yeoville* project was tapping into a public of strangers that could be related through a series of themes within the project. At the same time it provided a platform for the more private reflection of individuals. In the true sense of stranger relation that a public manifests, Warner points back to the self-organization of a public through discourse, where it is in this phase that strangers form points of commonality rather than attempting to establish an identical reference to each other.

When the strangers participating in the *Hotel Yeoville* platform are requested to account for their places of origin, they then have very little option but to draw from their lived experience or fabricate a response. Irrespective, the process produces an outcome that is specifically nuanced to that individual's sensibility to the environment they occupy and therefore the response can be framed as a individual private cultivation of strangerhood. What I mean by this is that for a marginalized group such as the African immigrants, their strangeness in relation to general South African public is something they are constantly confronted with, and therefore becomes something carefully calculated when announced. On several counts the interviewees brought to my attention the fears that some participants had about publicising the nationalities, as they saw this as a direct threat and invitation for harassment by authorities.

The *Hotel Yeoville* project was addressing a public of strangers with the intention to form structures that develop these stranger-to-stranger relations amongst the *Hotel Yeoville* public. In addition, this project also opened to a broader public via the Internet, where the global community could respond and interact. The fact that people orientate towards each other through discourse is already an impersonal foundation, which renders public discourse as a stranger-to-stranger phenomenon. As previously highlighted, in the phases of self-creating and self-organizing, a public is able to establish boundaries that become the guides for stranger-to-stranger relations amongst members of that public. "Strangers come into relationship by its (a public discourse's) means, though the resulting social relationship might be peculiarly indirect and unspecified" (Warner 2002:56). What Warner observes about modern society is that a stranger is no longer a disturbing presence that needs to be investigated; instead a stranger is a mystery that is welcome under the pretext of commonality. I disagree with this notion and refer back to what I posit as varying degrees of strange, which is how a public display of violence such as xenophobia is possible, the kind of violence that demonstrates an unwelcome-ness towards strangers.

The commonality identified through public discourse, which establishes some form of relativity amongst strangers is something that I had already said was hard to distinguish in the *Hotel Yeoville* project. Warner speaks of strangers becoming the norm in public discourse and not a reason for suspicion. "The expansive force of these cultural

forms cannot be understood apart from the way they make stranger relationality normative, reshaping the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity around co-membership with indefinite persons" (Warner 2002:57). This is why a project such as *Hotel Yeoville* could stir an interest amongst the Yeoville community that frequented the space, as it was engaging themes of nationality which render these groups as strangers and somewhat subverted this strangeness.

"Publics orient us to strangers in a different way" (Ibid): for African immigrants the predicament of lacking South African identity often equates to being subjected to gross abuse and violation; and finding a way to survive this is largely possible only through stranger relations amongst this public, which is why pan-African networks are crucial.

Irrespective of nationality and the cultural differences between members that form the Yeoville community (mostly African immigrants), in order to survive the hostile surroundings stranger-to-stranger relations become vital in creating support systems. It must be highlighted that the stranger-to-stranger relation amongst African immigrants is not limited to strategies of survival, however: there are many other facets to the formation of networks amongst African immigrants that vary from leisure to business relations.

2.4 When a public is beyond Strange

Outlining the kind of stranger status that distinguishes African immigrant groups from the rest of the groups that constituted the *Hotel Yeoville* public enables one to highlight the nuances of social exclusion embedded in this identity. As Warner puts it, "[t]he development of forms that mediate the intimate theatre of stranger-relationality must surely be one of the most significant dimensions of modern history" (2002:57). The modern histories that Warner speaks of, Julia Kristeva in *By What Right Are You a Foreigner* (1991) also brings to our attention, although in her case a different form of stranger relation has developed within modern societies, and this leads one to speak of two versions of the stranger identity.

Kristeva (1991: 95-97) delves into the notion of a stranger by investigating how dimensions of modern societies have come to endorse and institutionalise the notion of a foreigner, which is a form of stranger framed within the mystery of their unknown or misunderstood national identity. To Kristeva (1991:104), foreigners are systematically driven to a point of voiceless-ness through the dehumanising dimensions of national regulative structures. The question 'by what right are you a foreigner?' (Kristeva 1991:95) is asking about the grounds on which has the nation state come to validate the existence of the rights of man and the rights of citizens to be two completely different types. An underlying idea Kristeva puts forward is that one is treated as more or less of a man than the other, and therefore one is to be granted more rights than the other. Democracy as a modern construct has mostly been sited as a progressive mechanism of the modern era, yet in the same light Kristeva also notes that it is the very same democracy that is:

> The difficulty engendered by the matter of foreigner would be completely contained in the deadlock caused by the distinction that sets the citizen apart from the man: is it not true that, in order to found the rights that are specific to the men of a civilization or a nation - even the most reasonable and the most consciously democratic - one has to withdraw such rights from those that are not citizens, that is, other men? (Kristeva 1991:97).

This different view that Kristeva adopts in comparison to Warner, is orientated more to an understanding of how having a political role in the country of your habitat can be a complex proposition, which directly parallels being or not being a passive body in that political climate. Earlier I mentioned that Warner spoke of marginalized groups being powerless and uncertain of their sense of belong in nation states, similar to Kristeva's non-politically active passive bodies. A strong element in Kristeva's writing is how the systematic devaluing of a people based on non-citizenship further encourages the thinking that the foreigner is either beneficial or harmful to the nation, in contrast to a citizen that enjoys a flexible and multifaceted existence. In short, non-citizens are viewed as objects that can either be good or bad and not in-betweens, hence the rationale behind acts such as xenophobia.

The social media tools employed in the *Hotel Yeoville* project demonstrate the online manifestation of the stranger relationality. They were the project organiser's preferred

tools in the *Hotel Yeoville* project. Participants were contributing content to the project, which could reach an infinite number of strangers through the online channels. Participants/strangers contributed content that they felt was of relevance within the frame of *Hotel Yeoville* and therefore these became instances in the *Hotel Yeoville* discourse. The majority of the Yeoville community exist as both strangers (within the pan-African network) and foreigners (within the broader South African society) in Yeoville, which as highlighted above fosters different sets of reception in society. Warner stresses that a stranger no longer is a strange and unwelcome entity, whilst Kristeva highlights an unwelcome kind of stranger, the foreigner. To parallel both senses of strange-ness in addressing a public that exists as both is challenging. Yet *Hotel Yeoville* merges both readings of strange without creating too much emphasis on one or the other, and therefore allows the participant to set the tone of their political voice in their contribution. Comments would vary, as the following examples show, from an acknowledged stranger sensibility, as shown in Figures 5 and 6,

> Hey! Pumla here … the girl of your dreams. I'm a soft-hearted, ambitious young girl from the coolest kasi, Yeoville. I'm very talented and have a variety of interests as art, film-making, fashion etc. but besides all that I'm fun, outspoken and a people magnet. So it would be a crime not to know or wana know me. Xoxoxo. (Appendix, Figure 6)

This particular entry illustrates a welcome strange proposal, the entrant goes as far urging a the reader to engage them. The following entry states:

> I came from Chad, the journey took two years. Now I am here in Yeoville, and I miss home. South Africans are greedy and arrogant. (Appendix, Figure 7)

This entry demonstrates the kind of stranger status that Kristeva outlines of the foreigner, his account reveals the hostility experienced by African immigrants.

2.4.1 Networks amongst strangers that migrate

Immigration offers many grains of complexity especially when immigrant groups attempt to establish stability in foreign lands within new communities and new public spaces. Social networks are a vital source of information in accessing a survival guide to the new landscape. In the case of national spaces, social networks transgress national

boundaries and furthermore offer forms of support amongst immigrant groups. The *Hotel Yeoville* project attempted to emulate the already existent networks in the Yeoville community and connect this network to global communities.

Jacqueline Maria Hagan's article *Social Networks, Gender and Immigrant Incorporation: Resources and Constraints* (1998) of the social networks amongst a Maya immigrant community based in Houston, America, looked closely at the function of social networks in creating better settling journey's for new immigrants, and at how the journeys of new immigrants differ across gender lines. Consequently the immigrant Maya community in this study traced back to Guatemala and other neighbouring communities in the Guatemala area. The findings of Hagan demonstrated that in some cases in the Maya community the interest and decision to immigrate was often initiated and insighted through social networks, as these networks are the initial information source about the destination and the opportunities it holds. The social networks operated strongly from both ends, in the countries of origin as well as the new country of destination. As the study unfolded it revealed that these networks were vital in making available other opportunities for economic growth further down the line. However the networks didn't always have long-term benefits, and because "networks operate in a gendered way," this "produced systematic differences in the labour market outcomes" (Hagan 1998:56). The social networks amongst the men proved to be stronger than the networks observed amongst women due to various factors; the type of work industry being the main contributing factor. This resulted in more frequent job climbing for the male immigrants, whereas the women's work patterns were stagnant.

> Over time men enjoy greater economic and social opportunities than do Maya women. Several structural factors account for this divergence: the different dynamics of men's and women's social relations of work, the extent to which women's and men's jobs are linked to co-ethnic and non ethnic networks, and the size and growth rates of the workplace and industries in which men and women are incorporated (Hagan 1998:60).

Maya women were mostly absorbed into the domestic/housekeeping industry of Houston, and the isolated nature of the industry discouraged all forms of communication or community activity amongst the women and therefore beneficial information did not flow easily amongst them.

Such a study brings to focus the value that real and potential social networks bring to the experience and survival of immigrants in foreign and unfamiliar environments. Although the focus is on the social networks amongst the Mayans which Hagan refers to as a co-ethnic, she goes on to say that "[m]igrants can become so tightly encapsulated in social networks based on strong ties to co-ethnics that they lose some of the advantages associated with developing weak ties with residents outside the community" (Hagan 1998:65).

This study not only demonstrates the value or power of these networks across national borders but the ability of these networks to manifest into real activities. In a situation of immigration to South African, social networks in the digital space become equally valuable as they make accessible reliable information for navigating the country.

2.4.2 Strangers In virtual space

Although the virtual world is modelled on real life, the online social networks more successfully heighten stranger-to-stranger dynamics. In *Virtual Communities as Communities* (1999) Wellman and Gulia provide an insightful comparison between online and offline communities. The purpose of their conversation was to create an alternative way of understanding from the polarized arguments that exist in the academic world concerning online and offline communities. The virtual communities they cite are often framed as being anti-community practise or pro-community. Gulia and Wellman initiate the discussion by looking at social networks as communities whether virtual or interacting face-to-face, to demonstrate that communities can extend beyond a geographic demarcation such as a village or suburbia, especially in the modern age and with the advent of technological innovation.

Technologies such telephonic communications, airplanes and motor vehicles have been instrumental, Gulia and Wellman (1999) claim, in developing and sustaining virtual networks, to the extent that there are very few communities who don't employ these multi-layered mechanisms for sustaining their networks. The emphasis on these technological innovations further illustrates how such technology fore-grounded virtual networks, which would later be operating in concentrated variants.

> Social network analysts have to educate traditional, place-orientated, community sociologists that community can stretch well beyond the neighborhood. By contrast, members of virtual communities take for granted that computer networks are also social networks spanning large distances …These computer-supported social networks (CSSNs) come in a variety of types such as electronic mail (email), bulletin board systems, Multi-User Dungeons, newsgroups and Internet relay chat. All CSSNs provide companionship, social support, information and a sense of belonging. (Wellman & Gulia 1999:169).

The progression from computer networks to social networks is the foundation of the more contemporary social media that now dominates the online cultural landscape. Social networks are providing platforms for discourse to flourish and develop. With the Pan-African community in Yeoville, the greatest distinction of this kind of community is the network extending into the rest of the African continent, far beyond the South African boarders. Here the Internet paves a window to online social networks, and the communal spaces that Internet cafes occupy indirectly avail many opportunities for the intersection of these virtual offline and online networks. The presence of African immigrant groups in Yeoville, and the constant influx of such identities is testament to the active networks that exist between Yeoville and other communities on the African continent.

The Internet cafes as points of intersection of the online and offline social networks, and even more so the research leading into the *Hotel Yeoville* project, suggested a growing online activity amongst these demographics.

> We spoke to one of the cell phone companies and we also talked about different models on how to do this. We tried to get funding from it. The idea was, and the research has been done, which shows that public space Internet is going to be the big growth area. (Appendix, Interview Spiropulous).

The *Hotel Yeoville* project took the form of a digital installation and an online community website, the decision to use this particular medium was informed by research that was conducted in the area by members of the *Hotel Yeoville* project team. The investigation into Internet cafes operating in the area revealed a high density of Internet cafes in Yeoville.

> Terry kind of found our research and when she decided that *Hotel Yeoville* should be web orientated, she found our research and she got hold of us and asked to get involved in the initial design process of the website, because we had done research with the community already. She ran an initial survey in Yeoville pretty much like the survey we had done, so Jason and I kind of took the survey stuff that we had done and done it in that community and then Jason got involved in very much the information architect of the initial site. (Appendix, Interview Bristow).

The manner in which the research was conducted suggests an interest by the project founders that was formed based on the fascination these specific technologies holds in such density within a Pan-African community.

> My visits to Yeoville were facilitated by George Lebone, who is a very active ANC member but a very active community activist. He just loves … I mean I don't share his political views but I share his kind of interest in people and community and so on. He would just show me around the neighbourhood, we'd go into blocks of flats and we'd see behind some doors how people were living; behind some doors were Internet cafes. But I was struck by the fact that there were more Internet cafes here, literally next door to each other in three, four square blocks than there were anywhere I'd ever seen. And they weren't Internet cafes the way you'd find them in European cities when you're travelling. (Appendix, Interview Kurgan).

In the varied existing dialogues around digital divide, the general tone of the dialogue has been polarized with clear distinctions between groups that have and do not have access based on their economic and cultural standing. The west is mostly perceived to be highly exposed and involved with current technology, whilst the opposite can be said for African communities especially when they embody a low-income group. Although such arguments do hold degrees of truth, the danger lies in the unacknowledged or unexplored groups that lie in-between, that cannot be identified from both ends of the spectrum. The thinking that poor marginal communities are always to be regarded as the have-nots in the digital age, further suggests that when a group exists within a particular socio-economic bracket it is highly likely that their lack of activity online is not by choice but by lack of access. Yet what is often not taken into account is the ability of community networks to make available communal resources, which would otherwise not been easily accessible through institutions. Such findings then lead to the assertion that the virtual networks can be an extension of these real life ones.

> Much of the analysis that does exist is parochial. It almost always treats the Internet as an isolated social phenomenon without taking into account how

> interactions on the Net fit together with other aspects of people's lives. The Net is only one of many ways in which the same people may interact. It is not a separate reality. People bring to online interactions their baggage as their gender, stage in the life cycle, cultural milieu, socio-economic status, and offline connections with others (Wellman & Gulia 1999:170).

A survey of the Yeoville community's technological habits revealed that there was a strong culture of online activity through the Internet cafes, and this was made to look as if that the Internet generally was the preferred communicative mechanism by the Yeoville community.

In an interview Kurgan highlights what was observed during the research phase:

> And in the very heart of Yeoville near the Shoprite, there's this big wall full of notices, and lots of removal vans, twice a month you just see people loading up their belongings and moving to their next abode within the suburb. And there was just a sense of checking in and checking out, checking in and checking out and the city of Johannesburg not really allowing anyone to have more than a very tenuous hold on home, a temporary home. (Appendix, Interview Kurgan).

The Shoprite wall feature was re-appropriated into the exhibition as the Directory Booth. The Directory Booth installation had a wall that could be tagged with classifieds, as strangers looked to form networks with other strangers in the Yeoville suburb based on business or social activities. Another subtle aspect to be brought to the fore is the ever present theme of fluidity and mobility of masses that is subtly captured in descriptions such as "people loading their belongs and moving … checking in and checking out" (Appendix, Interview Kurgan). The Directory Booth functioned as an online directory or Classifieds service, where users could load up business cards along with the skills they were offering; it also served as a place where people could place requests for skills. The function of the Directory booth demonstrated the ability of an offline network to extend into networks in the online realm. A profile wall was also available next to the picture wall, where people could make a note of their skills or requests; all were pinned physically onto a board.

Wellman and Gulia (1999) set out to test a series of questions; the first question being, "Are online relationships narrowly specialized or broadly supportive," (Wellman & Gulia 1999:171). Their response is that "[i]t is not clear if such a broadly supportive situation has ever actually been the case - it might be pure nostalgia - but contemporary

communities in the western world are quite different. Most community ties are specialized and do not form densely knit clusters of relationships" (Wellman & Gulia 1999:171). This statement resonates strongly with what Warner puts forward as a commonality that strangers willingly gravitate towards within public discourse. In expanding this they distinguish that the core functions of community ties are to supply companionship, support, information and a sense of identity, yet could the same ties be represented in the virtual world? These themes parallel the functionality and themes that were being driven through the *Hotel Yeoville* project.

Chapter 3: Public discourse and the formation of an 'Us' in *Hotel Yeoville*

This chapter is a continuation of Warner's unpacking of 'a public'; however it is largely concerned with the 'Us' in the *Hotel Yeoville* project and the many milestones the project journeyed through whilst negotiating the inclusion and incorporation of the 'Us' that forms the public. The 'Us' in this regard is the *Hotel Yeoville* public that I am outlining as a mix of several groups, ranging from African immigrant groups to the global online community. However the focus of the discourse was more concerned with the lives of African immigrants living in the Yeoville area. Kurgan demonstrates this complex negotiation:

> Although the idea of the artist as genius producer working within the confines of the studio continues to produce value at both an aesthetic and economic level, bolstered by a global network of public institutions and metropolitan white cube galleries, the idea of art as viral and the artist as a kind of conductor or facilitator within connected social space has been gaining currency through the rise of participatory art practice…in its efforts to establish new ways of communicating within complex social spaces, *Hotel Yeoville* can be seen against this backdrop of a rise in socially based art across the globe (Kurgan 2013:15).

The complexity of social spaces that Kurgan speaks of is primarily the negotiation of pluralistic representations of a community and the tricky situation curators find themselves in drawing the line for the purpose of a cohesive product. As Warner's text progresses towards the ideas of the sovereign agency of a public, this lends to an interesting conversation between the curator, the subaltern groups of Yeoville (inclusive of all African identity groups even South Africa) and the African immigrant groups.

3.1 A public is 'Us' and 'I'

A public cannot exist without individuals, and no individual is a replica of the next, but public discourse brings together the attention of a group of individuals in relation to a particular idea. Each member of a public understands a public address in both writing and speech to be directed to them as a stranger and to the collective 'us' as strangers, according to Warner's third premise, "The address of public speech is both personal and

impersonal' (Warner 2002:57). The collective sense of *us* in the address creates a sense of social relevance and inclusion: a bridging of what stems from private thoughts and a public realm of shared thoughts. "The benefit in this practise is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought/life. Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so" (Warner 2002:58). The African immigrants groups could easily assume that they were the focal group of the *Hotel Yeoville* project, based on the fact that the project was partially named after the suburb they reside in as a majority; the project was greatly interested in stories of relocation on the continent; the project also made available important immigration information and resources.

> With public speech, by contrast, we might recognize ourselves as addressees, but it is equally important that we remember that the speech was addressed to indefinite others; that in singling us out, it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity, but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone, and therefore in common with strangers (Warner 2002:58).

Through their interaction with the installation and community website, the project made a stronger case of relevance with African immigrants through the repeated interest it showed in where people came from within the continent, and how those places differed from the current home (Yeoville). This also brought an intense level of focus on the movement of Africans across the continent, and the project went as far as visualizing these locative journeys in the Google Maps application. Through the interviews conducted with the *Hotel Yeoville* organizers there was generally no mention of any in-depth enquiry from the visitors/strangers as to whom such a project was intended for, people came to their own understanding of the project. In my interpretation the shift from 'I' to 'Us', was closely resembled in moments where visitors interacted and submitted their responses to the guided channels. The documented responses in the form of portraits, online videos, blog entries, and Google Map tags are illustrations of personal appropriations of the impersonal address of the project.

3.1.1 When art engages the 'Us' in a public

In *Public Art: History and Meaning* (2006) Hilde Hein advances the claim that "Public art presupposes the public sphere and produces a public in relation to this concept … sets out to forge a specific by means of an aesthetic interaction" (Hein 2006:49). Hein speaks

of a constructed public response as an aspect of the public art production process. This however does not mean the responses are unanimous and always in favour of the product at stake; the point that Hein is putting forward is that the interactive/social process is a critical element of the art process. Such an approach centralises the public in the production of the work as opposed to the private art process where the individual artist's creativity is central to the outcome of the artwork. I digress here, in stating that centralising a public isn't the same as being central to a creative production. The later means that the public is involved on all the layers of making the creative product (this process is more demanding of resources, finances and personnel); and centralising a public means to always have the public in mind whilst creating the art object. *Hotel Yeoville* I regard as having elements of both processes of centralising.

According to Hein public art differs from private art in that the aesthetic evaluation often applied in private spaces cannot be applied in the public art realm, as the public is differently situated in relation to the varieties of art. Another defining characteristic of public art, which is not vital in private art practice, to Hein, is the moral dimension that needs to be well identified in public art projects. The aesthetic and moral merit are two aspects that Hein insists work independent of each other, and in some instances the opposites of each merit can be realised in one artwork. The social reference of public art means that it operates in a constant ethical paradigm, although the focus of public art may be on its' moral dimension this does not instantly equate public art to a progressive social or political outcome. Hein further points out that in most instances when encountering private art one makes a conscious decision to visit a private space i.e. a gallery, whereas with public art the public can encounter the art unaware, as the art may be situated in public spaces that are frequently used. "We go to private art, but public art is come upon" (Hein 2006:55).

3.1.2 Public art stemming from an individual

Kurgan's role in *Hotel Yeoville* was a curator, initiator, and organiser/manager, and her journey leading into *Hotel Yeoville (2010)* had been in-sighted by her previous artistic venture namely the *Joubert Park* (2001) project. Her fluid transition from role of artist to curator is an interesting practise, however in looking at Boris Groys' essay *Multiple*

Authorship (2008) he states that both roles constitute a bit of the other's characteristics, which explains the ease at which artists can assert themselves into curatorial roles, and vice versa. Instead the idea of the individual artists' authorship Groys expands into a multifaceted form of authorship involving many other individuals although appreciated through an individual's practise,

> The traditional, sovereign authorship of an individual artist has de facto disappeared hence it does not really make sense to rebel against such authorship…when confronted with an exhibition, we are dealing with multiple authorship. And in fact every exhibition exhibits something that was selected by one or more artists- from their own production and or the mass of ready-mades. These objects selected by the artist are then selected in turn by one or more curators, who thus also share authorial responsibility for the definitive selection (Groys 2008:96).

The *Hotel Yeoville* project was not interested in celebrating individual authorship but rather in placing the creative product as a public authorship. Groys (2008:96,97) suggests that by virtue of the project being situated within a Yeoville public space this indirectly asserts the Yeoville public as part authors of that creative product. Groys goes further to state that even financers, commissioners and foundations also have a degree of authorial influence on what becomes of the creative end result. For instance the *Hotel Yeoville* exhibition suffered from a lack of funding, and was untimely taken down. The degrees of difference in what Warner states as self-organising and what Groys (2008:96) means by authorship, by approach the one acknowledges the power dynamic of being a creator or leader, whilst the other approach acknowledges a diffused state of decision making in creative practise. The task of public art is to strike a balance of both approaches effortlessly. What Groys identifies as an artwork is in what is exhibited, "Art is only manifested only in the exhibition, as in fact the title *Manifesto* already states," (Groys 2008:98), this already limits the sociability of public in response to an artwork and by definition this pays not attention to the transitions and transactions happening amongst subjects involved in the realisation of the exhibition. In addition, to simply say everybody has contributed is not entirely the same as saying everyone is of equal presence and voice as contributors to the point where they can walk away as equal beneficiaries or stakeholders. The socio-economic differences, the race factor of the curator along with the team in relation to the Yeoville public needed to be acknowledged and considered very carefully. Documenting the use of Internet

technologies amongst the Yeoville public; observing the media's misconception of the African immigrant bodies; were both equally strong motivations for a project such as *Hotel Yeoville*.

3.2 Attention captures or repels

Being in close proximity to the public you wish to address does not guarantee the engagement of that public, and this at the heart of public discourse that repels and public discourse the captures. As Patricia Philips puts it, in *Out of Order*: *The Public Art Machine* (1989),

> And thus a truly public are will derive its 'publicness' not from it location, but from the nature of its engagement with the congested cacophonous intersections of personal interests, collective values, social issues, political events, and wider cultural patterns that mark out our civic life (Philips 1989:192).

However this is testament that *Hotel Yeoville* resonated some relevance to the African immigrant groups, as the many entries demonstrated this.

Warner initiates the premise, "A public is constituted through mere attention," (Warner 2002:60) by acknowledging that social groups and classes are often perceived to encompass a people irrespective of time and situation whom willingly include themselves to a social group/class or public. Warner explains that the voluntary act in which members take to a public further cultivates a degree of agency that becomes a collective agency, a sovereign agency unlike institutional structures of social classes or groups, which assert a doctrine or frame an identity that individuals adjust themselves to fit in. It is also worth noting that agency in an unequal playing field becomes an objective harder to achieve for some groups more than it is for others. And more so for marginalised minority groups such as the Africa immigrants, that I early demonstrated were socially excluded from having a political presence.

Attention in this sense is the act of members displaying engagement or active uptake to the discourse, although it is noted that due to notional quality of the public it isn't always possible to gauge engagement, in the same way it is not possible to scale a

public. The church establishment provides a valuable example of a social group structure, where being a member is embedded with organisational doctrine and activity in the form of membership, the membership becomes what Warner recognises as active uptake. "The cognitive quality of that attention is less important than the mere fact of active uptake" (Warner 2002:61) due to the voluntary act in which members orientate themselves towards a social group they become start to form a public, at this point attention advances to active uptake. What Warner (2002) is demonstrating here is the transition from what starts off as attention within social groups, and how this attention advances to become active uptake when the engagement becomes public discourse. Distinguishing between a group and a public Warner explains,

> Because a public exists only by virtue of address, it must predicate some degree of attention, however notional, from its members… some doctrinal emphases, like those of faith and conversion, make it possible for churches to orient themselves to that active uptake on which they are increasingly dependant (Warner 2002:61).

Active uptake is important with publics in comparison to social groups, as publics are directly dependant on active uptake in order to initiate. A *Hotel Yeoville* public commenced as the exhibition drew the attention of strangers visiting the library, as well as those who came across the community website online. Levels of active uptake by the public to the *Hotel Yeoville* project varied. The community website was mostly active during the time frame of the exhibition, although the website continues to run online, for the online community to continue making entries. It became apparent that activity decreased drastically after the exhibition time. This aids my argument that the activity documented through the project was mostly in response to the exhibition. The entries that participants voluntarily submitted on the website may have been suggestive of a discourse that was particular to the exhibition. However in their lack of continual flow and follow through, which is instrumental for circularity in the *Hotel Yeoville* discourse, this momentum soon waned. Attention was not sustained, which is reflected in the decreasing of active uptake; in other words visitors/strangers weren't uploading entries to the website beyond the exhibition period. Content lacked the viral character that best illustrates an online discourse.

The exhibition alone successfully captured the attention of many Yeoville community members, yet the online platform wasn't successful in doing the same. To illustrate this by focusing on the YouTube video entries: all of the video entries were taken during the exhibition timeframe in the exhibition facility. The same can be observed of the Flickr image entries. It seems the website played a greater role in documenting rather than grabbing attention, whilst the exhibition received most of the attention. The relationship between these two platforms was harmonious, yet the exhibition dominated in comparison to the website with regards to attention and active uptake.

3.3 The public creating a social space to form a politic

The premise "a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (Warner 2002:62) goes back to the understanding that public discourse is about a continued dialogue and therefore no single address can claim to create a public, but rather it is a series of addresses some of which are realised through the formation of the discourse. Yet in the same vein discourse is not to be restricted to the sender-receiver model. Warner adds that neither can elements such as single voice, a single genre, or even a single medium represent public discourse. Each listed element contributes to and supports the creation of a public; however these are insufficient individually to form a public as they lack reflexivity. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "a reflexive word or form of a word shows that the action of the verb affects the person who performs the action".[21] A text remains a text unless it is attached to a lived outcome: in other words, if the text has direct relevance for the reader/recipient one could speak of the text as affecting one's immediate world. This is important in understanding and distinguishing between members of a public and onlookers, for onlookers seldom feel affected and remain distant from that discourse.

> The interactive relation postulated in public discourse, in other words, goes far beyond the scale of conversation or discussion, to encompass a multi-generic life-world organized not just by a relational axis of utterance and response, but by potentially infinite axes of citation and characterisation (Warner 2002:63).

[21] http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/digital-divide?q=digital+divide. Accessed 21 August 2013.

Earlier I identified a global online community as a part of the *Hotel Yeoville* discourse. This was based largely on the choice the organisers made to present the exhibition archive via a community website for the online community to engage. This particular community demonstrates an onlooker's presence; however in the later phases of the *Hotel Yeoville* (2013) project Kurgan begins to engage the global community in publishing the *Hotel Yeoville* book. In 'A Dialogue Between Two People Who Never Met' (Kurgan & de Serdio 2013:185), Kurgan converses with Aida Sanchez de Serdio, a Professor of Art Education at the University of Barcelona, about the process of creating *Hotel Yeoville*.

> Between the discourse that comes before and the discourse that comes after, one must postulate some kind of link. And the link has a social character; it is not mere consecutiveness in time, but a context of interaction. The usual way of imagining the interactive character of public discourse is through metaphors of conversation, answering, talking back, deliberating (Warner 2002:62-63).

A public springs to life when members reflect, respond, and build on that particular address; this Warner identifies as the self-understanding of a public. It may lead for a better understanding to see this aspect of reflexive circulation as a form of negotiation and pondering on a particular discourse that individuals process together. And this is where I understand a collective politic beginning to brew: it's about the co-operative weaving of a multitude of viewpoints. Warner goes on to explain that the discourse has to have social character. The social character is founded on the reflexivity within a public as the members take charge in shaping the discourse. Although Warner does stress that the irregular progression of public discourse, which cannot be adequately engaged through time framing such continuity, one could partially gauge a continuity of the discourse in *Hotel Yeoville* project by looking at the documented material outcomes.[22] Participation (numbers) as well as levels of participation could help to frame the continuity. Other measures of gauging this continuity such as documenting how many visitors visited the site repeatedly and how their interaction differed with each visit, could have offered a deeper insight to the continuity. However this was not possible, as this research was only initiated after the exhibition. Therefore this aspect of continuity of the *Hotel Yeoville* project is very limited and does not offer a thorough

[22] Continuity in this context is utilized in the sense of continuation, a series of events or moments building on from the previous moment or event.

excavation of the public; neither does it assist in outlining the social character of the *Hotel Yeoville* public.

Continuity was also able to demonstrate the different levels of engagement each phase of the project offered. If the medium was not engaging then what support or value did the medium (community website and digital interactive installation) bring to the *Hotel Yeoville* discourse? These mediums created the platforms in which the *Hotel Yeoville* public could form their social space and in doing so, mould a politic of their making. Based on observation of the *Hotel Yeoville* community website a public's attention was captured, that is, activity on the videos page revealed several online viewings of the videos posted o the page.

Of similar importance to continuity is circularity, which is just as crucial in a public forming a social space and developing a politic. Circularity exists within a realm of tangible and intangible traces of exchanges, in which both the known and unknown social characteristics of a public directly influence circularity. Warner (2002:62) goes onto explain that the social character of a public is identified in the links between the discourse that comes before and the discourse that comes after. To expand a little more on these links (social characteristics) of a public, I liken this to a preference for circulation that a public naturally navigates towards.

A prime example of this is once again the Shoprite wall in Yeoville, with very traditional choices of circulation (paper notices) on the wall. What was apparent with the *Hotel Yeoville* project as highlighted earlier is that the community website and the exhibition accumulated different participation levels, and whether or not this speaks directly to circularity is what I unpack here onwards. However in delving into this notion of the known and unknown, Warner clarifies that the unknown allows for transformation whilst the known allows a scene to be set for practical possibility. The unknown factors of circularity present many unpredictable scenarios for a public discourse, hence the sometimes unforeseen transformation.

> Circulation also accounts for the way a public seems both internal and external to discourse, both notional and material. From the concrete experience of a

> world in which available forms circulate, one projects a public (Warner 2002:64).

The blogging application, YouTube, Flickr, and Google Maps are what one could refer to as the available forms of circulation that are already experienced in the world, although one cannot brazenly assume this of the Yeoville community; however the project organisers through their research had confidence in these platforms of circulation. The views of the video entries present an example of circularity.

> The key development in the emergence of modern publics was the appearance of newsletters and other temporally structured forms orientated to their own circulation: not just controversial pamphlets, but regular and dated papers, magazines, almanacs, annuals, and essay series. They developed reflexivity about their circulation through reviews, reprintings, citation, controversy. These forms single out circulation both through their sense of temporality and through the way they allow discourse to move in different directions (Warner 2002:66).

This is what Warner notes about modern publics' development of newsletters, and it is partially applicable to Internet technology, especially where social networks are concerned. The viral nature of social networks is synonymous with the reflexivity developed by the circulation through reviews, re-printings, citation, and controversy. Unlike with earlier Internet technology where responses, reviews citation and controversy were limited to email response or the creation of alternative websites, the discourse links weren't as well established; however with social networks the ability to respond and cross reference in ways that are publicly visible and instantaneous allow for a consistent temporality of discourse.

I would go further to say the level of temporality on social networks is tremendous due to the instantaneous reflexive capabilities of the this technology; and the diffusion of the discourse is equally extreme. At this point there are very few illustrations of reflexivity in *Hotel Yeoville* website and installation; however the launching of the book allowed for a reflexive circulation to begin.

In relation to the unknown elements of the addressee enabling transformation, Warner does not elaborate on this transformation. Transformation from the unknown could be read as a direct reflection of the publics' reflexivity, which is largely achievable under

the conditions of the publics' authorship and sense of belonging towards a public discourse. If members feel equally important and valuable, the unknown surfaces and merges itself within the discourse to form a new veil of that public, hence the transformation. One cannot expect a public to instigate any form of transformation if public discourse is not circulating within the realm of unknown elements, and this is largely based on public members' confidence in belonging to that public. The *Hotel Yeoville* project was faced with great challenges: operational costs were the greatest hindrance as the budget was limited and unable to accommodate all the necessary expenses of executing the project to its full potential.

In addition to this, the time frame of the exhibition was extremely short for this discourse to take form or make substantial progress. These were amongst the material limitations the project was exposed to. However these challenges may not altogether prevent a public discourse from continuing; on the contrary these obstacles may have presented an opportunity for this discourse to diffuse to other circulative platforms. This is where online social network became ideal in absorbing the diffusing discourse. It is evident that the Yeoville community was familiar with online technologies, although there isn't a lot of clarity with regards to the intensity at which these technologies are used. Refer to page 17. However this observation doesn't specify much about the use of social networks in these spaces. In addition to this, the Yeoville community already seemed to have effective mechanisms of communicating among themselves.

> In the very heart of Yeoville near the Shoprite, there's this big wall full of notices, and lots of removal vans, twice a month. You just see people loading up their belongings and moving to their next abode within the suburb. And there was just a sense of checking in and checking out, checking in and checking out and the city of Johannesburg not really allowing anyone to have more than a very tenuous hold on home, a temporary home. So it seemed like a very obvious home for the project, *Hotel Yeoville*, it was both like welcoming but temporary. Home but not home. (Appendix, Interview Kurgan).

The notice wall at Shoprite may not be an example of public discourse, yet it is a well-recognized tool within the Yeoville context for addressing strangers in this community. The *Hotel Yeoville* project did embrace this characteristic, yet the Shoprite wall location was overlooked with regards to the value and connection it has with the Yeoville community. And here I wish to distinguish between the aesthetic incorporation of the

wall into the *Hotel Yeoville*; and the incorporation of the communicative network function of this wall. Whereas the project mimicked the aesthetic of this wall as well as offering a network largely operating within online social networks, the connection between this network and the already existent Yeoville network wasn't evident. This is demonstrated in the dwindling network produced online by the project in contrast to the consistent Yeoville Shoprite wall network.

3.4 The politic of a public is in the punctuality of discourse

> Not all circulation happens at the same rate, of course, and this accounts for the dramatic differences among publics in their relation to possible scenes of activity. A public can only act within the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence. The more punctual and abbreviated the circulation, and the more discourse indexes the punctuality of its own circulation, the closer a public stands to politics (Warner 2002:68).

The value of punctual and abbreviated rhythms in discourse is crucial in sustaining a contemporariness and relevance of a discourse to its public. According to Warner, when discourse circulates it should do so with efficiency, and it diffuses in multiple directions. This suggests that within the circulation of public discourse there is a period that avails itself in which the public of that discourse can organise into a public activity. This public activity is the heart of a publics' politic, and beyond this period discourse is no longer within the mode of temporality, making it highly unlikely for a public to stand closer to its politic. Temporality in this sense is strongly linked to political awareness of a public, a direct link to a discourse that is current; only within temporality can scenes of political activity arise, here publics act in accordance to their lived experience or live world in the present. The politic I earlier identified of the *Hotel Yeoville* public was that of countering the misrepresentation of African immigrants in the public sphere.

Warner suggests that it is misguided to think that a public discourse is a flow from conversation to decision-making because this disregards a great deal of discourse taking shape in unconventional social spaces. When multiple discourse indexes form, varied directions of discourse develop. As repeatedly demonstrated in the earlier chapters there was evidence that the dependence of the *Hotel Yeoville* discourse was somewhat displaced from the Yeoville community, but rather fulfilled the role of

displaying this community to a *Hotel Yeoville* audience. Indeed the Yeoville community and more specifically African immigrants were the key focus or provided the key content for the *Hotel Yeoville* to reflexively circulate.

My understanding of Warner's punctuality is that it does not only reflect a promptness of a public discourse flow, but the current-ness, in order for the discourse to penetrate a public and circulate and amount to activity amongst that public (Warner 2002:68). In this premise Warner shifts to a position on the relation time has with a public discourse, as opposed to his initial position where time is a minimal factor, the reason for this being that there is now a very particular outcome of public discourse that is being highlighted and that is a political outcome. At this point he dissects time in the rhythmic sense, where he distinguishes long rhythms of circulation as opposed to what he calls punctual rhythms. Long rhythms are best epitomised by academic archives that flow continuously over long periods of time. Longer rhythms contradict punctuality, moreover, "the absence of punctual rhythms may make it very difficult to connect localized acts of reading to the modes of agency that prevail within the social imaginary of modernity" (Warner 2002:69).

Understanding the value of punctuality is also to acknowledge the temporal dimension society exists within; an address today may not be received in the same way a few years later because of the ever-shifting live-world that publics occupy (Warner 2002:67). The punctuality observed on the Shoprite notice wall in Yeoville was very telling of an already existent and effective communicative network that resulted in a characteristic activity (amongst many) every month end within Yeoville, where loading vehicles serviced the needs of relocating residents. Apart from this easily identifiable public activity, the notice wall was used for varied purposes from abortion doctor services to church prayer group meetings etc. The punctual rhythms at play on the Yeoville Shoprite wall was a great example or offered great potential for the emergence of scenes of activity amongst the Yeoville community. The more a public discourse emulates and reflects the live world of that public, the better the circulation of that discourse and this develops a character of temporality. The Yeoville Shoprite wall was in tune with the pulse and discourse of Yeoville publics.

Warner expresses at the time that he wrote his text his dissatisfaction with the Internet in relation to its non-existent temporal dimension.

> One way that the Internet and other new media may be profoundly changing the public sphere … through the change they imply in temporality. Highly capitalized forms of circulation are increasingly organized as continuous (24/7 Instant Message) rather than punctual. (Warner 2002:68,69).

The idea that the Internet implies temporality partially holds, yet it varies from platform to platform based on the function. At the time Warner produced this piece of writing the Internet hadn't evolved into the social network frenzy it now is.

The current state of the Internet, I argue, is that of a platform that is capable of demonstrating both long and punctual rhythms. Web culture and capabilities prior to the year 2002 generally resembled one-way information channels. A website in the year Warner was writing only implied temporality on the basis of on its timeless existence of public addresses that could be extracted punctually from the cyberspace resource, but this punctuality is not to be mistaken for reflexive punctuality that cultivates a discourse with political clout. Very little of the discourse that was reflected on the Internet prior to 2002 was circulative, in the true sense of the public actively shaping the direction of its discourse. Fast-forward to the advent of social media in the 2010, and this particular form of Internet culture opens room for debating Warner's stance on the technology.

The social aspect of social media is critical, as I would like to argue that these social media platforms allow functions for publics to be addressed and for circulation of discourse to take place. A public in social media platform such as Facebook, can be created in a way that sets a parameter of interests that the general online community can access, yet activity beyond that distinguishes those that form a part of that public and those that are a mere audience. An individual orientates themselves to a public on social media, which he/she keeps updated with, and this arrangement allows for a degree of control around the discourse an individual wishes to associate with. The Facebook group for *Hotel Yeoville* had 11 members.

Warner's observations are echoed by Wendy Ross, who writes many years later within a much more advanced technology culture and a strong social media presence.

> Regrettably, contemporary society is complicit in contributing to the demise of deserted cities and sterile public spaces. Computers have deprived people of their humanity, of the necessity to mix and mingle, with e-mail replacing letters and 'human talking'. Cellphones have managed to create an even worse scenario: SMSs with youth unable to spell; imposition of private conversations loudly communicated to all in lifts, queues and restaurants; total dependency on cellphones; impoverished imaginations; and any form of leisure time constantly interrupted. It is no wonder that public spaces are designed for a society that desires only the latest technological devices, data and clearly defined boundaries and impersonal spaces. These technocrats are inseparable from their computers and cellphones and have little to concern themselves with places, imagination and the well-being of the planet. (Ross 2009:131).

Ross's observations on technology culture put it in a negative light, and she illustrates how socially destructive the effects of this culture are. However my opinion deviates from Ross's and I would say that this diagnosis of socially destructive activities is not particularly unique to the advancement technology, and I also would like to add that technology can also assist in creating social connections that would have otherwise been hard to make let alone sustain. Ross notes that writing emails has replaced the act of human talk, which is an argument that could extend equally to the precursor of email technology, the traditional practise of letter writing. Ross's argument also seems to disregard the privacy and personal dialogue exchange that is upheld through technologies such as email and SMS.[23] Ross's argument is not exclusive to technology although her observations are based on fieldwork, the socially awkward culture she observes seems rather misdirected, however effectively she demonstrates a communicative culture that is evolving.

Warner's discussion is clearly out-dated in relation to current technology culture and I wish to make a strong case for social media as a direct challenge to Warner and even Ross's (later) anti-social diagnosis of the Internet and communicative technology as a whole. *Hotel Yeoville* is my evidence: it is one of many initiatives across the world that is

[23] Short Message Service for mobile communication systems.

redefining the Internet and communicative technology as political tools for public activism and social activity.

3.4.1 The political presence of technology

The ability for social network tools to garner political action is where a new kind of political agency has emerged in the recent technological advances of the decade. The revolts in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Libya, also known as the 'Arab Spring',[24] a revolutionary wave that swept across the Arab states in 2011, demonstrates this kind of socio-political phenomenon. The Arab Spring was pivotal in demonstrating the mass potential that could be realised through the communicative mechanism of online social networks, which for a long time academics and field experts alike had predicted from observing smaller scale demonstrations. This particular event consolidates my hypothesis that technology is able to accommodate Warner's bottom-up model that he calls the self-organising of a public discourse, in which all the individuals of the public are allowed the power to define their discourse as it develops into mass action. The case of the Arab Spring is as relevant in the surfacing of a politically and economically excluded mass in those states, as is the rise of African immigrant groups living in Yeoville, South Africa.

[24] The Arab Spring revolt was a mass political upheaval of the four longstanding Arab regimes by disgruntled youth that grew momentum into a anti-regime public masses. The mobilisation of these masses into political action was largely fueled by the communicative mechanisms of social media networks, allowing these masses to organise themselves in the face of military controlled confrontation.

Tunisia's 'Jasmine Revolution' is the first popular uprising to topple an established government in the Middle East and North Africa since the Iranian revolution of 1979; it's also the spark that ignited and inspired other Revolutions in the region. It unfolded in three phases: First, on December 17, 2011, a young Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in hopelessness and to protest his treatment at the hands of the authorities. Demonstrations broke out in his rural hometown followed by protests in other areas of the country. A brutal security crackdown followed, reported in shocking details by online social media. Second, when protests reached the capital, Tunis, the government responded with even more brutality, arresting demonstrators, activists, and shutting down the Internet…. This act marked the end of one of the Arab world's most repressive regimes. It was a victory for people power and perhaps the first time ever in history that an Arab dictator has been removed by a revolution rather than a coup d'Etat. (Cornell University, 'Arab Spring: A Research and Study Guide.' (http://guides.library.cornell.edu/content.php?pid=259276&sid =2163144, accessed 20 August 2013).

Although the social, political and economic contexts of the marginalising conditions of the African immigrant groups in South Africa may differ from the publics in the Arab Spring uprising, a common ground is that these are marginalised masses and there is the presence of social media (as presented by the *Hotel Yeoville* project) as a tool at their disposal. The contexts of these social media technologies are largely responsible for the different outcomes highlighted in both situations. So here is a tool that can facilitate uprisings, and here is a project (*Hotel Yeoville*) availing such a tool in an organised fashion to a marginalised group of immigrants, and although not posing it as a form of resistance there is a degree of political charge embedded in the existence of this project. In *Postcolonial Media Theory* (1999) Maria Fernandez highlights the way both postcolonial studies and electronic media theory advocate the notion of multiple, contradictory, conflictive and open-ended identities; however both areas fail in forming relevance to each other as academic areas.

And this is what I propose as the predicament of *Hotel Yeoville* in its intentions to realise a political statement through the project by the African immigrant groups (the marginalised group in the public). The nuanced postcolonial setting that outlines the culture surrounding African immigrant identities was taken for granted in light of the pluralistic capabilities that could be achieved through the technologies that were being presented to the *Hotel Yeoville* public. Based on the critical engagement in the previous chapters what continuously emerges is that there wasn't a particular in-depth inquiry by project organisers into the state of the disenfranchised identity. Fernandez's unpacking of electronic media is inclusive of digital media, and electronic art is inclusive of digital art.

Postcolonial theory on the one hand, as Fernandez puts it, focuses on social groups that are marginalised based on racial and cultural difference within postcolonial era, and seeks to engage systems and structures that sustain this status quo (Fernandez 1999:65). She adds electronic media theory outlines the potential the technology presents in allowing individual authority in defining identity, as well as recreating identity, and rather identifies closely with individualism. My thinking is, essentially what you have is a disjuncture between creative practises of technology that don't bridge beyond the ideological boundaries of social groups they are intended to, and this

is due to the practises tendency towards an individualistic focus and user satisfaction that has been driven largely by corporate fractions (this corporate influence I explain below through Fernandez's text). And then there is ideological discourse of postcolonial theory that lends itself to alternative minority and marginalised and outside the boundary thinking. When postulating an 'Us' in the form of a public, this completely changes the individual sensibility and rather adds a different dimension to individual identity when one forms a part of a public. Essentially these ideas point to the core of each theoretical discourse; one more focused on group dynamic and the other on individual authorship. Although both offer qualities that are beneficial in the formation of a public, the gap becomes ever so evident when seeking real life demonstrations of such. This gap is once again illustrated in Fernandez's writing as she looks more specifically at electronic art practise in the west.

> Progressive art practice is indirectly linked with new generations of technology. The role of the artist is to explore the technology before it is commercialized. In other words, the artist does the R&D for corporations and then goes on to explore the next wave of technological media. Electronic art concurs with commerce, where products are ranked on the use of the latest technology. The value of novelty is so extreme that corporations customarily sell unfinished hardware and software that customers not only purchase but beta-test. In electronic media art, the artist's concentration on technology frequently makes content irrelevant. Emphasis on state of the art technology requires artists who work in these media to struggle to keep up with the latest trends. In this period of scarce funding for the arts, artists who cannot afford to join the race are at a disadvantage (Fernandez 1999:66).

For Fernandez (1999:66) the aesthetic standards of digital art that she witnesses in developed countries, is a repetition of a dominant culture that marginalizes other forms of cultural identity. The dominant culture in this scenario stems from the corporate industries, more specifically the corporates producing these technologies. Such an observation is highly important especially when noting that one of the strategies of the *Hotel Yeoville* project was to align or collaborate with corporate cellular network companies in the coming phases of the project, as revealed by Spiropulous (2011) in the interview with the *Hotel Yeoville* team organisers. And although this is not to reduce these kinds of collaborations to an ascribing to dominant culture, at this point the intention for such collaboration raises concern, because this intention wasn't based on

the outcome of the project and therefore making it more vulnerable to such capitalist influence. Another aspect Fernandez highlights is this:

> If the use of state of the art technology increasingly becomes a primary factor in determining the aesthetic significance of a work of art, it will be impossible to maintain the respect of aesthetic diversity that postcolonial studies have supported. The new aesthetics will promote a cultural supremacy that will not be easily challenged as the construction of new canons will be justified by quantifiable and measurable attributes (Fernandez 1999:67).

This trait of marginalization within the digital (electronic) art practice as Fernandez points out, gains momentum the further it is left un-contested or critically engaged. The fetishizing of the technology enhances a point, that the state of technology and it advancements has come to bear greater influence within the digital art practices than the publics that define the cultural landscapes that these technologies are absorbed into. This as a consequence has disregarded other variations or explorations of digital art that are accessible to a wider range of publics in South Africa. The levels of consciousness when it comes to socially excluded groups, influences a more inclusive culture of the creative practise leading into the future. Should marginalised groups not feature within these critical discussions, a great deal of technological cultural nuances about these groups goes un-acknowledged. This is why projects such as *Hotel Yeoville* are rare encounters, in that they create the possibility of introducing this new dialogue within the field. A field, as expressed by Fernandez, such as digital media has a mandate to boast pluralistic perspectives inherent in the infrastructure of technology.

In *The Revolution Will Be Digitized: Afrocentricity and The Digital Public Sphere* (1990), Anna Everett looks at the persistence of African diasporic consciousness in cyberspace and the digital age. Everett problematizes cyberspace as a public sphere, where, she declares, the remnants of colonialism are still present and functioning. This she explains is a factor in the way that communicative technology has been documented inaccurately in comparison to the trends that are taking place in real life. Specifically, documented trends omit what is really happening when it comes to the uses of communication technology by black communities. According to Everett:

> [N]ew media technology gurus, academics, politicians, and cyberfunk novelists divining the eventual contours of the coming information society, concern over issues of racial equity or impact of the growing black presence

> in cyberspace has been conspicuously muted until now. This deafening silence is evolving discourses of new information technologies … might be owing to the presumption of the black nonparticipation in the incipient technosphere or perhaps to a belief in something akin to what I am calling 'black technophobia' (Everett 1990:132).

Black technophobia is a concept that is validated and made to seem like a factual truth based on the way that the digital media has been documented. The implications of such documentation (Everett 1990:129), is that the black masses are written out of the history of digital media, and therefore unlikely to influence the future direction taken within the field. This links strongly with her statement (Everett 1990:126) that she is not convinced that colonization is over, which is directly reflected through the marginalization of black communities within digital media histories, theories and critiques. Applying Everett's observation within the South African digital art realm exposes symptoms of a similar concern within the industry. Her suggestion (Everett 1990:130) is that an over-simplified approach to the digital divide encourages the dismissal of marginalized communities as engaging technologies. The digital divide, when applied in a simplistic manner, Everett says, conceals the marginalization of certain groups, as it allows the assumption that certain groups are not actively using digital media technologies due to being classed as digitally disadvantaged.

3.5 A public making sense of its poetic world making

I arrive to the understanding that if publics develop social character through the diffusion of their discourse, then it is somewhat inevitable that they develop very distinct characters in their sociability. And this completes a full circle in what Warner introduces in the first premise as the circularity of public discourse. When all the attributes of a public are functioning according to the previous premises, only then is it a public, poetic world making implied in Warner's writing (Warner 2002:82-84). A world making in this regard is how individuals of a public re-enact, appropriate, and advance a public through discourse, and more important the development of their social character.

> Public discourse says not only: 'Let a public exist,' but: 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.' It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success- success

> being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world-understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole, and see who salutes. Put it on show and see who shows us (Warner 2002:82).

Individuals of a public exercise variants in poetic world making of their public, giving it what I would like to call a pluralistic chorus. In the case of *Hotel Yeoville* a great deal of the poetic world making was documented through the community website. A random selection of entries listed below provides a representation of the online entries made by the visitors at the exhibition. In Figure 7 on the maps page (see Appendix) as seen in the webpage image to the left, a participant writes:

> From Government to Business. From administration to business ... Such a shift! I'm from Ethiopia and live in Yeoville, Time Square. I worked for the government for 6 years in the building u see. It's the Ethiopian ministry of Communications. For political reasons I moved to South Africa and now doing well with my business, wholesales in Town, Bree Street. I'm not sure that i'll be back home coz am already established here in South Africa. I'm involved in gathering Ethiopians so that we can share common memories which keep us updated about home. Sorry I did not bring a picture of me ... next time! Great Project! (Appendix, Figure 7).

In the stories page as seen in the image above to the right, an anonymous entry reads:

> The Nightmare Ending Life. Something in my life strangely happens and mostly it's about people interfering with my personal life and so I've decided to fight my enemies. I am degraded by exposition. I'm forced by retaliation. I'm angered with pain. I'm commanded with self image. (Appendix, Figure 7).

Figure 8 captures a still from a YouTube video, where a Congolese man describes the difference between his home Kinshasa and Yeoville. Each one of these entries although unique and particular in their own intention brings a valuable contribution to the greater *Hotel Yeoville* public discourse which seeks to demonstrate these varied expressions.

3.6 The counterpublic of Yeoville in *Hotel Yeoville*

As Warner concludes on publics he speaks of tensions within publics that exist because of the subordination of certain groups in society. These publics he calls counterpublics. He identifies the counter existence of counterpublics in society as mainly framed

around their contradiction to the dominant publics that set the tone for general sociability in society.

> Over the past three centuries, many such scenes have organized themselves as publics, and because they differ markedly in one way or another from the premises that allow the dominant culture to understand itself as a public, they have come to be [counterpublics] … they are ideological in that they provide a sense of active belonging that masks or compensates for the real powerlessness of human agents in capitalist society … A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant. And conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions, but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public and to the hierarchy among media (Warner 2002:81,86).

The framing of a counterpublic is largely where postcolonial identities such as African immigrants offer a more fitting framework of sociability. Although Warner's unpacking of this notion of *counter* is more in line with social exclusion, he does not present a more detailed framework that could be more specific in outlining the patterns or types of exclusions observed in societies. However I demonstrate throughout my writing the presence of counter forces that adds constant discomfort towards African immigrant groups living in South Africa.

Conclusion

There must be an intended logic behind the order of the phrasing 'public art', with public first and art following; as opposed to 'art public' which arrives at a completely different order of meaning. In as much as the field remains largely loose around its theoretical framing, it is not surprising that many public art projects can exist superficially within the field and fall short of their public-ness. As Philips notes:

> [T]hough public art in the 20th century has emerged as a full blown discipline, it is a field without clear definitions, without constructive, and without coherent objectives. When the intentions have been apparent they are usually so modest (amenity) or so obvious (embellishment or camouflage) that they seem to have little to do with art at all. In short, the making of public art has become a profession, whose practitioners are in the business of beautifying, or enlivening, or entertaining the citizens of, modern American and European cities. In effect public art's mission has been reduced to making people feel good- about themselves and where they live (Philips 1989:191).

What Philips is pointing out here is the denial character that looms within public art practise, so much so that it (denial) characterises this practise. This is not to suggest that this was the case with *Hotel Yeoville*. It does point to a greater problem that public art practise is faced with, however, which makes the practise very susceptible to dominant ideology disguised as the norm. I am arguing that if there isn't an intense investigation of the public (in subject) then the outcome isn't far off from what Philips expresses as a public art that beautifies the citizens, and in not so many words a public art that appeases dominant groups.

In working through the strategies of the *Hotel Yeoville* project, what has become apparent is the moral dimension that characterises a concern of Kurgans, one that was instrumental in realising *Hotel Yeoville*, which was about subverting the poor one-dimensional media representation of African immigrants. This was an ambitious concern and laden with many obstacles. The creative intervention in this sense became by extension a social and political statement, with a moral dimension. I have presented a community of African immigrants subjected to dispossession based on their pan-African character, which is greatly marginalised in the economic, cultural, and political domains of South Africa. The advent of the 2008 xenophobia attacks not only points to

the fruits of a longstanding history of social exclusion and of the invisibility of the postcolonial subject (whom are in this case the African immigrant groups) but also the continuation of these traits in current South Africa.

My main finding was that the project's location did work in favour of engaging this populace, and more so, the project was successful in amassing the presence of African immigrant groups to a point where they were vocalizing their narratives and visually representing their presence. Each visual and text document evolved into what I frame as the collective memory of this community, and this is largely to do with the engagement shifting through different mediums. From the digital installation to the community website and the publication of the book each phase allowed for a deepening stake in the project as it developed in representing this group identity. This demonstrates a history forming, and I present this idea immediately after highlighting a strange history of social exclusion that this community has been subjected to following the change of demographic from white to black, and then specifically to African immigrants.

I now identify an opportunity lost in the project's lack of rigorous unpacking or investigation of the public it was addressing, and this is consistently a discomfort I encountered whilst conducting this research. Another challenge was the merging of two creative dimensions - public art and digital art - that are equally loosely framed, and as I highlighted, more specifically with digital art its lack of contextualising the medium to marginal groups in South Africa was apparent. There is no better demonstration of this than the distinction between the levels of engagement evident in the installation as opposed to the community website. Most of the engagement took place at the installation, and with that in mind I return to Philips on publics:

> But a public art that explores the true symbiotic topography of civic, social, and cultural forces can take place anywhere – and for any length of time. It would not have to conform to such formal parameters, for it would not find its meaning through its situation in a forum, but would create the forum for the poignant and potent dialogue between public ideals and private impulses (Philips 1989:192).

Something was amiss between what was understood as the cultural activity in Yeoville and the public discourse that would be engaging to such a community. The project did

have an African immigrant presence, however although dialogue and discourse were harder to account for. This project demonstrated both a harmonious approach and a presence amidst the Yeoville community, as well as assisting in developing a conscientizing (as in making conscious) around the field of public digital art when addressing marginal communities.

This research was initially interested in understanding how digital art, more specifically interactive media was being employed in situations focusing on and involving minority African immigrant groups in South Africa. The relevance of such a study is crucial, I have shown, in conscientizing this relatively young field of Digital Art in South Africa, especially for a black minority group, although one may also be alarmed by the lack of even the black majority in engaging this field. In exploring this question it was important to develop from the paradigm of a public, as that was the most effect way to identify people's sociability in a landscape so highly charged with political baggage.

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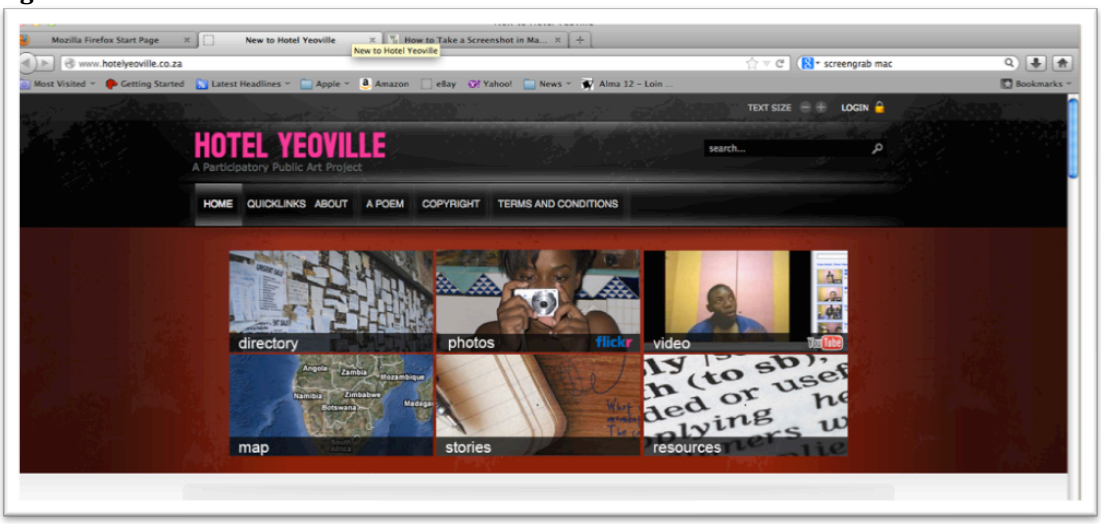
2001 'Joubert Park.' Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg.

2010 '*Hotel Yeoville*.' Yeoville Public Library, Johannesburg.

2013 'Public Art/Private Lives.' Art on Paper Gallery, Johannesburg.

Appendix

Figure 1: *Hotel Yeoville* website



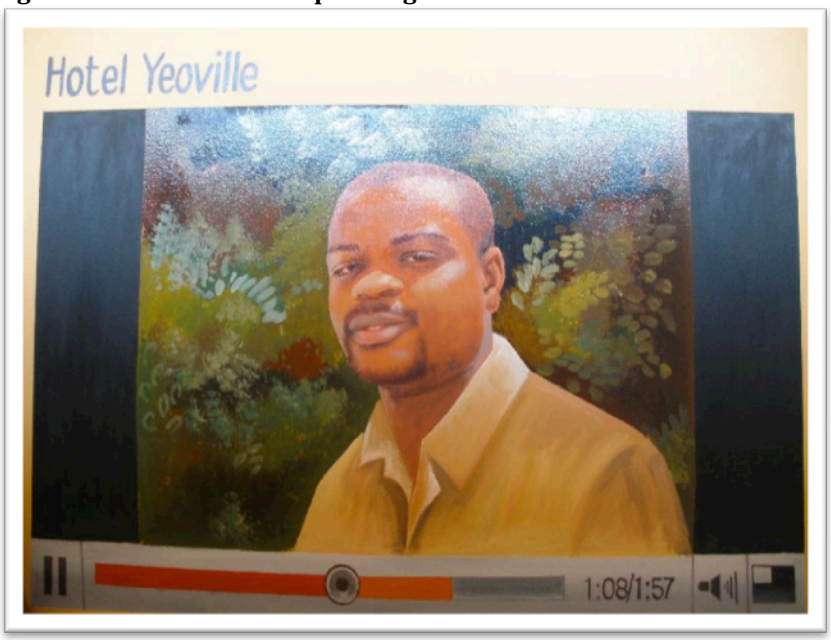
This is a screen grab image of the opening page of the *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 2 : Installation wall



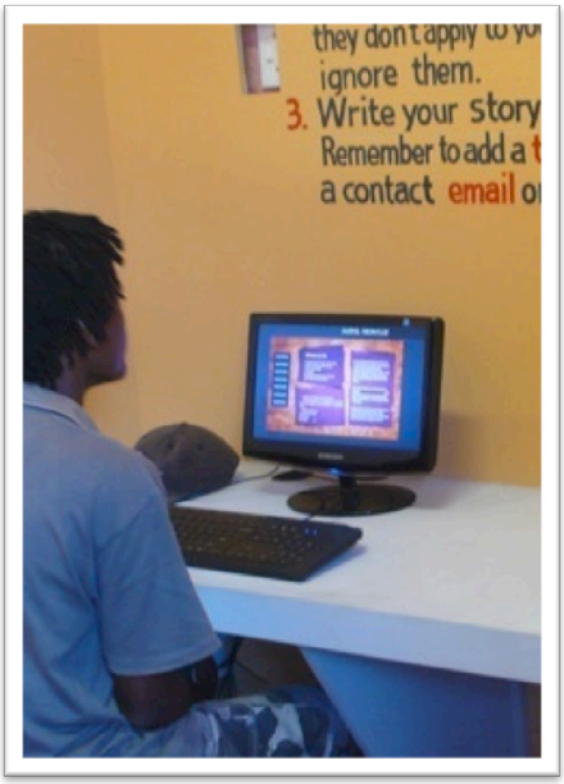
Image of the painted wall at the installation *Hotel Yeoville,* in the Yeoville Public Library. Image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 3: Installation wall painting



A painting depicting a video screenshot from a Youtube entry. Image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 4: A participant observes



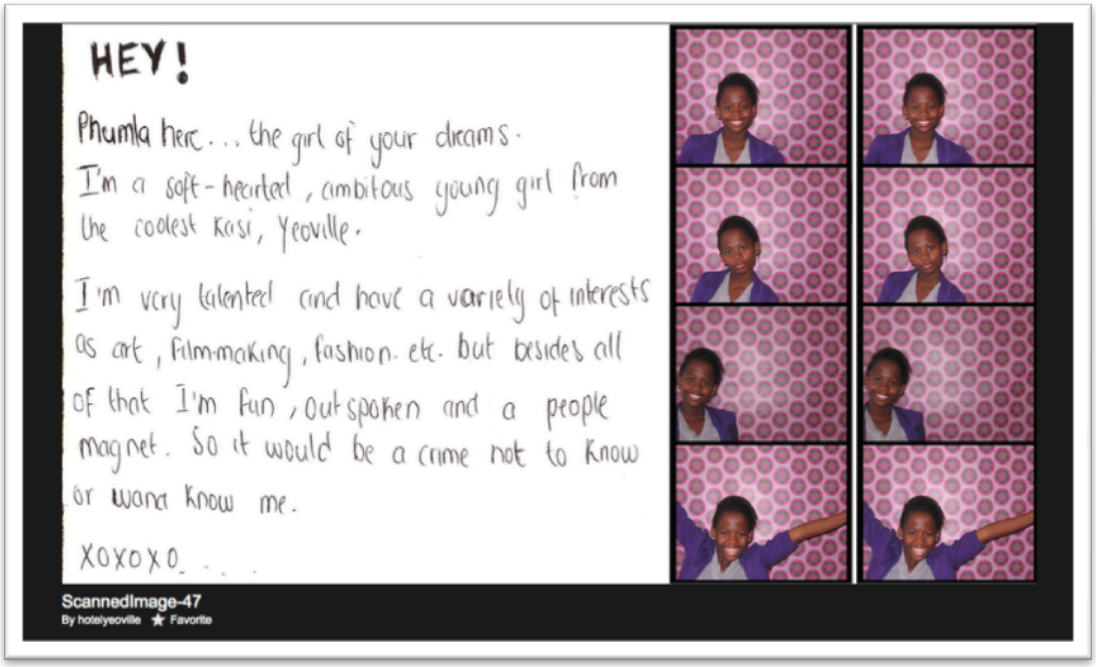
Participant reading from a computer at the installation site. Image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 5: Participants reading entries



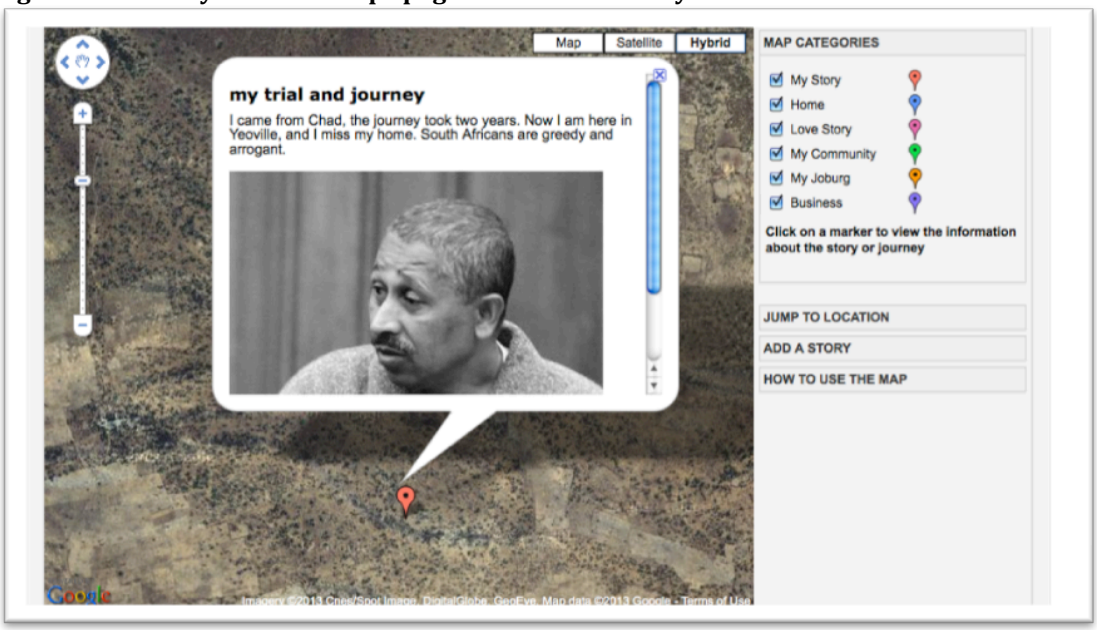
Participants read other entries on the photo wall. Image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 6: Photo wall entry



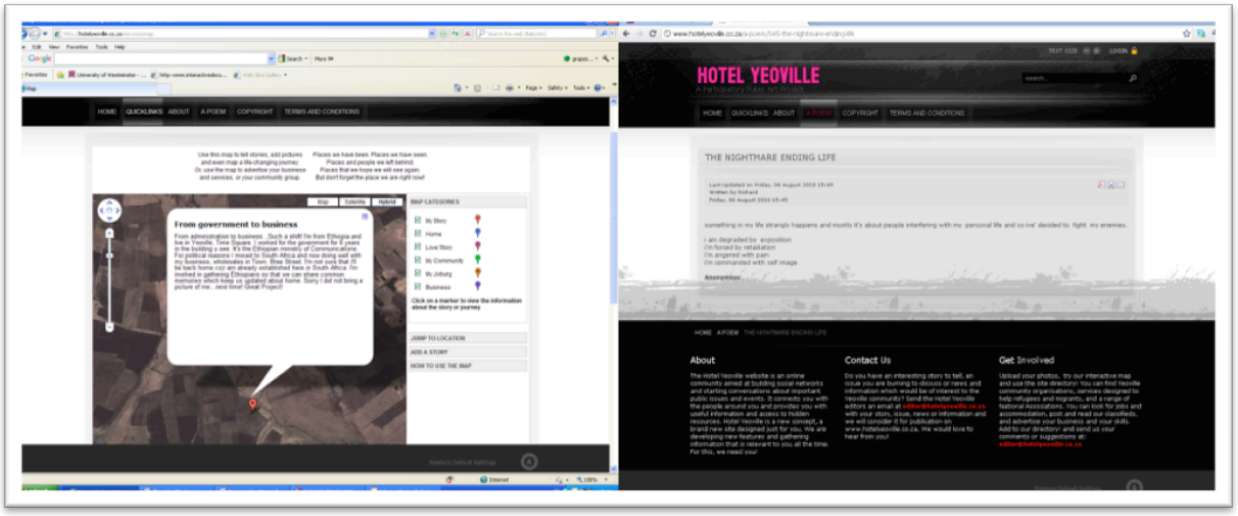
An entry made by Phumla, inviting strangers to get to know her. Image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 7: An entry from the Maps page on the community website



A man from Chad notes his experience of South Arica. Screen grab image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 8: Community Website Maps and Stories pages



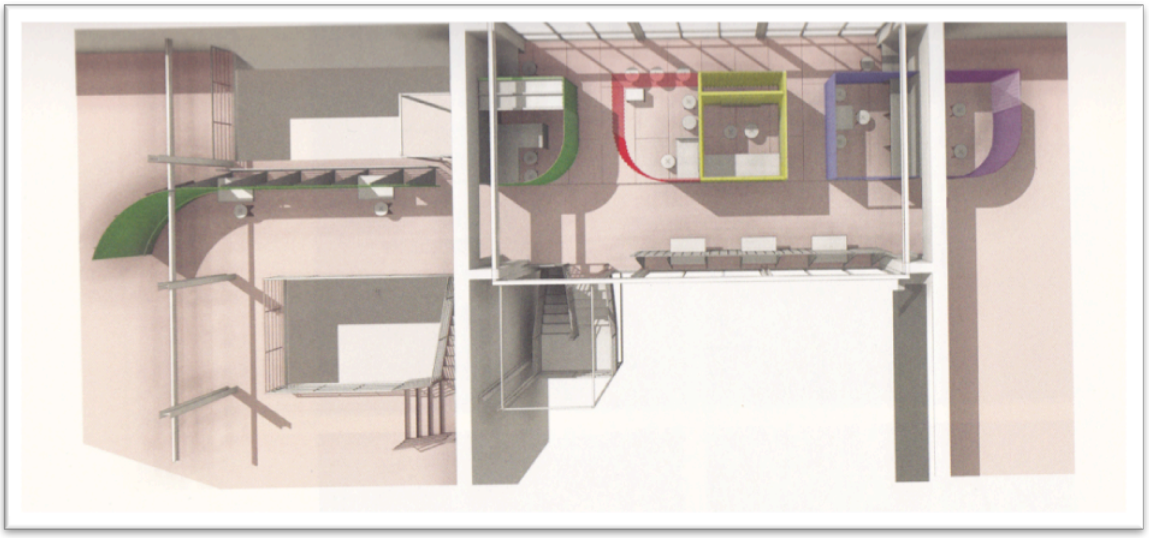
The page layout of Maps page and Stories page. Screen grab image sourced from *Hotel Yeoville* community website.

Figure 9: A screengrab of video entry



A screen grab image of a video entry taken from the *Hotel Yeoville* Youtube account.

Figure 10: Exhibition layout



Exhibition layout image sourced from the *Hotel Yeoville* (2013) publication.

Interview, Kurgan (Interview on Disc, see attached)
Interview, Spiropolous (Interview on Disc, see attached)
Interview, Opper (Interview on Disc, see attached)
Interview, Bristow (Interview on Disc, see attached)