

**AESTHETICS ON THE STREET:
RETHINKING THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT
IN PUBLIC ART PRACTICE.**

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Abstract:

A theoretical and grounded study of dialogical art-making/drawing in informal, neighbourhood domains in order to reflect what social aesthetics and modalities of participation emerge through collaborative practices of drawing and speaking with residents of the Yeoville community Johannesburg.

- Dialogical
- Drawing
- Informal
- Social aesthetics
- Collaboration
- Community
- Participation
- Yeoville, Johannesburg

For Nicole, Kayl and Kyra
and to David Andrew
for bearing with proliferation...



CONTENTS

List of figures	vii
Introduction: Aesthetics On The Street	1
Background: <i>Yeoville International: Speak English To Me</i> .	1
Problems in Grant Kester's 'Dialogical Aesthetics'.	1
Overview of Chapters.	3
Chapter One: Participatory Aesthetics	5
Analogies between the Social and the Aesthetic.	5
Public Art and the Problem of Participation.	6
Socially Engaged/Oriented Art.	8
The Doxa of Participation in Socially Engaged/Oriented Art.	10
Dialogism and Participation.	12
Social Modalities of Aesthetic Representations and Experiences:	
the Living image and Ways of Reading.	17
The Aesthetic Neighbourhood: Two Logics	21
Socially Engaged Art: Work!	22
Socially Oriented Art: Play!	24
Post Autonomy 1: Relational Theories of The Aesthetic.	25
Post-Autonomy 2: Dialectical Aesthetics: Denunciation	
and the Double Bind.	34
The Philosopher and The Sociologist Of The Social-Aesthetic:	
Naming Practices.	40
The Suspension of Work and the Radical Aesthetic.	44
Grant Kester, Miwon Kwon, Claire Bishop: Monopolising the	
Social-aesthetic.	48
Heteroglossia: Facing No Obvious Measure.	56
Informality and Ambulation.	58
Chapter Two: Yeoville as the Research Site	59
Chapter Three: Drawing, Testing the Ground	78
and Lucky Breaks.	
Experiments in Drawing Responsively. <i>Highlands:</i>	
<i>Under Development, Nelson Mandela Bridge.</i>	78
Experiments in Drawing in Relation to Speech: <i>Five Christ,</i>	
and others: the Neighbourhood.	80
At the Coal Face: William Kentridge and " <i>The Sophist</i> ".	82
A Processual, Conversational Aesthetic.	84
Neighbourhood, Friendship and Little Gestures.	85
The Beginnings of a Project: Strategies and Tactics.	87
Where to Begin?	88
'Home' and 'Language' as Generative Devices.	89
Networks of Strangers.	91
<i>Speak English To Me.</i>	92
Drawing 'Home Objects'.	94

Setting Objects in Motion through Neighbourhood Speech.	99
Storyboards: Decoding and Encoding Speech Texts.	102
Collaborative/Negotiated Construction of Texts: Storyboards for <i>Wall Literatures 21</i> .	105
The Struggle to Animate.	107
Neighbourhood Talk	109

Chapter Four: Making Findings and Making Do **115**

Connective Attentiveness and Walking: Dancing in Chaos.	115
Games: the Survival of the Aesthete.	117
Strange Introductions: Dis-identification, Displacement, Disincorporation, Disorientation.	123
Storytelling and Conversation	126
Home, Exile and the Lives of Images and Objects: Home Language Drawings.	136
Storyboards: Speech and Proliferation.	156
The Aesthetics of Intimacy: Edwina, Diogo, Jacques.	175
Diogo: Dreaming of Pigs and Monkeys.	176
Jacques: Suitcases, Closing and Opening Doors.	181
Edwina: The Dignity of Women.	185
The Gallery and Consummation.	191

By Way of a Conclusion: Dialogue, Informality and Aesthetics **202**

The Street, Informal Aesthetics- the Right Place?	202
Entangling Conversation and Drawing.	214

Sources cited **215**

Appendix A

DVD of *Wall Literature 21*

Introduction: Aesthetics on the Streets.

Background: Yeoville International: *Speak English To Me*.

In 2007 and 2008 I spent much of my time walking the streets of Yeoville, Johannesburg introducing myself to residents from a variety of cultural backgrounds and inviting them to enter into extensive conversations with me. We reflected on our experience of the neighbourhood of Yeoville and the city of Johannesburg, shared our biographies, lived experiences, beliefs and aspirations. These open-ended conversations became departure points for the production of a body of drawings, prints and animated sequences grounded thematically in the place of Yeoville. The project entailed walking and ‘drifting’ through the area allowing myself to be led around the streets of Yeoville by the people I had met. I spent a great deal of time in the project on the streets of Yeoville recruiting participants, networking, speaking, and listening and, crucially, *drawing and making in the space of the other*. I would carry my interlocutors words, objects and visions back into my studio where artworks and texts were generated and returned to them in order to sustain further conversations which in turn generated new rounds of image-making. During the project I spent most of my time in the presence of ‘strangers’ making, drawing, speaking and writing with them in a variety of spaces, non-sites, private and domestic places, public spaces in Yeoville rather than working in solitude in my studio.

The research report reflects critically on these processes in the project *Yeoville International, Speak English to Me*, a dialogical art project that I undertook in the Greater Yeoville area in 2007 and 2008. It narrates the experiences, crises and failures that took place in the course of the project, making sense of them theoretically and attempts to develop out of this ‘story’ a tentative model for how public artists may work in informal spaces; especially in terms of drawing. The series of interventions grew out of a personal desire to situate my practice as an artist in a specific neighbourhood (and for its community), conceptualising it as the primary site of “audiencing” (Rose 2006: 197-198). I wanted to experience what it felt like to make art in “the wrong place” (Kwon 2000: 33), as it were, rather than producing art objects and experiences for a closed and privileged group of producers, art consumers, lovers, and collectors. This two year experience allowed me to investigate how, as an artist, writer and educator, what was involved producing texts and materials outside the formal boundaries of the art world. I sought to develop a ‘post autonomous art’ within the context of the everyday and out of this a method of drawing in the presence of others who have no direct experience of art.

The project initially attempted to give insight into a set of problems that I had identified in Grant Kester’s formulation of a ‘dialogical aesthetic’. These informed the research questions I generated prior to the initial proposal which are refined here for the purposes of this report:

1. What are the qualities of a dialogical aesthetic situated in informal places and what kinds of participation emerge from this context?
2. What are the effects of drawing with strangers outside normative, institutional constructs that frame the production of public art? What kind of aesthetic emerges in the process of working as an artist in an informal context?

Problems in Grant Kester's 'dialogical aesthetics'.

The knowledge gaps that appear in Grant Kester's (1993; 1997; 2000; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007) thesis on "dialogical aesthetics" have enabled me to investigate a number of specific problems not addressed generally in the literature on what I term "participatory aesthetics" which I outline in the introduction and which informed the project *Speak English To Me*. First and foremost, Kester assumes that the aesthetic can simply be mapped onto the dialogical (Kester 2004: 11) in order to validate (and valorize) particular kinds of collaborative projects as 'art'. Again and again, we see Kester (and other writers on socially engaged art) characterize the dialogical situation as somehow aesthetic in its own right without really defining its discursive boundaries. For example, Kester's theoretical framing of a "dialogical aesthetic" is unable to answer what is a relatively straightforward question: how do we train and educate *image-makers*, creators of *aesthetic experiences* to operate in dialogical settings (community based, collaborative)? By simply entertaining a homology or conceptual resemblance between the dialogical and the aesthetic the issue of how images catalyse dialogue is not satisfactorily resolved in his work which emerges as a central problem in his work which I will attend to in this report. Kester's conceptual approach is symptomatic of many formulations of a socially engaged aesthetic seem "less interested in a relational aesthetic than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity" (Bishop 2006: 178). By interrogating "the dialogical" and "the aesthetic" theoretically and through the lens of the situated art making project *Speak English To Me* I will attempt to disrupt the Western Kantian tradition to which so much writing on public art, and community is indebted where dialogue (social) and art making (aesthetic) are united unproblematically as transcendental, sovereign categories.

Because Kester assumes that this easy mapping of the social/dialogical onto the aesthetic is efficacious, three central knowledge gaps appear in his theorization of socially engaged art which he admits are shortcomings in his work. After an exhaustive examination of a selection of community based/collaborative art projects in *Conversation Pieces; Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), Kester asks rather disingenuously "what is to be gained by defining this work as art?" (Kester 2004: 190). In other words, he may be asking of the socially engaged projects he is examining: what is their aesthetic value? This admission suggests an uneasy tension in Kester's mind around the status of the *aesthetic* in new contexts.

Kester (2004: 190) admits to having "neglected the visual dimensions of these projects...", giving little consideration to how the participants, and collaborators in his case studies, on the level of their everyday experiences, respond to, and interpret images (rather than say, spoken or written words, sound, space, performative situations). If Kester provides very little about the status of aesthetics in the everyday in his study, he gives even less about the behaviors of project participants in *relation to images*. He seldom explicitly analyses their responses and interpretations to images nor outlines the kinds of conversations that may have taken place between artist and participants in a given project. The absence of *the speech of the participant* in Kester's commentary on socially engaged art practices is surprising because without it their very dialogicality is thrown into question. This report is able to address this crucial absence by giving specific details as to how participants in *Speak English To Me* interpreted, responded and contributed to a given text or artwork. The report can give insight into the role imagery places in relation to dialogics, how it can facilitate, frame, produce particular kinds of sociability.

Kester (2004: 190) also admits that his research is limited because there “...is a potentially productive terrain ... for an expanded analysis of the aesthetic, especially with reference to concepts of framing and distance”. Kester presumably means here that there is something to be gained from examining the social modalities built into collaboratively produced images and artifacts; the communicative/appreciative repertoires and resources that readers/participants bring to texts in making and consuming them. The report also addresses this gap by giving in-depth commentary on the social distance and modality instantiated by aesthetic representations and experiences in informal places. Finally Kester (2004: 190) identifies an “... area that I have neglected” which “concerns the possible connections between the idea of a dialogical aesthetic and artistic paradigms based on concepts of networking and communication...” [referring here to digital media]. He suggests here that his further work in dialogical aesthetics could examine more closely the concept of relationality. How, for example, can artists working in community-based settings take on “the task of demarcating the relational specificity... addressing the differences, adjacencies and distances between one thing, one person, one thought, one fragment next to each other rather than invoking equivalencies via one thing after another” (Kwon 2004: 166). Again, because *Speak English to Me* was premised on social networking and “relational specificity” as its guiding principle it can offer some insights in this regard.

The report has something critical to contribute to each of these gaps in Kester’s theorization of a “dialogical aesthetics” notably by paying attention to the “failures” and crises that took place in *Speak English To Me*. I focus on those critical moments where the project, as I experienced it as an *artist*, could not (by virtue of a whole range of constraining factors) conform to the normative strategies underpinning so much discourse on “good” public art, participatory, community based, socially engaged art. The project has allowed me to explore in an embodied and practical way (rather from the distance of a critic, researcher, writer) the social dimension of a participatory aesthetic within the context of a fraught and unstable, inner-city social space (rather than a safe institutional space), Yeoville. This has allowed me to problematise, through my project narrative, easy notions of ‘participation’, ‘interaction’, and ‘community’ in socially engaged art practice. I do this by playing two productive frames off against each other in order to examine the notion of aesthetic participation in informal places: discourse and dialogue. Discourse foregrounds power in communication and interaction which casts all transactional exchanges as sites of struggle between two positions in a delimited field. Discourse is defined by Foucault (as cited by Mills 2004: 57) as the means by which language regulates, mediates and indeed produces social reality. This approach to understanding participatory aesthetics stands in sharp contrast to the “dialogical” (Bakhtin in Kester 2004: 122- 123), which as it is invoked in literature on participatory aesthetics, tends to aestheticise, equalise and idealise the communicative event as intersubjective sharing, rather than an exchange of profits.

Overview of chapters.

Chapter one ‘Participatory Aesthetics’ attempts to construct an archeology of the aesthetic-social relation in literature on participatory aesthetics in discourse on ‘socially engaged’ and ‘socially oriented art’. Here I unpack some of the ideologies at work in the literature on ‘socially engaged’ and ‘socially oriented art’ which attempt to interlace/disentangle the relation between the social and aesthetics. Drawing primarily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Rancière, I identify two conflicting logics at work in the literature on participatory aesthetics- the relational and the dialectic which I feel are two paradigmatic positions that inform accounts of contemporary participatory forms of artistic practice. I argue, in this chapter, for the productivity of locating aesthetic practices in the informal domain in terms of *Speak English to Me*.

Chapter Two 'Yeoville as the Research Site' introduces the reader to the complexity of the research site; the neighbourhood of Yeoville, Johannesburg in order to establish the reasons for conducting the project in that space. Then, in *Chapter Three, 'Drawing, Testing the Ground and Lucky Breaks'* I provide a metanarrative around the thinking underpinning decisions I made as an artist as the project unfolded on the ground. I describe, in some detail, the stages that emerged, organically, as the project progressed on the streets of Yeoville. This chapter looks primarily at the artistic decisions that I made in the course of the project. *Chapter Four, 'Making Findings And Making Do'* highlights the difficulties involved in making findings/theory in projects of an aesthetic orientation conducted in difficult and messy, everyday social environments. I provide the reader with commentary on critical moments that emerged in the project and case studies which foreground in rich particularity the voice and experience of the participant in aesthetic experiences. I also attempt to give critical insights into the crises and failures that took place in the project. *Chapter Five, 'By Way of a Conclusion: Informal Dialogue, Drawing and Aesthetics'* explores in a more grounded way some of the conceptual difficulties in locating aesthetics in informal places, and examines current literature emerging around culture in inner city Johannesburg. It attempts to provide a set of problems and recommendations artists may consider when working in these contexts.

Chapter One: Participatory Aesthetics.

Analogy between the social and aesthetic.

In the *Future of the Image*, Jacques Rancière (2007: 91) presents an idea that is not new, one that recurs in the discourse on art; the idea that the aesthetic and literary surface is somehow analogous (Rancière 2004: 17) to the social. Modestly, he remarks that “what interests me is the way in which by drawing lines, arranging words, or distributing surfaces one also designs divisions of communal space” (Rancière 2007: 91). If the discourse of aesthetics can be esoteric, dense and elevated, and understandably so because it is so often characterised as “a place in which to think contradiction” (Rancière in Bishop 2006: 182) it is exceptional for discussions of the aesthetic in Western thought *not to make* Rancière’s connection between the aesthetic and community, the aesthetic and the commonsense everyday/social.

Starting with Plato’s notion of the artist as that disruptive double being that makes visible the political order in his mimicry (Plato in Rancière 2004:43) followed by Kant’s notion of the aesthetic as that affective and cognitive domain where bourgeois monads in divesting their personal interest can participate in the development of utopian communities (Kant in Eagleton 1990: 81), we see emerging a host of modern and postmodern speculations on art and aesthetics emerging that rehearse Rancière’s analogy. The rehearsal plays out as a conversation between the Platonic function of aesthetic work as disruption to the natural order and Kant’s aesthetic as an exemplar of the natural community. Adorno (1997: 221; 1991: 61-97) argues for the irreconcilability and essential mystery of the aesthetic as a redemptive to the social fragmentation and banality of modern life. Guattari (1995: 107) understands the aesthetic paradigm as the site for the processual production of new, redeeming subjectivities. Jean-Luc Nancy (1991: 7) proposes literature and aesthetics as the place for the construction of new ways of “being-in-common”. Rancière (2007: 33-67) develops what may be described as an aesthetics of the “sentence-image” in order to rethink the political and democracy. Even in theoretical physics (Bohm 2004: 16), educational theory; social semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006: 291); critical, “border pedagogy” (Giroux 1993: 35); Doll’s postmodern education of chaos and complexity (1993); Schön (1990) designer “reflective practitioner” we see the aesthetic and visual field being characterised as a place where subjectivity, cognition and sociality is not so much represented as it is constructed and reconstructed. The relational paradigm is thus emblematised in the aesthetic. The term “aesthetics” is used in this sense as a philosophical catch all, a “net thrown over chaos” (Guattari and Deleuze in Rancière 2007: 48), a valuable place of invention where no other place can be found for it in the fixities of discourse; a place in which sense is made and unmade interminably.

There seems to be an ‘aesthetic turn’ in a number of ‘other’ disciplines: philosophy, anthropology, literary criticism, sociology, linguistics, cultural studies, education that points to the fecundity of a post-structural, relational thinking in which the aesthetic plays its part as a potential model, as “a poetics of knowledge that would cut across all disciplines” (Rancière 2000: 5). The aesthetic may be valuable to other ways of thinking because it is a transgressive and transdiscursive medium. This is perhaps because, as Rancière suggests, the aesthetic offers “... configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the social world” (Rancière 2006: 92). The aesthetic as dematerialised process of cognitive perturbation and synthesis may thus be called upon as an interlocutor to ‘speak’ to other disciplines; to unsettle and disrupt them. At the same time it is called upon in order to make sense of the various crises and catastrophes that are said to confront contemporary society: the collapse of ‘actual’ communism, the fracturing effects of the post modern condition, the clash between tradition and modernity, the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries. The aesthetic is thought to be that kind of alternative *place* in which new ways of existing, thinking, acting and

being human may be rethought. It seems to offer a conversational, generative and connective approach to the production of knowledge. As Rancière (2006: 9-10) suggests, “this supposes the creation of a space without boundaries which is also a space of equality”. The aesthetic is an ‘other’ to discursive rationality because it is the one domain that provides the promise of producing new knowledge and subjectivities. However, paradoxically, this is because it can “produce no knowledge” on its own (Eagleton 1990:16), the place where “knowledge is transformed into non-knowledge” (Rancière 2004: 23).

This resurgence of interest in the interstices between art and life in contemporary art practice under the scheme of ‘socially engaged’ and ‘socially oriented art practice’ also constitutes a broader shift in how cultural practitioners perceive the social function of their art, perhaps reflecting a return to what Rancière (2004: 19) terms the “ethical regime of images”. In Rancière’s (2004: 20) ethical regime, the “images mode of being affects the *ethos*, the mode of being of individuals and communities”. In other words, this is the regime that points to the “ways that figures of community are aesthetically designed” (Rancière. 2004:18). This regime describes the extent to which artistic practice is integrated into the social fabric. The move to a more participatory aesthetic in contemporary practice would, in effect, mean a historical departure from what Rancière defines as the “poetic regime of images” (Rancière 2004:21-22) or a problematically framed “modernism” (Rancière 2004: 27). Within the latter regime the image/aesthetics become visible as an object of knowledge in itself by finding its own “proper place” (its occupation as it were) in the social order. This is defined within modernist discourse as the ‘autonomy’ of the aesthetic and artistic practices in relation to the social. Rancière (2004: 22) relates these imagistic “regimes” to historical epochs, suggesting that the production of images/aesthetics are themselves social expressions of what is sayable, thinkable, and visible within a particular milieu. His notion of the “regime” suggests that there is a dialectic/dialogic at work between social and aesthetic surfaces.

Public art and the problem of participation.

A return to an “ethical regime” of image-making asks if artists have a responsibility to query the kinds and qualities of sociabilities their work engenders. Critical public art practice emerges as a response to this problem by claiming that artists working outside the circuit of the museum and the gallery can develop new sites of audiencing and in so doing challenge the elitism of the art world and the field of legitimate culture. An ethical approach to art making can democratise art and engender new forms of aesthetic production by taking an oppositional stance against dominant hegemonic systems. Public art has moved beyond the simple interventionist assumptions that “aesthetic improvements associated with public art projects have a number of social impacts, for example, promoting senses of community amongst residents of disadvantaged backgrounds” (Hall & Smith 2005: 176). In many ways, the ethical discourse of public art has been superseded and problematised by “participatory aesthetics” (Bishop 2006: 10-16) or ‘socially engaged art practices’ representing a dialogical turn in the genre of public art. As Tom Finkelpearl (2000: 45) notes, with reference to the formative changes of the Percent for Arts Programs in the United States; the shift from public art to a “*dialogue* in public art” [added emphasis] means that it is possible to understand public cultural production less as an “elitist notion that public art is a gift of the “best” to the people of the city, than as an opportunity for “true dialogue, the mutual pursuit of critical understanding among equals”, which will lead to “critical consciousness for all involved.”

Raising the issue of ethics, dialogue and participation in public art necessarily politicises its practice and problematises the role of aesthetics because it implicates power relations between discursive fields: the public and artistic sphere; artist and audience, self and other. Where Finkelpearl ideal-

ise the egalitarian potential of new public art practices, critic Rosalyn Deutsche links the ascendancy of various public art practices in New York to urban politics, critiquing an institutional interest in public art as “alibis for redevelopment” (Deutsche 1988: 9). Public art becomes the means by which a false consent may be secured for “redevelopment and to the restructuring that make up the historical form of late capitalist urbanism” (Deutsche 1988: 10) which she contends is always predicated on an exclusion, whether it be the poor, the homeless, the disenfranchised. It is these exclusions that forms of specular, object-oriented public art tend to mask. Public art, for her, cannot be entirely ‘innocent’ for a number of reasons. Although public art can be seen as a “gift of the best to the people of the city” it can also play a critical role in the manufacture of consent by constructing the illusion that ideal, public spaces even exist. In masking exclusions and conflicts that tend to characterise the public sphere public art and cultural practices can indeed act in complicity with the interests of a dominant class creating the illusion of public space is public when it is, in fact, private and exclusive. Deutsche (1988: 13) begins to plot out the problems inherent in defining, critically, a more participative practice of public art which is premised on “urban politics”:

Most existing aesthetic approaches can neither account for the current conditions of public art production nor suggest terms for an alternative, possibly transformative practice. Even when they comprehend the problems of the public sphere or entail sophisticated materialist critiques of aesthetic perception, they generally lack the adequate knowledge of urban politics. Needless to say, traditional art-historical paradigms cannot explicate the social functions of public art- past or present- since they remain committed to idealist assumptions that work to obscure those functions. Maintaining that art is defined by an independent aesthetic essence, prevailing doctrines hold that, which art inevitably “reflects” social reality, its purpose is, by definition, the transcendence of spatiotemporal contingencies in the universal, timeless work of art... they [art historians] thus preserve the idealist separation of art-its ontological status intact- from social environments with which art merely “interacts” ... all tendencies within art history are informed by notions of the city as a transhistorical form, an inevitable product of technological evolution, or an arena for the unfolding of exacerbated individualism.

In seeing aesthetic essence and doctrine as the obstacle to a critical, transformative practice in public art she charts out a new definition of participation that, rather than relying of progressivist notions of reforming urban space (rejuvenation, community building and so on), or in terms of aesthetic gifts to the public (Finkelpearl 2000: 45) is linked primarily to the idea of political oppositionality:

The most radical promise embodied in public art that attempted to de-fetishize both art and urban space was the potential for artists and critics to articulate their aesthetic opposition to the spaces of the arts” reception with other elements of social resistance to the organisation of the city (Deutsche. 1988:14).

What Deutsche ultimately demands from a oppositional practice of public art is one where urban space is read symptomatically. Artists must demystify urban space through making visible “uneven developments”, revealing “contradictions underlying images of well-managed or beautiful cities”, exploring “the tensions between art and urbanism” (Deutsche 1988:23). Deutsche implies that if their work meets these criteria it will could be more authentically participatory. She contends that artists working in the public sphere must make visible the contradictions in urban and social space which suggests that their artistic strategies should be representational rather than participative/situational and, further, that visual artists offer specialised expertise in this regard. In illustrating this point, Deutsche (1998: 93 -105; 1986) refers to Krzysztof Wodiczko’s homeless vehicles and projections of vagrancy and displacement on urban monuments. Here, the objects produced are not so much relational in a utilitarian sense (Bourriaud in Downey 2007:271), but are rather interventionist in a representational sense, offering a visible critique of gentrification and the erosion of public space.

Her argument fails to convince how *aesthetic* practices, in their specificity, can play a role in democratising urban space without collapsing into pure representivity and mere propaganda where the only role artists can play is amplifying the voice of the marginalised and expose a relation of inequality. What is of central interest is who these practices of “visibility” are addressing, who they involve and to what

end. Deutsche's argument, like many that point to the disruptive potential of aesthetic work, struggles to resolve the tension between the need for critical art to represent situations, and the need to produce them. The representation (no matter how critical) of a situation is problematic precisely because, as Raunig (2007: 149 -150) suggests, it is linked to a bourgeois, Hegelian notion of the autonomous social function of aesthetics, which must 'represent' in order to function aesthetically at all:

The aesthetic representation is so closely linked with the dialectical framework of identity that breaking out of this limitation seems completely unthinkable, particularly in the context of classical art theories. Art must be imagined in the rule of identity as pure representation, as an image of something, a description of something, an appearance of general forces; in other words, as a representation of situations.

Critiques that examine the political uses to which public art are put catalyse a shift from the way art making as a representational practice contributes to the production of public space to one centered on the relationship between art and participation, the construction of political agency and artistic practice within a variety of social spaces. A discourse that focusses on the dematerialisation of representational public art practices into situation must deal centrally with the issue of the quality of aesthetic participation. But is it possible to imagine a post-autonomous art – an art of situations? What disruptive, representational discourses on public art struggle to address is the limit of artistic production. When art crosses a critical border and takes to the streets as a political gesture (in an attempt to be a situation) it loses its visibility, representational potential and dissolves paradoxically losing its political power. The move from the representation of situations to the situation itself is where the discourse on socially engaged/ oriented art situates itself attempting to examine the problematic notion participation in aesthetics.

Socially Engaged/Oriented Art.

Claire Bishop (2006: 12), in her anthology *Art and Participation* (2006), attempts to address the nature of aesthetic participation by marking out three agendas for “socially oriented” art practices from the 1960's to the present day.

Despite its changing context, we can nevertheless draw attention to continuities between the participatory impulse of the 1960's and today. Recurrently, calls for an art of participation tend to be allied to one or all of the following agendas. The first concerns the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency. The second argument concerns authorship. The gesture of ceding some or all authorial control is conventionally regarded as more egalitarian and democratic than the creation of a work by a single artist, while shared production is also seen to entail the aesthetic benefits of greater risk and unpredictability. Collaborative creativity is therefore understood both to emerge from and to produce, a more positive and non-hierarchical social model. The third issue involves a perceived crisis in community and collective responsibility. This concern has become more acute since the fall of Communism, although it takes its lead from a tradition of Marxist thought that indicts the alienating and isolating effects of capitalism. One of the main impetuses behind participatory art has therefore been a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning. These three concerns- activation; authorship; community- are the most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation in art since the 1960's.

In each of the above agendas it is interesting to note how the aesthetic in socially engaged art is understood in terms of motivation. Participative art is seen as a projective and instrumental enterprise. Art contributes to the construction of a politically “active subject”, the development of an “egalitarian”, “democratic” society, and plays its part in the “restoration of the social bond”. Agendas such as these situate new collaborative practices in art within Rancière's (2004: 21) “ethical regime” of images which,

“in its most general formula”, “intends to raise the consciousness of the mechanisms of domination in order to turn the spectator into a conscious agent in the transformation of the world” (Rancière 2006: 83). The language used by Bishop suggests a projective aesthetic project where participatory artistic practices, less contemplative than more conventional forms of artistic production, act out in the social world and in doing so attempt to impinge on the everyday rather than merely reflecting social situations. Art within this model considers its role, reflexively, in shaping situations and being shaped by them.

However, criticism that values art practices according to these three agendas risks assuming that there are degrees to which various artistic forms accord participation; that some forms of artistic production are “poorer” than others in social capital. The ‘dialogical turn’ in public art practice tends, as Claire Bishop (2006:179) has noted, to prompt the valorisation of some modalities of reception/communication/ expression over others on an ethical basis. This tendency to overlook the aesthetic, in favour of the ethical tends to take place when more or less ‘interactionist’ artistic practices come to be aligned with community activism and engagement. This is the case in New Genre Public Art.

This new form, according to its main proponent Suzanne Lacy, takes the notion of the “...unknown relationship between the artist as audience, a relationship that may itself be the artwork” (Lacy 1995: 20) as its departure point. Lacy fictionalises the emergence of this new genre within a history of public art practices lining up each along a continuum of participation from “art in public places”, to “art in the public interest”, culminating in “calls to action”, “engaging multiple audiences”, “collaborative practice”(Lacy 1995: 39-41). Her formulation essentially argues for a re-imagining of the *medium of art as social* (bodies, time, space) which has to be ethical, shifting from a “typology of materials, spaces, or artistic media” to “concepts of audience, relationship, communication and political intention” (Lacy 1995: 28). She attempts to pre-empt criticisms that this new form makes no place for aesthetic experience, per se, by stating that “...new genre public art is not only about subject matter, and not only about the placement or site for art, but about the aesthetic expression of activated value systems” (Lacy 1995: 30). Because of the valorisation of ethics-as-aesthetics Lacy fails to convince how makers of aesthetic representations (visual artists) would function differently from social workers or a community activists in terms of the very artistic criteria she sets out. The latter could just as easily activate “value systems” (Lacy 1995: 33) through the placement of their practices. What is inherently ‘aesthetic’ about these ethical norms she expresses?

If anything, the artist seems to possess little capacity for the production of images, aesthetic forms and representations but rather comes to resemble a critical educator or community activist who works in the medium of the social and performative. Thus within Lacy’s model the visual falls away as a key competence and artist are asked, for example, to practice a “...gentle, diffused mode of listening... a kind of art that cannot be fully realised through monologue”. “[T]he skills for this relational work are communicative in nature, a stretch for the imaginations of artists and critics used to the monologic and studio-based model of art” (Lacy 1995:36). The work of art is utterly diffused for its “use in a social context” (Lacy 1995:27) instrumentalised in the service of an undefined social/ethical goal. The aesthetic is nothing but a particular kind of sociality. Lacy sidesteps the difficult problem of explaining how the social situations designed by artists are indeed aesthetic. It is noteworthy that in Lacy’s call for a new criticism centering on interactionism in public art the aesthetic and the visual becomes secondary to more ethical concerns. For her, “[n]ew genre public art calls for an integrative critical language through which values, ethics, and social responsibility can be discussed in terms of art” (Lacy 1995:43). The argument dissolves precisely at this point because it cannot establish a workable dialectic between the social, the visual and the aesthetic. The aesthetic, in being subsumed completely into the social (in the indeterminacy of the relationship between artist and audience (or an ideal relation between them) loses

the critical autonomy it needs to be an interlocutor with the social-ethical in the first place. New Genre Public Art struggles, in other words, to address the specificity of the visual as an interlocutionary power within an dialogical context.

The Doxa of Participation in Socially Engaged/Oriented Art.

The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival (Bakhtin as quoted by Holquist 2006: 39).

To a large degree, this uncritical valorisation of art-as-social work, art-for-change, art-as-activism, community-based art becomes an attempt at displacing the perceived *autonomy* of other practices by committing an injustice against them, stereotyping certain forms of art making as monological, textual, and elitist. For example, characteristic of this valorisation, Mary Jane Jacob (1995:53) suggests that an "art of social critique" is more relevant and valid to a contemporary situation than avant-garde museum art. But are post-autonomous practices more critical, and in what sense, if we cannot define the ontological and disciplinary boundaries of the aesthetic? Without a certain degree of containment the aesthetic becomes a cipher for any non-normative social practice, collapsed into a non-definition, and can be made to perform any function in the final analysis.

Participatory models, based on the valorisation of ethical criteria (such as Suzanne Lacy's) assume that it is natural to propose that artists can position their work at a point in a spectrum of participatory strategies from the private ("artist as experienter", "to artist as reporter") to the public ("artist as analyst") and finally on the far end of the spectrum into a full blown interactionist mode ("artist as activist") (Lacy 1995:174). Such arguments assume that the aesthetic has no conceptual boundaries. It can be inserted into a variety of interpersonal, institutional and cultural contexts unproblematically because the aesthetic is seen as entirely malleable conceptually and discursively open-ended. Lacy can therefore assume that some forms of artistic practice can be designated as stably "private" and others "public". It is also assumed, for example, that the "artist as reporter", "artist as experienter" is somehow less public than their "analyst/activist" counterparts. Valorising certain artistic practice in terms of ethical criteria tends to throw a certain shallow participatory scale over all artistic practices. Ethical discourses like these also artificially associate 'interactionist' art practices with constituencies existing on the fringes or entirely outside the influence of art world or legitimate culture. It is almost as if interactionism (art-as-activism) in itself, when it operates in other places, constitutes a gesture of political radicality. This misrecognition (interactionist = radical) translates into equating artistic quality with those new modes/genres of practice (installation, video, events, workshops etc) that address 'other' audiences beyond the traditional art lover, collector, museum audience. Artists working on the outskirts of the so-called art institution, motivating ethical criteria to evaluate art, can then easily claim that their work, (by virtue of the fact that it is 'interactive', 'social', 'convivial' i.e. measured in terms of ethical norms of participation) can represent more adequately the interests of democracy and social justice. This skirts the question of how the modalities of their *aesthetic* and visual practices come to achieve this in the first place.

Such hierarchical ethical criteria are of course simplistic lenses by which to apprehend the aesthetic because various artistic forms possess their own unique communicative modalities, dialogical po-

tentials, which are of course constrained by where they are seen and how they are practiced, and to whom they are addressed. These are factors which become difficult to disentangle from one another. The issue at stake, for me, is the *transactional specificity* of various forms of aesthetic production and the contexts of audiencing in which they are motivated. Transactionality points to the complexities in how we understand the relation between the social and the aesthetic and what constitutes the ethical.

Bishop, like Lacy (1995) accords a certain ethical normativity to the functions contemporary art can afford:

The tasks facing us today are to analyse how contemporary art addresses the viewer and assess the quality of the audience relations it produces: the subject position that any work presupposes and the democratic notion that it upholds, and how these are manifested in our experience of the work (Bishop in Downey 2007: 274).

Assessing the “democratic potential a practice upholds” appears to be a most limiting and moralising way of understanding a given mode of art making if we take into account Bishop’s (2006:180) call for a more nuanced attentiveness to what she terms the “danger” inherent in aesthetic modalities in contemporary art. Who for example would determine the extent of that “democratic potential a form upholds” and upon what basis? For some, “democracy” itself may appear a negatively or productively dangerous proposition. What would the conceptual relationship be between the “aesthetic forms of a work” and the democratic “relations it produces”? “When an activity is designated as ‘art’ and its function is described as political, in the final analysis what efficacy does it possess to do more than rail against the limitations of its self-imposed status?” (Felshin 1995:87). An orthodoxy that promotes a specious forms of ethical participation over aesthetic engagement (an inaccurate binary one may argue) would lead us to believe there exist characteristics or properties *innate* to particular forms of cultural production that somehow determine their democratic legitimacy. In contrast to assessing the “democratic” modalities of art making “uphold”, to cite Bishop again, it may be more worthwhile to:

[...call] for spectators who are active as interpreters... that the politics of participation, might best lie, not in anti-spectacular stagings of community or in the claim that mere physical activity would correspond to emancipation, but putting to work the idea that we are all equally capable of inventing our own translations. Unattached to privileged artistic medium, this principle would not divide audiences into active and passive, capable and incapable, but instead would invite us all to appropriate works for ourselves and make use of these in ways that their authors might never have dreamed possible (Bishop 2004:78).

The terms of the debate around participation and ethics in art often center, unhelpfully, around the perceived differences between modernist and post modernist art criticism and the differences between beholding and spectatorship respectively. Michael Fried’s (1967) refrain against “theatrical qualities of art reception” in *Art as Objecthood* is often taken as a departure point in the legitimization of the democratic qualities of so-called ‘participatory art experiences’. For Fried (1990: 201), the key indicators of a self-reflexive art are “formal absorption” where the image turns its back, so to speak, on the spectator by refusing to enter into a direct transactional exchange with them. This is seen in post modern art theory as a problem, and by socially engaged art practice as a the departure point from which to develop its own *raison d’être*. Post modern forms of art (as opposed to its dismissive modernist counterpart) must shake off the elitist, self-referentiality of self-absorption and the artwork must be designed in such a way that the presence of ‘a’ viewer could be said to complete it. Semantic closure aside, such claims only hold if it can be argued that artistic forms can be apprehended outside the mode of decipherment and mediation. How is it possible for an artwork to be completed by a viewer when these objects, artefacts, texts and experiences are so highly mediated? The fact that a given work has turned its back on the spectator assumes that it can instantiate a dialogical relation of a special kind- it is a relation nonetheless.

Mitchell (2005: 222-244) asks, in this regard, if a re-reading of abstract art and painting is not overdue. He argues that rather than writing off abstract painting as non-relational, autonomous and elitist we could assign a “totemic” modality of intimacy to this medium. Mitchell (2005: 235) asks, for example, in discussing Gerhard Richter’s painting, “what are the current possibilities for abstract painting at the end of the postmodern era..., what can abstraction aim for in the wake of the postmodern return to figuration, pictorialism, and the oft-noted ‘eruption of language into the aesthetic field?’ (Mitchell 2005:226). In formulating an approach to the relational modality of abstract painting, Mitchell makes a fine distinction between “empathy” (a capacity regularly promoted by proponents of socially engaged art) and “intimacy” insinuating that theatricality is a most limiting way of apprehending the heterogeneous participatory capacities of aesthetic representations, including painting. Mitchell (2005: 236) suggests that painting, rather than being written off as elitist and non-participatory, because it “turns its back on the spectator” needs to be revisited not on the basis of ethical criteria but in terms of modality:

The sort of contemplative, concentrated seeing demanded by abstraction needn’t be associated with a regression to empathy, sentimentality, and (heaven forbid) private, bourgeois subjectivity. The democratising of abstraction, its availability as a vernacular artistic tradition, offers access to a space of intimacy in which new collective and public subjectivities might be nurtured. This intimacy isn’t in itself a politics. It won’t save the NEA, much less bring down the New Right or stop the killing in Israel/Palestine. Its operations and aspirations will have to be quiet, modest and patient.

Dialogism and participation.

If particular forms of art are uniquely sociable then why would generalised discourses and orthodoxies in participation in aesthetics, aesthetics of participation emerge at particular junctures in cultural history? Why, for example, would the line between art and life attempt to be crossed by the Russian Constructivists and Productionists (Eisenstein and Tretyakov’s gasworks) in the Soviet Union in the early part of the 20th century, or by Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus in post First World War Germany, the Dadaists before that, Pop Art in the age of new consumerism, Fluxus and de Bord’s Situationism in the 60’s? Why does the dialogue between art and life take the forms that it does at these particular historical junctures? Without being able to do these questions any historical justice within the scope of this report, I can perhaps explore why this relation is being resurrected in the contemporary moment in a veritable cacophony of names: “dialogical public art”, “critical public art”, “relational aesthetics”, “site specificity”, “conversational art”, “participatory art”, “littoral art”, “new genre public art”, “connective aesthetics”, “socially engaged art”, “interventionist art”, “collaborative and participatory art”, “experimental communities” and “the social aesthetic”? What are the stakes of these many urgent namings? Does this constitute a new kind of cultural opposition to the increasingly fashion- driven, globalised, spectacular, celebrity-culture art world industry? Is this a form a resistance against the capital logic of international art economy? Does this discourse of ‘socially engaged art’ attempt to respond to a genuine loss of authenticity or is it merely symptomatic of how the art world itself functions: an avant-garde strategy of displacement on the part of a new breed of artists and critics marginalised by the art economy? Further, why does conflict continue to haunt attempts to link the social to the aesthetic when the so-called space between the social and the aesthetic has been rehearsed so often in the 20th century? Is this conflict a necessary constituent of the contemporary space between the social and the aesthetic?

If there is an aesthetic turn in other disciplines, the renewed contemporary interest of the art world in the relation between the social/political and the aesthetic/artistic may speak to a shift in the way that both spaces are imagined. The contact zone between these two domains is indexed in speculations about

wider paradigmatic shifts. The renewed interest in socially engaged art may be viewed symptomatically, indexing a shift from a society of hierarchy and privilege to a more flattened globalised capitalist social ambience where socially engaged art practices celebrate/critique a shift from statist models of governance to laissez-faire neo-liberalism. It may also be that these art practices reflect a desire to remediate and recover from a condition of social melancholy where the loss of a time of authentic communication, communitarianism, communing attempting is lamented and retrieved where the aesthetic is seen a place to work through loss (Scribner 2003: 13). Or perhaps, more ambivalently, socially engaged art may refer to an attempt to address a society that has lost its moorings, its boundaries and sense of continuity, tradition, place, community locked into the enthralling stasis of post history unable to escape from a melancholic fascination with catastrophe (Derrida 1994: 105, Baudrillard 2002:3), mass media spectacle (Becker 2003:143). Moreover the aesthetic may be seen as a place for cultural work in which to negotiate and the dissolution of cultural and national boundaries into “global/local assemblage” (Wilson & Dissanayake 1996:2). It may be argued that this renewed interest in the relation between the political and the artistic is less a symptom, than a movement instigating in a shift in social relations from dominative orders of social organisation toward a more aesthetic egalitarian model where the boundaries between legitimate culture the everyday, discourses and practice, center and margin begin to be questioned and dissolve (Stimson & Sholette 2007:13).

Or perhaps the renewal of an interest in the relation between art and life is an attempt to revisit a complex and archaeological-discursive of the disciplinary relation between the social and the aesthetic. On the other hand, the simple binary reduction to interactionism versus decipherment, that we see emerging in discourse on socially engaged art may point to an attempt on the part of the culture industry to revive itself by artificially setting up a new set of artistic co-ordinates or doxas over which various agents in the field may argue and validate its practices and production of symbolic objects for a privileged consumer. For me, the valorisation of participation in aesthetic practice becomes a somewhat disingenuous way of addressing the problem useful only to the extent to which it may be used to disavow and displace ‘other’ practices of art making as less social, ethical or participatory than others. If writing on socially engaged art practices is laying the ground of a new aesthetics we need to ask: does it entail a loss, by excluding a range of aesthetic practices perceived as ‘not social’?

Moralistic generalisations issued by a range of critics and writers on the value of public art and socially engaged art may be arguably theoretically premature. The discourse of socially engaged art is hardly tentative with its writers preferring to issue moral proclamations about what constitutes a ‘good’ socially engaged practice rather than grasping at the complexities involved in thinking through an aporia that Adorno (1997: 6) would say must be lodged between the social and the aesthetic. In conceptualising the practice of art in terms of the doxa of participation a frame is offered in which artists can compete for a stake in the service industry with their practices ‘measured’ for a market. A typical avant-garde commentary (its subtext being economic) closes down the dialogue around the social-aesthetic relation because it promotes a non-zero game predicated on competitiveness, of sustaining workable homologies between the field of capital and the field of cultural production. Whatever this renewed interest in social practices indicates, participatory aesthetics, socially engaged art practices, new genre public art may also present an opening in which new social and aesthetic surfaces and the places between them may be imagined and theorised as a kind of resistance against the avant-garde art criticism that serves often to close readings of art rather than to make close readings.

A dialogical approach would argue that each and every transactional act is entirely unique, “utterly unrepeatable ... uniquely tailored to the circumstance of expression” (Bakhtin in Shotter & Billig 1998: 22); as aesthetic in some sense. A dialogical reading of the communicative potential of art calls for an

egalitarian ethos in the reading of texts (a point which I will elaborate upon later). Mitchell (2005:252) might argue, under the scheme of a problematic ‘visual culture’ that all forms of artistic production require the presence of a participant, it depends on “where the boundaries are being drawn”. The operationalising of a text is intrinsic to all texts- there is always a ‘participant’. In any given transactional exchanges there is participation which are to varying degrees multilayered, complex and dense. Social semiotics would suggest that rather than apprehending images and art on the basis of what position we should take, we should examine the way in which these forms design our position in advance (as spectators, consumers, readers, beholders, participants and so on) in terms of mode of address, gaze, social distance modality. Participation is therefore embedded in all objects, texts, experiences including aesthetic representations and experiences which hail their interlocutors. This is not to say that we cannot formulate our own “preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings” in relation to them. A semiotic dialogical model would suggest that the reading all texts, artefacts, arts, speech etc (regardless of its social context, ideological situation, form etc) is participatory and moreover that there are “relatively stable types of utterances” made about it on the level of langue (directly mediated speech acts), within the ambit of official culture and more fluid, unpredictable, extreme heterogeneous speech acts on the level of unofficial parole- two forms of transaction that always exist in tension with one another. Although Bakhtin (2006: 98) privileges artistic speech genres as similar to the conversations that take place in everyday life in terms of being radically heterogeneous and heteroglossic they are also regulated internally, and ontogenetically.

The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex.

He places aesthetic representations within a spectrum of speech genres each mediated by the terms of their addressability and the extent to which they are regulated, reminding us that aesthetic representations can never be purely or stably determinate. In this sense, despite the form of the representations, there are complex registers of participation at work in every communicative act. However, this is *not to say that all representations are aesthetic*. Ironically, an interactionist paradigm of artistic production, in ignoring this, tends to be anti-democratic if we metaphorise art objects, texts, and experiences, more relationally, as living interlocutors rather than as mere passive texts to be deciphered, mastered, unpacked and emptied because their repertoires, like that of their participants, are also ‘inexhaustible’.

The dogma of interactionism in art is dangerous precisely because it commits an injustice to the heterogeneity of both aesthetic and non-aesthetic experience. This kind of dogma is well-illustrated in the language of Grant Kester, a leading advocate of socially engaged art. Ironically, in order to formulate his thesis of a so-called “dialogical aesthetic”, he must do so at the expense of writing off a range of artistic modalities. In an interview with Tim Stott (2006) he opposes works made in a “textual mode”, “mono-authorial” gallery based avant-garde works in favour of more “collaborative or collective approaches in contemporary art” and/or “participatory, process-based experience” (Stott: 2006). He argues, in a rather binary fashion, that the dialogical relation can be found in some practices and not in others. He presupposes, in this interview, that artefacts produced in solitude are made by artists to be “decoded” where materially and visibly collaborative experiences and *projects* are somehow not. In Kester’s mind, this makes collaborative practices inherently ‘better’ because they are explicitly made to be dialogised which makes them more democratically attuned than their modernist counterparts.

Kester’s comparison of Rachel Whiteread’s *House* (1993) and Loraine Leeson’s, *West Meets East* (1992) (Kester 2004:18 -25) is a case in point. His analysis is symptomatic of the flimsy rhetoric of participation as the criterion for socially engaged art. He proposes that *House* was designed as a “good avant-garde work of art”; to be “provocative yet indeterminate, opaque yet open to differing responses”

and as such became “ungraspable” (Kester 2004: 20) to the Bow community in London’s East End where the work was located. He rejects the work itself on the basis that the catalogue published about the piece dismissed the “hostile reactions the work provoked among the non-art public” (Kester 2004:20) confusing the commentary in the publication about the work with the artwork itself. In other words, he attributes dialogical failure not to *House* itself (a three-dimensional site specific text) but to the London art world (as indexed by the catalogue) which, in his terms, is unable, given its avant-garde elitism to accommodate the so-called ‘community’. In this way, Kester himself cannot grasp either the dialogical potential of the agonistic potential of *House*. He claims that “*House* was not dialogical because it provoked a heated dialogue in the British press” (Kester 2004: 21) which is a contradiction in terms. He does not attend to the dialogical specificity of the work itself making an easy congruity between *House*, as a site specific situation, and the values of the art institution as they are emblematised in the catalogue. He imagines the concrete cast sculpture as a representative of the elitist art world, that somehow lurking in its monolithic, silent form is a refusal on the part of the avant-garde to engage with the banality of the everyday.

In contrast, he offers a more modest work; *West Meets East* (1992), a textile- based, billboard photomural developed in conversation between the artists and young, immigrant Bow women (in the same community that *House* was located). This Kester asserts as an alternative to the perceived monologicality of Whiteread’s ‘avant-garde’ work. He asks, in the comparison, if “it is possible to imagine an artwork that would retain the power to challenge fixed or conventional meanings without dividing its audience into philistines and cognoscenti?” (Kester: 21-22) offering Leeson’s work as the answer, because rather than encouraging the suspension of interpretation (written off as an avant-garde strategy) this work tends to favour the “artistic encoding of a shared language” (Kester. 2004:23). In other words, for Kester, *East Meets West* visibly reproduces what is already known by the community, because it represents their interests. In many senses, *East Meets West* does not operate on a dialogical basis but rather upon the basis of delegation where the artist is required to represent interests rather than instilling critical debate. In this way (if we have to take Kester’s argument to its logical conclusion), *East Meets West* representing the interests of a coherent community in much the same way as *House* is made to represent the failures of avant-gardism. The difference for Kester is that where *House* represents the vision of a singular, celebrated artist (and the art world community), *East Meets West* encodes ‘participation’ through the right kind mixture of aesthetic form and process. For him the literal and material act of interaction, shared communication, with the “artist facilitating shared experience” (Kester 2004:23) makes *East Meets West* dialogically superior to the object centered *House* because, he implicitly maintains, *House* generated *conflict* (Kester 2004:24). In this way, he misrecognises the ambiguity of the work itself with the institutional elitism of the art world. He cannot imagine polyphony taking place in the private encounter between the community member on the street and Rachel Whiteread’s work. His account of the work does not give just dues to the silent, undocumented unofficial and informal register of street interpretation. If dialogue is to take place for Kester then it must be managed in its legitimate domain- in his book *Conversation Pieces* (2004) and the catalogue; in the place of the formal and in the public domain in which the art critic participates, expectedly, as a dominant mediating player.

If we assume that any aesthetic practice cannot be conceived of without consideration for the dialogical then Kester’s assumption that artists such as Whiteread have an ethical responsibility toward their audiences/communities become null and void. Asserting that evaluating artistic practice in terms of its positive ‘impact’ upon ‘communities’ through its dialogical capacities becomes somewhat irrelevant because dialogism, as defined by Bakhtin, is indeed common to all acts of communication. One form of practice is not more ethically efficacious than another because it is more dialogical. The question, for me, is about the defining the quality of the relation between any given aesthetic object/process/text and the readerly responses of participants. The encounter between context, viewer and artwork is the sum total

of the aesthetic experience which is always a dialogical relation. It is therefore crucial to examine the polyphony implicated in such encounters including the official and unofficial responses of ‘the audience’ to a given work.

West Meets East and *House*, in terms of my argument, create their own communal surfaces and speech performances, possess their own public and private traits, situational idiosyncrasies and interlocutory textures which need to be attended to if we want to formulate a rigorous and imaginative relation between the social and the aesthetic. Complaints, such as Kester’s, regarding the monologism of avant-garde art are misdirected because in Rancière’s terms a fully singular, monological text is impossible to imagine. By attending to the polyphonic texture of the responses generated by works themselves— both those seen and unseen, official and unofficial more justice can be done to works such as *House* and *West Meets East*. Kester ‘wrongs’ the object in the same way as “policy wrongs equality” (Rancière 1992: 58) by not paying attention to the specificity of both the work and the totality of the dialogical situation. How do we know, for instance, what performative communities these works created under the veneer of adversarial language of the media, art world criticism and public-political legitimisation? Kester, as a critic, plays a part in constraining the polyphonic, capacity releasing potentials of both of these artworks by mediating, controlling, legislating and regulating the way they are received and engaged with from his position as a representative of official culture. The media and art institution delimits what readings (frames of reference) can and cannot be made about specific forms of artistic production which on the one hand presents an illusion about the dialogical capacities of art works and on the other limits what audiences can or cannot say about the works they encounter. In effect, Kester’s *formal* strategy of disavowing *House* and his explications about the truth of dialogicality in *West Meets East* (that material interactionism constitutes the only form of dialogical art practice) closes down conversation around the performative potentials of the *many* aesthetics operating within, and circulating within specific, complex social situations.

In response to Kester’s polemic Rancière may, for example, ask: what does it mean, for ‘someone’—(non art, everyday man, and citizen, community member) to ‘participate’ in art? What does it mean for art to be ‘socially engaged’, ‘public’, ‘politically active’, ‘community based’ if indeed *all* forms of artistic production and reception are marked by (Bourdieu:1991), model (Guattari 1995: 77-78), make visible (Rancière 2004:22) and produce (Nancy 1991:73) their own regimes and communities; their own politics; modes of sociability within, often utterly unrepeatable dialogical situations? What is the value of taking the principle of equality as our starting point in the engagement with aesthetic representations and experiences? Why, I might add, should artists be bound to such normative definitions of participation such as those presented by Kester, Lacy, Bishop and Deutsche? There is, I would suggest, *no such thing* as a practice of art that is not in some way (in its own way, in the other’s way?) participative and sociable. The question is whether it worth setting up a hierarchy of more and less socially engaged practices in the name of equality if “any attempt to realise equality entails a loss” (Rancière 1995: 64)? Eagleton (1990: 40) asserts that motivating ethical criteria in the evaluation of art means working at a loss because in “aestheticis[ing] morality... [we] make it ideologically effective [and] risk leaving it theoretically disarmed”. What vocabularies should ‘we’ employ to ascertain the qualities of participation in forms of artistic practice and maintain the critical potentials of avant-garde art? What new criteria can we motivate to evaluate artistic practice both in terms of aesthetics and ethics, participation and autonomy? For me, the issue must be squarely framed not in terms of the innate notions of participation or sociability supposedly afforded by or embedded in particular forms and practices but rather around the actual participativeness both immanent to and existent in the social construction and reception of these forms.

Social Modalities (Performativities) Of Aesthetic Representations and Experiences: The Living Image and Ways of Reading.

So, rather than chalking up a hierarchy of more or less participative forms of aesthetic practice, it may be worthwhile entertaining a more interlocutory metaphor to explore how participation works in all forms of art. Mitchell (2005: 1-6) speculates that images may be more imaginatively conceived of as a subaltern class of “things” (categorised by him as fetishes, totems and idols) that seek a variety of dialogical relations to us (‘us’ being cognate human beings rather than merely ‘audiences’, ‘spectators’, ‘viewers’ and so on). Rather than characterising images and aesthetic representations as being inert and passive surfaces upon which we project our own interested desires, specific political projects, vested models of community and so on, Mitchell argues, that by evoking our more pre-modern attitudes toward images we can re-enchant the visual field as a living and responsive surface. Art and the field of art comes with its own set of interests, desires, and affects. For Mitchell, images are oppressed precisely because their capacity for responsiveness is suppressed by more fetishistic modes of critique and decipherment. He assumes, like James Elkins (1999: 15-16) that we should be attending to the radical particularities of each aesthetic ‘thing’ (‘thing’ registering an openness in its own right); the “littleness” of individual images and their marks and less obsessed with how classes, or types of images reproduce power or how they are mediated by power. Mitchell’s (2005: 30) animistic metaphors perhaps points to new ways of approaching the visual field that is simply less “oppressive and pathological”:

Pictures and things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively; or they look back at us silently across a “gulf unbridged by language”. They present not just a surface but a face that faces a beholder. While Marx and Freud both treat the personified, subjectified, animated object with deep suspicion, subjecting their respective fetishes to iconoclastic critique, much of their energy is spent in detailing the processes by which the life of objects is produced in human experience. And it’s a real question whether in Freud’s case at least, there is any prospect of “curing” the malady of fetishism. My own position is that the subjectivized, animated object in some form or other is an incurable symptom, and that Marx and Freud are better treated as guides to the understanding of this symptom and perhaps to some transformation of it into a less pathological, damaging forms. In short, we are stuck with our magical, pre-modern attitudes toward objects, especially pictures, and our task it not to overcome these attitudes but to understand them, to work through their symptomatology.

Mitchell, like Rancière, looks toward a post-symptomatological reading of art and images. This is a condition if you like, that makes linguistic explication as the sole means of engaging with artworks a very limited and totalising way of understanding them. Apprehending artworks in terms of explication makes the image comes to stand as a sick body to be diagnosed rather than seeing the image as a vital and spectral body that is “invited to speak”, “mutely” (Mitchell 2005:33) by a variety of potential interlocutors- people, classes, bodies, politics, systems other images. For Mitchell, we need to consider resisting the discursive treatment of the body of art that, like the voice of the people reveals itself to “be cut”, and “cleaned up” (De Certeau 1984:145-146). By transferring the explicatory practice of reading-as-analysis (decipherment, decoding, denaturalising etc)– the language of conquering (the social as penetrated by the aesthetic and vice versa) onto art that resists the notion of explication (both avant-garde and so-called socially engaged art) their capacity to generate dialogue may be curtailed and shut down. Explicatory forms of writing about art tend to commodify, reify and fetishise ethical and poetic regime of images which both in their own ways resist semantic closure. Rancière notes in this regard, that in the 19th century:

... artistic images were redefined in a mobile relationship between brute presence and encoded history was also the moment when a major trade in collective imagery was created... it is a period that witnesses an unlimited proliferation of the vignettes and little tales in which society learns to recognise itself... by transposing the artistic practices of the image/hieroglyph and the suspensive image into the social negotiation of resemblances. The moment of this new exchange between artistic images and commerce in social imagery is also that of the

formation of the components of the major hermeneutics which sought to apply the procedures of surprise and decoding initiated by the new literary forms to the flood of social and commercial images. Thus was solidarity forged between the operations of art, the forms of imagery, and the discursiveness of symptoms... for by way of compensation they received a new image-value, which is nothing other than the twofold power of *aesthetic* images: the inscription of the signs of a history and the affective power of sheer presence that is no longer exchanged for anything (Rancière 2007: 17).

Mitchell's (2005) new image-value comes to promote a new conception of image making and reception that seeks to resist, tactically, the practice of symptomatic reading and the ends-means rationality of the market- the assertive autonomy of the aesthetic. The aesthetic attempts to assert its autonomy (its sheer presence) as kind of practice of freedom against the grain of reductive recognition and reflection by showing, as it were its incorporeal body. Aesthetic images exist between the ethical and poetic regime of images. Powerful images manage to assert a living autonomy that can advance into and retreat from the social. Aesthetic images have the status of a 'thing'... a virtual body with the capacity to converse, circulate, intrude, a body that does not need to collapse into the other, into itself or the relation between them. The aesthetic image is not a text, and nor is it a body, an index or an icon, but more a ghost, pure alterity.

It may be worth considering how the analogy between De Certeau's body and the work of writing (orality and writing, performance and writing) may be dramatised in terms of how we, as humans, socialised machinic subjectivities, read and write about images. Why is there a need to read and write about aesthetic images at all? For Certeau the need to write and read is a form of control over the thing and the image. For him (De Certeau 1984: 131- 153), scriptural practices are linked to modernity and within it two forms become available to writing subjects; "the machinery of representation" an instrumental and symptomatic reading of the image and "celebrate machines". In the first scriptural economy:

Two main operations characterise their activities. The first seeks primarily to remove something excessive, diseased, or unesthetic from the body, or else to add to the body what it lacks. Instruments are thus distinguished by the action they perform: cutting, tearing out, extracting, removing, etc. or else inserting, installing, attaching, covering up, assembling, sewing together, articulating, etc... from the inside or the outside, the correct an excess or a lack, but in relation to what?... this activity of extracting or adding on is carried by reference to a *code* (De Certeau 1984: 147) [added emphasis].

In this model of reading, the body (which I am making analogous to the reading of an image) experiences a violence committed against it. The virtual-corporeal muteness of the image is a sign of a lack, and it is *made to speak* as a hieroglyph would, through the imposition of a code and an operation. an operation. Bourdieu (1991: 221) may characterise this form of reading as one based on decipherment. Within this readerly regime aesthetic images are shorn of their excessiveness and surplus and become misrecognised as social vignettes or a little stories. De Certeau describes such instrumentalised practices of reading as "normative" because they depend for their voracity making the body and aesthetic images "into a story". Instrumental discourses make aesthetic images os those that are to be "believed" as "illusions" that require the imposition of a collective act of magic. This suppresses both the infinite practice of reading and the image-flesh upon which the code was inscribed. Instrumentalised readings of the mute body of the image are therefore cast by De Certeau as totalising and anti-dialogical. In order to open up the potential of aesthetic images new practices of readings need to be produced the body. In other words, our instruments must change. The site of reading needs to be seen as the site of struggle between two communities (body/image and writing/reading) and their positions.

De Certeau proposes a second form of scriptural practice that suggests a new relation between reading/writing and the image/body. Scriptural technologies such as "celibate machines" are "theoretical fictions" that, in "closing in on [themselves]" (De Certeau 1984: 150-153) recognise the impossibility

of communication (Nancy 1991: 8-12). Within this technology writing/reading confronts the image becomes as an autonomous speaking subject in its own right that engages with writing/reading as an interlocutor. In some ways, what De Certeau is calling for here, in this scriptural regime is certain critical dialogical distance between reading and image, writing and the body; an exchange that is not based on sacrifice or domination, but upon relationality. This throws both into crisis what is sayable, thinkable and visible. De Certeau's characterisation of this "celebrate- machinic scriptural practice" De Certeau (1984: 151 -152) resists easy citation, so a list must suffice in describing what he means by it:

- These productions are fantastic not in the indefiniteness of the reality that they make appear at the frontiers of language, but in the relationship between the mechanisms that produce simulacra and the absence of anything else.
- There are no dead in the field of graphic and linguistic operations.
- These tragic-comedies, fragments of myths, recognise the impossibility of communication, of which language is both the promise and the phantasm.
- Henceforth, the important thing is neither what is said (a content), nor the saying itself (an act), but rather the transformation, and the invention of still unsuspected mechanisms that will allow us to multiply the transformations.

Similarly, Mitchell (2005: 33) in arguing for the critical interlocutionary status of images achieves a similar status for the image/body that De Certeau does. He attempts to retrieve a certain strategic autonomy for aesthetic images and the reading practices we bring to them:

In any event, it may be time to rein in our notions of the political stakes in a critique of visual culture, and to scale down the rhetoric of the 'power of images'. Images are certainly not powerless, but they may be a lot weaker than we think. The problem is to refine and complicate our estimate of their power and the way it works. That is why I shift the question from what pictures do to what they want, from power to desire, from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to be interrogated or (better) to *be invited to speak*. If the power of images is like the power of the weak, that may be why their desire is correspondingly strong: to make up for their actual impotence. We as critics may want pictures to be stronger than they actually are in order to give ourselves a sense of power in opposing, exposing, or praising them [added emphasis].

Mitchell calls for (2005:188) new attitude toward images and a new kind of addressability for them. He posits a relational theorisation of the aesthetic image that is post-symptomological. He achieves this by classifying images within three loosely defined and dynamically related conceptual categories which bear a strong resemblance to Rancière's (2007:22) "naked", "ostensive" and "metaphorical image":

Totemism, fetishism, and idolatry are not to be regarded as discreet, essential categories of objects... they are rather to be understood as the names of three *relations* to things; three forms of "object relations," if you will, that we can form with an infinite variety of concrete entities (including words and concepts) in our experience.

Like Rancière (2007:49), Mitchell begins to think through the image in terms of an interdependence between the notion of regime (what Rancière later corresponds to "sentence", similar to Foucault's "discourse") and the notion of infinite reading ("image") advocating a tentative practice of "sounding out" to apprehend the "alterity of images" (Rancière 2007:3). For Mitchell, "the totem-fetish-idol distinction, then is not necessarily a *visible* difference, but can only be apprehended through a *sounding* of the image, an inquiry into what it says, and does, what rituals and myths circulate around it" (Mitchell 2005:189) which is a relational, interlocutionary endeavour. He explores the extent to which our stance on images may be imagined in *relational terms* (understood by Mitchell as configurations of mutual desire). He extends on this by arguing that aesthetic images act as indexes for modes of community, as Rancière might say; that aesthetic images "inscrib[e] forms of community" (Rancière 2007:3). Mitchell

(2005:194) makes the leap of claiming that images are communities in their own right!

Totems, fetishes, and idols are, finally, things that *want* things, that demand, desire, even require things... It goes without saying that they have 'lives of their own' as animated, vital objects. What do they want from us? Idols make the greatest demands; they characteristically want human sacrifice... Fetishes, as I've suggested, characteristically want to be beheld- to 'be held' close by, or even reattached to, the body of the fetishist. Totems want to be your friend and companion.

Compare Mitchell's imagistic community of the subaltern, for example, to Rancière's understanding of the image as a communal surface and we see an interlocutory (relational-dialectical) metaphor emerging as a relation between the social and the aesthetic. Rancière argues that "...these forms [art images] therefore appear to bring forth in very different contexts, figures of community equal to themselves" (Rancière 2004: 18) and that "figures of community are aesthetically designed". However the terms of the dialogue between the community of viewers and images as community is not without tension. Menke attempts to make sense of the logic of the aesthetic, by pointing toward its "interminable processuality" (Menke 1998: 48) that defers "enacted signifier formation" (Menke 1998: 47) and "disrupts" "identificatory" and "automatic understanding" (Menke 1998: 47-52). Aesthetic images, for him, are the product of "failure of automatic understanding" (Menke 1998: 69) because the polysemy in the materiality of the art work, an "array of fragments" (Menke 1998: 54) provides,

... no criteria for the selections [semiotic] to be made from the material can be gained from the material itself and there is no context that encompasses the aesthetic signs, then the aesthetically processual enactment of signifier formation must end in failure... when the direction of the act of selection is reversed, it becomes interminably deferred... aesthetic disruptions of understanding consists precisely in triggering efforts to create contexts for meaningful use.

This space of tension between the social (meaningful use) and the aesthetic (meaning deferred), writing and the body, the image and reading is thus described as more relational and interlocutory affair. This is perhaps because the aesthetics field, as Bakhtin (1990:5) has argued presents the problem of consummation in human communication. If we imagine the aesthetic image as a living thing that engages with a human interlocutor then it could be said that the relation is one of "facing"/"clashing" between the sentence and image; a form of "parataxis" (Rancière. 2007:28- 45) . Seeing the transactional exchange in this way would offer a more subtle theorisation of the social-aesthetic. Modalities of art making, operating within historically defined everyday situations, may be thus imagined as configurations of opportunities where a number of fields, discursivities, narratives meet, intermingle and impinge upon one another within various configurations of desire in the encounter between viewer and artwork. In other words, we may be able to take a dialogical condition as axiomatic in our relation to *all* images, without collapsing art into life, and life into art. As Adorno (1997: 6-9) may argue, the relation between the aesthetic and the social is one of a productive irreconcilability. There is a frissive contact zone between these two incommensurable autonomous forms. Rancière's (2007:45) "sentence-image parataxis" (montage) resonates with this line of thinking. He sees the relation between sentence and image as constituting a clash of sorts:

By sentence- image I intend the combination of these two functions that are to be defined aesthetically- that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image. The text's part in the representative schema was the conceptual linking of actions, while the image's was the supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance to it. The sentence-image overturns this logic. The sentence-function is that of linking. But the sentence now links in as much as it in what it gives. And this flesh or substance is, paradoxically, that of the great passivity of things without any rationale. For its part, the image has become the active, disruptive power of the leap- that of the change of regime between two sensory orders. The sentence-image is the unison of these two functions. It is the unit that divides the chaotic forms of the great parataxis into phrasal power of continuity and imaging power of rupture. As sentence, it accommodates paratactic power by repelling the schizophrenic explosion. As image, with its disruptive force repels the big sleep of indifferent triteness or the great communal intoxication of bodies. The sentence-image reigns in the power of the great parataxis and stands in the way of its vanishing into schizophrenia or consensus (Rancière 2007: 46).

If we think in terms of relational situations between aesthetic image and viewer as “organised clashes” (Rancière 2007:49) between ways of performing in social space and in terms of materialities (reading, writing, speaking etc) rather than in terms of essences, and forms, essences in forms we may begin to understand images and reading, the social and the aesthetic as a kind of “rubbing up against” relation that offers opportunities to produce new configurations of the sayable, the thinkable, the visible. The question, for me, becomes less about the degree to which artistic practices lend themselves to participation per se than it is about formulating a critical and animated language of which to speak of the social modalities (the rhythms of fracture and suture, difference and repetition) afforded by various artistic practices. This may involve unpacking the history and contemporary social-aesthetic in an attempt to develop a vocabulary, and approach (rather than a method) that articulates the *performative modalities* and potential generativities latent/present in/between various artistic/visual practices. We may need to examine how these modalities operate/play out under varying dialogical circumstances and observe aesthetic modalities at play. Modality, for me, becomes a key metaphor in thinking through the relationship between the aesthetic and social-political because as Rancière notes, “[I] believe it is important to note that the political dimension of the arts can be seen first of all in the way that their forms materially propose the paradigms of community” (Rancière 2000:17).

Indeed the reverse of what Rancière claims may be entertained. If the aesthetic proposes paradigms of community in its materialities, then there exists the possibility that the political may also propose paradigms for the aesthetic. In Rancière’s “poetics of politics” (Rancière 2000:113) he remarks that being-in-common is how the aesthetic manifests itself in the political because “every social political movement has a will toward aesthetic appropriation... the aesthetic dimension of the reconfiguration of the relationships between doing, seeing, and saying that circumscribe the being-in-common is inherent to every political or social movement” (Rancière.2000:17). It seems to me that a generative and tentative theoretical framework can be developed whereby the aesthetic and the social are again; productively “interlaced” (Rancière 2007:41). A certain conversational distance, a certain transactional autonomy, “more modest overlaps of art and revolution” (Raunig. 2008: 203) is what I am proposing here.

The Aesthetic Neighbourhood: Two Logics- (Aesthetic Negativity and Aesthetic Sovereignty).

Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it (Adorno 1997: 6-7).

I have established two ways of apprehending the relation between the social and aesthetic- one of intimacy and another of clashing. It occurs to me that if we seek an interlacing of sorts between these two fields we need to examine the logics that emerge presently in the discourse of socially engaged/oriented art in terms of this. For me two appear that may be useful signposts for artists wishing to explore this contact line between the social and the aesthetic in this art of situations, this life-art dialectic, art and collaboration. I want to examine here, in some detail, the metaphors that are put to work in describing the relation between the social and the aesthetic in literature on socially engaged and socially oriented art in order to exhibit “a community constructed by a fraternity of metaphors” (Rancière 2007:55) or a “partition of the sensible” (Rancière 2005:13). I am particularly interested in exploring the tensions between the logic of socially engaged art and socially oriented art which, in the literature, provide radically different conceptions of the social aesthetic question. I am interested in how they may be seen to commune, befriend, converse, seduce, penetrate, exploit, sacrifice and betray one another. The logics I identify offer competing definitions of what constitutes a relation between the social and the aesthetic, a thematic

which plays out regularly in the literature on public, community-based art criticism and the theoretical paradigms upon which various writers draw to make their claims. I want to investigate whether these two logics ought to be or can be reconciled- if I can “synthesise what is fractured and thus make its irreconcilability determinate” (Adorno 1997: 221). I want to know if reconciliation is possible or is it best to leave them as dialogical partners, voices that “glance sideways at each other” (Holloway & Kneale. 1998: 76).

I argue later in this section that the aporia in the social-aesthetic relation may not be a metaphysical one at all but rather could constitute a symbolic struggle over who has the right to define, invent, fictionalise, dramatise a new global-international avant-garde that situates itself (as so many before have done) in the all too familiar interstices between the social and the aesthetic, art and life etc. To arrive at such a conclusion would be a disappointment. To a large extent, the logics I describe here emerge in the critical debate between various players in the field of socially engaged/oriented art as it is presently defined- Bishop versus Kester, Kester versus Bourriaud, Kwon versus Kester and so on. I hope that this discussion may set the scene for how artists can play/work both within these logics, between them, outside them and in so doing disrupt easy “adjacencies” (Kester 2006: 2) between the political and the artistic, the social and the aesthetic, autonomy and community and consider how these logics may be applied to working within the context of the informal.

Socially Engaged Art: Work!

Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept and thus become uncertain of itself right to its innermost fibre (Adorno 1997: 2).

The first logic I want to discuss, what I term *the dialectical logic* of socially engaged art, offers a spatial metaphor where the aesthetic and the social are visualized within a dynamic field of agonism¹. It is imagined as a place in which the transactional exchange between the artistic/aesthetic and the political/social is defined as a finite relationship constrained by power. The agonistic field is conceived of as a competitive game, a space of struggle: “a relation of forces” structured by the dispositions of agents and the positions they take within a field². The social-aesthetic is almost constructed here as a scene or stage upon which a finite number of specific forces operate, play out against each other and in so doing structure the field itself. Within this logic, it is the collision between elements within a field which are deemed as the site of productivity. Aesthetic practice is imagined, within this logic, as necessarily contaminated by the social-discursive. Or it is conceptualized as discursive category in its own right and because of this aesthetic activity within this logic can but only be understood in terms of being artificially constructed, historically determined and politically strategic rather than a given human essence. Because the aesthetic, here, is essentially demystified and denaturalized the conceptual tension between the social and aesthetic is formulated as an irreconcilable, procedural dialectic. This agonistic logic is firmly aligned, historically with ‘critical’ and expository practices such as the institutional critique of artists such as Hans Haacke, Santiago Sierra, and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. The autonomy of the aesthetic is seen by this logic as at once as its source of political power but at the same time is regarded with skepticism and suspicion, because it has shown itself, historically, to be susceptible to cooptation by institutional power.

2 Agonism, understood here in Chantal Mouffe’s terms (2006: 2) as a form of adversarial politics in which conflicts are played out in a symbolic register (democratic forums). “This type of relation which I have proposed to call “agonism”. While antagonism is a we/they relation in which two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents... as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism”.

3 Agents here could be artists, gallerists, curators, funders, community members, museum directors, publishers, politicians and so on.

Reading of aesthetic practices within this agonistic logic must be symptomatic, constrained and self-reflexive rather than infinite. Readings are only valuable if they are borne out of struggle and if its conclusions can be apprehended by the intellect. Reading, within this logic, must seek to make visible the relations of power in the social order. The sub-field of art within this logic is situated within a broader field of social power (Bourdieu 1993: 30) and thus this agonistic logic imagines the social-aesthetic field as thoroughly conflict-riven, political, historically determined, as one discursive among many and in this sense the aesthetic activity is problematised (like politics) as always “based on some form of exclusion” (Mouffe 2006: 18) regardless of the form an art making practice takes. Here the aesthetic is never innocent and certainly not seen as transcendental. Artistic practice is seen as thoroughly complicit in the machinations of power but can however retain certain elements of ‘free-play’ on the condition that it realises a broader emancipator project. In this sense, art is not valued because it is transcendent but because it offers a unique set of discursive and critical resources that other fields may not. Art practices within this logic emphasizes visibility over vision, suggesting that the aesthetic, although a place or regime shot through with power, ideology and history can, under the right social conditions provide unique insights into an oppositional, political project because the aesthetic is a symbolic space, a place apart in which work of constructing a democracy can be done. Aesthetic practice takes as its task the “transformation of antagonism into agonism” (Mouffe 2006: 20). Because of this, the dialectical logic holds the promise of ushering in what some would call a ‘revolution’ in the social via the aesthetic and in the same vein a revolution in the aesthetic via the social because each field is differently structured and a collision between them would unmask the ideologies operating within each. An emphasis on dialectics makes socially engaged art seem more strategic in its social orientation, hierarchical, hard, goal-oriented, critical and penetrative placing emphasis on praxis rather than autonomy as a challenge to various noxious regimes such as absolutism, fascism and totalitarianism and in our context, neo-liberal ideology.

This dialectical logic is best exemplified in the work of Grant Kester. He describes the dialogical and the aesthetic as if they were a tools to be put the the service of a social project. Here, the autonomy of the aesthetic is made to work under certain conditions. A dialectical logic necessitates an autonomous art which is constantly under “renegotiation”, involving “cyclical³... shift[s] within the field of art... a re-articulation of aesthetic autonomy and an increasing permeability between art and other zones of symbolic production” (Kester 2006: 2). Kester continually relies on an antagonistic rhetoric (‘us’ (community) versus “them” (artistic avant-garde) (Kester 2004: 17-50), “duration” versus “somantic shock”) (Kester 2004: 50-82), discursive dialogism versus modernist autonomy (Kester 2000:79; Kester 2000: 2) in his formulation of workable dialogical art practices often mistaking the dialogical for the dialectical. His writings constantly propose a series of checks and balances to ensure that the social and aesthetic are suitably equilibrated in order to ensure that *the work* of democracy (rather than the play of imagination) gets done. In this sense, a dialectic logic, because of its preoccupation with questions of power, needs to point to *tension* as the site of productivity denouncing what falls outside of the ambit of social *work and struggle* (play, experimentation, disruption, avant-garde “undoing”, “unmaking”, “unsiting” etc) as a form of “dialogical determinism” (Kester 2004: 182). Its main interest is in making invisible structures in the social body visible. It makes sense, therefore within this logic for playful avant-garde practices to be seen as self-serving, exclusive and frivolous, ideologically suspect because nothing but labour can achieve what is desirable; tangible, political outcomes. Logics such as Kester’s therefore resorts to the rhetoric of mastery and critique to achieve their ends which is done in the name of a people seldom named struggling to define itself, on aesthetic terms, with the politics of delegation and representation. The productivist orientation of the dialectical logic reveals a bias for the social by circumscribing the aesthetic within it which finally suggests that this logic favours *social work* as its *raison d’être*.

Socially *Oriented* Art: Play!

Art must find domination a source of shame and seek to overturn the perdurable, the desideratum of the concept of the sublime (Adorno 1997: 260).

The second; a *relational logic* of socially *oriented* art (upon which the former dialectic logic depends upon for many of its revelations) metaphorises the relationship between the social and aesthetic terms of emergence, essence and immanence on a genetic *plane*. This plane is characterized less by forces acting upon objects as it is articulated by gentler distributions and is marked out spatially by partitions and activated by nodes of possibility. It imagines spaces between things (liminal, tactical, and interstitial) as the primary site of meaning-making. In this sense, the social and the aesthetic rather than being seen as clashing in a struggle, where the one category risks being mapped onto, sublimated by the other through collision, the aesthetic and social “incline” toward one another instantiating a critical distance, a friendly resemblance between one another. Socially oriented art is exemplified in the notion of the relational which is seen as a more ideal, egalitarian, transcendental, potentially *utopian domain* (by virtue of its flatness) wherein infinite readings (Rancière 2000: 114) of the social and the aesthetic body can be perpetually made and unmade which granted by the very equality that is established between those two bodies that is conceived of in terms of friendship, neighborliness, diplomacy. This logic makes socially oriented art seem more ludic in character; a place of play that is flattened topographically, softer and thinner in texture than the agonistic field. Because of this, the logic often regards its ‘engaged’ counterpart as vulgar because of its overt interest in instrumentalising and operationalising the resources of the aesthetic in the name of social transformation which, it implicitly contents, suggests an unequal relation between the two principles. The relational logic places the social and the aesthetic onto the same plane; in a position of pure dialogicality. It takes the equality between the social and the aesthetic as its starting point.

If force is to be tolerated within this logic then it is as a gentler, tactical exertion in which the social, rather than penetrating the aesthetic it is incorporated into the social. They are mutually diffused in their encounter with one another and appear to playfully redistribute one another. The tactical as a kind of ‘play ethic’; a “practice of language, alterity” (De Certeau 1984: 9) is celebrated within this logic because it is from the place-of-in-betweenness/Deweyian in-itself (fact and fiction, history and the present, parole and langue, art and life) that a creative agent can “poach” (De Certeau 1984: 7) non-violently from both sides of the social-aesthetic relation in order to be not so much ‘productive’ (as is the case in the first logic) as meaningful. The ‘everyday’ and ‘art’ are seen as the materials that can be drawn into in-between spaces in order to generate, produce, organize and maintain a practice of infinite reading and meaning making which is ultimately the ontology of this logic –reading for its own sake, pure creative bricolage which some might say, may be recognised as a closed circle.

It is for this reason that the relational logic resists notions such measurement, explication, explanation, goals, directives, instrumental criticality, symptomology, which it sees as intrusions on its autonomy and incursions on its ontic. It does not want to commit symbolic violence against any practice through the operationalisation and instrumentalism of the aesthetic and so it tends phenomenalise everything as the “prose of the world” (De Certeau 1984: 11) deferring aesthetic and cultural work as potentially limiting to its creative impulse. This being-for-itself/being-in-between relation, the inclining of the aesthetic and the social can be compared, when taken to its extreme, to the union of lovers (rather than the exchange between friends, neighbors, citizens). As Bataille may suggest, this kind of order of transaction; the desire for pure consummation, quickly leads to ecstasy in which one party, in order to retain its integrity,

must resist oblivious dissolution into the other or relation itself and can only survive by reinstating its distance and claiming its sovereignty/autonomy. In order to retain its ludic orientation the relational logic must, despite itself, draw away in the moment before, ecstasy, communion, conclusion and ultimately in doing so valorises the autonomy of the aesthetic. It discovers on the brink of collapse between the two principles (the social and aesthetic) that the *relation of equality is itself an aesthetic principle*. And so this relational logic in assuming that the aesthetic domain is at once the origin of equality itself and its organizing principle must ultimately assign sovereignty to the aesthetic as that place *from which* the social may be delineated and circumscribed.

It is this act of withdrawal on the brink of semantic collapse that gives birth to the assumption that the aesthetic is indeed a supplement to reason, that it is a non-discursive domain that escapes dominative reason. As such, the aesthetic, by its very sovereignty, becomes paradoxically the origin of the egalitarian principle itself. The relational logic therefore grants the aesthetic the right to effect a divorce from the social while maintaining access to it. It can traverse and travel through the social and in so doing destabilize the everyday, disrupt socially normative practices, perturb the institutional not as a penetrative and threatening agent but as a kind of a friend to the social. This betrayal of the social *by the aesthetic* is, of course, underplayed in the discourse of relational or socially oriented art because by pretending that the betrayal never took place in the first place, the aesthetic can be made to look like a struggle-free domain- pure, uncontaminated by power, a place to think contradiction, to enter into play for its own sake; to practice the pure art of disinterestedness; in other words to *become emblem of universality itself*. The relational logic therefore, finally, eschews the world and its ideologies. It favours the situation over the representation of a situation because the situation is the emblem of collapse. This finally suggests that a relational logic of socially oriented art favours *aesthetic play* as its *raison d'être*.

Post Autonomy1: relational theories of the aesthetic.

The distinction between art and other realms of knowledge is made operative in the osmotic exchange between different capacities to do things which opens up the creation of new subject positions and articulations of democratic equivalence (Bang Larsen 2006: 172).

...the structures of power must become structures of feeling and the name for this mediation from property to propriety is the aesthetic" (Eagleton 1990: 42).

The discourse of aesthetic participation, around the "open work" casts the aesthetic experience as taking place in a conflict free processual zone, an open space for the pure making of meaning. This idealist/universalist rhetoric is exemplified in the reification of the "open work", where, according to Eco, there "are no privileged points of view and all available perspectives are equally valid and rich in potential" (Eco 2006: 35). The mythology of the open work is sustained by the notion of the "death of the author" where it is argued that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 2006: 45). The "open work" may be associated with Rancière's (2004: 22) "aesthetic regime of the arts" that unlike the "regime of visibility" strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter and genre.

Reading of the finished, consummated art object as socially "open" leads naturally to the assignment of sociality into the process of artistic production itself. Socially oriented theories of art therefore encour-

age artists to polyphonise their work on the level of their own practice, to invite others to intervene in their creative process, or to find ways in which their work itself can intervene in the organic practices and processes of the everyday, non-aesthetic experience and institutional culture. Despite the rhetoric of this openness the very autonomy artists enjoy in making symbolic goods for a privileged circle of consumers is consequently mapped or even imposed on the social. It is this unproblematised movement from the open work to its manifestation in interventionist, everyday art making, that makes relational artist vulnerable to criticism. An interventionist approach can mean that artists open their work to “aesthetic evangelism”, “aesthetic orthopaedic” where their work acts as a “social ameliorative” (Kester 2004: 88).

This kind of innocent discourse around the openness of socially oriented art is well-illustrated in Suzi Gablik’s (1992) advocacy of “new genre public art” practices. She contends that this new form of art advances “a profound and necessary paradigm shift” for artists. A “connective aesthetic” (Gablik 1992: 2) that artists premise their work on “listening”, radical “interconnectedness” (Gablik 1992: 4) “which is oriented around the achievement of shared understandings and the essential intertwining of self and other, self and society” (Gablik 1992: 6). This set of artistic attitudes is provided as an aural/oral antidote to the dominance of the autonomous Cartesian self in Western culture, emblematised in the ocular arrogance/assertiveness of the “disembodied eye” (Gablik 1992:4) which Gablik (1992: 6-7) allusively maintains is somehow responsible for various ecological, social and spiritual crises endemic to the contemporary situation. It is a common strategy for a relational logic to employ social rationales such as these in order to validate its autonomy. In its very openness, “connective aesthetics” cannot seem to formulate a concrete radical project or goal. Gablik’s argument reads somewhat tautologically as: ‘we need a more connective art to make a more connective culture’. The discourse of the open work cannot make nuanced differentiations between cultural individualism and autonomy in its critique of so-called ocular-centric art practices and further unable to develop a nuanced framework in which all artistic practices are seen to be dialogical, ‘connective’ in their own unique ways. Bearing such limitations in mind, the relational logic of a socially oriented art practice, attempts to redeem the aesthetic as a kind of privileged place that offers the radical promise of social renewal by virtue of its very autonomy. However it is an openness that is covertly closed because of the fetishisation and privileging of the artist as a creative agent who is said to possess the sensibilities, attitudes, competences, imagination that are required to mend the social world.

We see such a privileging of the “indeterminateness of a discursive aesthetic” (Kester 2000:6) “dialogical determinism (Kester 2004:182) playing out in the conversation between Doug Ashford, Wendy Ewald, Nina Felshin and Patricia C. Phillips in *Art Journal* (2006). Here, collaborative artistic practice is seen as an end in itself rather than having a firm set of political coordinates that informs its direction, methods and principles. As Kester has remarked, is that despite its rhetoric of egalitarianism, the relational logic often descends into an implicit paternalism. The suggestion that the resources of the aesthetic may be tapped by its agents in order to realise social-ameliorative/orthopaedic (Kester:1995; Kester 2004: 88) ends is essentially patronising. It points to the fact that ‘communities’ are implicitly perceived by artists, their sponsoring agents, and art world as a deficient, deformed society of “commonplace others eking out their existence within the normative parameters of a given social order” (Kester: 2006: 2). Kwon (2004: 139-141) argues, this implicit institutional orthopaedism often becomes a hidden structure in community based projects that is internalised by participants from the start. The paternalism implicit in a relational approach to socially oriented art infects the language that practitioners used to describe their mandate. For example, Ashford (2006: 70) asserts problematically that artists should be required to “design power-free areas and conversations that can move groups from history to a future...” , to “raise people’s consciousness through conversation...” By situating the responsibility for social change in the facilitative hands of the artist Ashford creates the illusion of an “essence of freedom” for artists.

However, for the community, this is a freedom deferred because without the aesthetic worker the practice of freedom cannot be wholly undertaken, coordinated, legitimised, published and so on. Communities are thus imagined as essentially static, homogenous, groupings by artists; that implicitly require the dynamic services of ‘socially responsible’ artists and art to ‘move’ them, to ‘raise their consciousness’ by facilitating legitimate aesthetic experiences for them, which is argued as valuable in and for its own sake. In other words, artists rely on the continual deformity of the community in order to validate their social practice. Relational interventionism thus imposes itself on the social body in the name of creative autonomy.

This orthopaedic attitude toward that which is ‘other’ to aesthetic culture (or what Bourdieu would term “legitimate culture”) is perhaps due to the fact that residues of bourgeois culture continues to haunt efforts to privilege the aesthetic as the domain of freedom. As Kester (2004: 45) remarks art remains as “a reminder of the utopia of plenitude slumbering in the lap of bourgeois capitalism”. In this regard, Terry Eagleton (1988: 327-329) links the aesthetic, without hesitation, to the historical emergence of the bourgeois order. His deconstructive analysis of the aesthetic suggests to me that the residues of its original formation continue to haunt contemporary attempts to make art more socially oriented. Eagleton traces the emergence of *hegemony* as a form of aesthetic social control on the part of the bourgeoisie developed in the 19th century as an alternative to traditional forms of coercive control as they were exerted before their rise to power: “the aesthetic, at least in its original formulations, has little enough to do with art. It denotes instead a whole program of social, psychical and political reconstruction on the part of the early European bourgeoisie” (Eagleton 1988: 328). He elaborates on this idea by arguing that if the project of the bourgeoisie was to understand the political body/subject as potentially malleable, to be governed from the inside as it were its form of governance needed to draw on the resources of the aesthetic in order to achieve the dream of a social order based on private property. It was necessary to *aestheticise the political body* so that it could operate *as if it were a work of art*: “like a work of art the subject introjects the law which governs it as the very principle of its free identity and so, in an Althusserian phrase comes to work “all by itself, without the need of political restraint” (Eagleton 1988: 329).

Within this scheme, the subject internalises the law of the dominant faction of society (the bourgeoisie, capital, the market) without really knowing it. Citizens are interpellated into being a “good subject” through various cultural-aesthetic institutional technologies (the museum, the gallery, salon, school, advertising etc) and, of course, by the specific objects and practices it uses to do its work. The bourgeois order can naturalise its right to govern under the scheme of a so-called universal human capacity: the aesthetic experience. As such, the subjectivity of the political subject in the bourgeois order must be necessarily split between work and play. This Rancière (2000:114) terms “a vision of division” effected so that the subject can be made to subscribe ‘naturally’ to the alienating effects of private property. Those without the means of production must exchange their labour on the market in order to survive. Potential political resistance to this situation of alienation is displaced and passified by the ruling faction into the worker’s leisure time which is spent in the domain of cultural consumption. The inherent alienation of working society based on the acquisition of goods, the circulation of commodities, waged labour, social mobility, reification therefore comes to be masked through the aesthetic representation itself (cinema, art, advertising, theatre etc) which, by virtue of its displacement from the arena of work, makes it mis-recognised by the subject as an index universal essence, ‘timeless values’ and pure disinterestedness. The aesthetic, in these terms, plays its own part in deferring equality indefinitely.

How then can aesthetic practice be conceived of as liberatory? If the aesthetic is repressive in its own way, it is through its very disinterestedness that we, ironically, “glimpse the possibility of a non- alienated object...one quite the reverse of a commodity which... returns our tender gaze and whispers that it was

created for us alone” (Eagleton 1990: 78). If, on the one hand, the aesthetic representation ineluctably seduces us into the “utopia of plenitude slumbering in the lap of bourgeois capitalism” (Kester 2004: 45) it also contains the seeds of the destruction of the order that created it in the first place. The aesthetic representation allows the subject “... to turn around upon [itself], stand a little apart from [its] own vantage point and begin to grasp the relation of[its] capacities to reality in a moment of wondering *estrangement*...”[added emphasis] (Eagleton 1990: 89). Between this feeling of empathy and estrangement the subject comes to experience, through the aesthetic experience, the illusion of a social world where “reciprocity of feeling” (Eagleton 1990: 75) and community exists where it does not, diverting attention away from the fact that the social world, under capitalism, is premised on alienation and shaped by class conflict.

If the aesthetic, in acting in the interests of bourgeois culture, is conceived of as a repressive technology, this is both a blessing and a curse for it. The problem for the bourgeois order, as Eagleton puts it, is that the aesthetic is a child that then turns on its master, and becomes the very place from which bourgeois authority is challenged. Because the aesthetic is that open place where “the law that is not a law” is invoked, it is by it that the rule of bourgeois law itself may be overturned. “There is a greater risk still, however that ... the aesthetic begins as a supplement to reason; but we have learned from Derrida that it is in the manner of such lowly supplements to supplant what they are meant to subserve” (Eagleton 1990: 45). Because of “aesthetic negativity” (Menke 1998, the very irreconcilability in the aesthetic representation, the eternal oscillations it provokes between the level of the particular and the universal (Adorno 1997:238) a glimpse of the radical is thus proffered in the materiality of the art work itself. Because the aesthetic image is a representation of crisis “the aesthetic may be the language of political hegemony and an imaginary consolation for a bourgeois bereft of a home but it is also, in however idealist a vein, the discourse of utopian critique of the bourgeois social order” (Eagleton 1988:337). What Eagleton is alluding to here is that the aesthetic can be imagined as a place in which to think contradiction, a place of oscillation which by virtue of its openness is ripe for cooptation either by the bourgeois order or radical revolutionaries. It therefore becomes a site of contestation between political liberation and legitimate culture; a site of struggle and clashing between revolutionary and conservative interests. Avant-gardism and anti-aesthetic art practice becomes, in this sense, “a rejection of the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois order rather than a wholesale rejection of aestheticism” (Burger 2006:48).

It is significant how easily the bourgeois aesthetic hegemony as it is described by Eagleton is echoed in contemporary accounts of a “relational aesthetic” (Bourriaud 2006) which may be seen as an extension and refinement of avant-garde culture. Here, in this discourse of innocence, the privileged work of the artist, the indeterminacy of the creative act and its reception- in other words the appreciative register of “open work” is mapped unproblematically as a mode of art production onto a broader utopian and emancipatory social project as if there were no contradiction between the place and its project. This is done by employing a spatial metaphor of the aesthetic domain as a kind of ideological catch all, an infinitely malleable place that exists in various gaseous states, somewhat Brownian, somewhat thermodynamic, a system undergoing change, a closed game, existing as a kind of sub-atomic stage upon which open ended dialectic between chaos and complexity unfolds. This way of thinking through the relationship between the social and aesthetic as a system of perturbations and equilibria, a theatre in which machinic- organic concatenations unfold end enfold, a plane in which articulations and distributions miraculously take place as if by no human agency, without rational actors, a chaotic game is perhaps best exemplified in Guattari’s (1995) notion “ethico-aesthetic” paradigm. This is subsequently appropriated by the French curator and art writer, Nicolas Bourriaud (2006) in his “relational aesthetic” and Gerald Raunig (2007: 17) in his Schillerian “transversal reterritorialisations”.

Bourriaud's (2006) argument is fairly standard, casting art making and its reception within the "poetic regime of images" (Rancière 2004: 23). This, like many accounts of the relational, begins by asserting the transversal, egalitarian possibilities of aesthetic creation which then withdraw these possibilities into an autonomous privileged realm (the exhibition), lest it realises its true radical transgressive potential of aesthetic work. According to Bourriaud, "*the exhibition is a privileged place* where instant communities like this can be established: depending upon the degree of audience participation demanded by the artist; the nature of the works on show and the models of sociability that are represented or suggested, and exhibition can generate a particular 'domain of exchanges'" [added emphasis] (Bourriaud 2006: 82).

Drawing heavily on the work of the late Felix Guattari, (grafting his work on psychosis onto his curatorial practice) Bourriaud pays little attention to "the exhibition" as a "privileged" symbolic space, an institutional site of audiencing as Bourdieu and others may characterise it (Rose 2006: 196). He problematically assumes that the sociable is encoded into the formal register of a given work. For Bourriaud the aesthetic experience is a "domain of exchanges" which relies overtly on how a given artist encodes participation *into* their work. As evidenced in the passage below Bourriaud cannot avoid buying into certain formalism in the valorisation of aesthetic autonomy and the identity of the artist. This is illustrated well, here, where Bourriaud responds to critics who accuse his relational aesthetics of a limiting formalism:

What these critics overlook is that the content of these artistic proposals has to be judged in a formal way: in relation to art history, and bearing in mind the political value of forms...the exhibition is an interstice, defined in relation to the alienation reigning everywhere else... so the exhibition does not deny the social relationships in effect, but it does distort them and project them into a space-time frame encoded by the art system, and by the artist him/herself (Bourriaud 2006: 82).

This dependency on the codings of an artist is a hardly a relational idea. If we accept that artworks are encoded with specific "models of sociability" then they must also be decoded by a viewer. However this decoding takes place within a hermeneutic circle which ideologically circumscribes it. The gallery often performs this circumscribing function and yet it is casually assumed, by Bourriaud, to be a fully inclusive institution in which "we", (and be this we assume him to mean society in general, the general public) can participate in on an egalitarian basis. The gallery visitor is imagined as a molecule directed to interacting with other molecules in an non-alienating aesthetic vacuum chamber of the gallery space by the artworks themselves or the manner in which a body of works are "relationalised" by a curator. There is a certain risk here that in ignoring the value laden nature of the gallery site the texture of a relational logic can paste over potential conflicts and exclusions in order to "promote specious forms of universalism" (Eagleton 1990: 9), that ultimately "blocks and mystifies political movement" (Eagleton 1990: 9). In other words, the "poetic regime of images", as it is distorted in the writings of Bourriaud and others, by situating the democratisation of culture in the formalities of aesthetic practice, in the mystical figure of the artist, curator and its attendant institutions, a place is made "proper to the political" when the "political is precisely the absence of a proper" (Rancière 2000:119). The relational aesthetic cannot give up the gallery as a site of privilege. Also it cannot deal specifically with it as a specific, historical site of modelisation and therefore cannot realise an authentic radical project only serving to impose the notion that the art institution and by extension the domain legitimate culture is the rightful home of democratic practice.

It is interesting that in *Post Production* (2002), the prequel to *Relational Aesthetics* (2006), the art institution and aesthetic experience is made to overtly mirror the dynamics of the market. Bourriaud exposes his curatorial practice as essentially underwritten by neo-liberal agenda by making a firm analogies between practices of the artists in his stable, his own curatorial work, and the ethos of the unregulated market (confused here as the informal) and technocratic consumerism. The curator makes readers believe

that aesthetic creation and reception are nothing but a distinctive brand in the globalised service industry (which it increasingly is), motivating an overused trope of the artist and the viewer as “productive consumer” in order to argue for the privileged relationality of the gallery. Poaching on the work of De Certeau, he claims: “what matters is what we make of the elements placed at our disposal. We are tenants of culture: society is a text whose law is production, a law that so-called passive users divert from within, through the practices of postproduction. Each artwork, De Certeau suggests, is inhabitable in the manner of a rented apartment” (Bourriaud 2002: 24). Extending this line of thought, Bourriaud offers ‘the market’ as the primary ambience of new sociability acting as a substitute for revolutionary collective action. The curator asks:

Why has the market become the omnipresent referent for contemporary artistic practices? First, it represents a collective form, a disordered, proliferating and endlessly renewed conglomeration that does not depend on the command of a single author: a market is not designed, it is a unitary structure composed of multiple individual signs (Bourriaud. 2002: 28).

In the blithe acceptance of Guattarian notions such as “assemblages of subjectivisation” (Guattari 1995: 11), “chaosmotic enfoldings” Bourriaud cannot resist making aesthetic autonomy (emblematised by the exhibition) to function as if it were a stock market. Bourriaud makes this connection, because a stock market resembles a “semiotic segment” (Guattari 1995: 13), that “starts to work for itself and to secrete new field of reference” (Guattari 1995: 13). Disingenuously, Bourriaud completes his argument for a relation between the social-aesthetic mediated by the market by referring to Joseph’s *Little Democracy* (1997) which he claims is the artistic model for future models of sociability: “with the help of installations that affect the exhibition site, Joseph offers us experimental objects, active products and artworks that suggest new ways of apprehending the real and new types of investment in the art world. *Little Democracy* is something we can inhabit” (Bourriaud 2002: 66).

To whom do these ‘we’s’ refer? Is it the privileged, cosmopolitan consumers of high culture, a closed circle of producers, a fantastic “little democracy” (as if a bigger one does not and could not exist)? The point here is that there is no ‘we’, and if there are many ‘we’s’; ‘we’ do not necessarily have a choice about what elements are “placed at our disposal” by a curator in a consumerist society. For Bourriaud the materials for the construction of new subjectivities will be provided by a new vanguard of curators like him who will provide ‘us’ with a shopping list of artists who will expertly usher in new models of sociability and subjectivity: the DJ-artist, the pop bricoleur, installation artist. The universal futurity of this relational discourse and its pseudo-radicalism, both manifest in Bourriaud and Guattari (note that both writers make a constant appeal to an absent ‘we’ continually in the name of an imagined future) also performs the function of de-historicising and de-institutionalising aesthetic discourse by presenting their ideas as if they were contemporaneous, brand new (*new* machinic subjectivities, *new* models of sociability and conviviality and so forth). Their basis for this new brand of radicalism, rather calling for social justice, makes sweeping aesthetic appeals to a non-existent universal audience. This effectively relegates a historical and grounded form of pragmatic avant-garde radicalism to the dustbin. The project of radically rewriting history: historical-political as it ruptures into the aesthetic present (De Certeau 2004:35 -50) is effectively “wiped from living memory... to bring about an amnesiac condition in which it would be as though such notions had never existed...” (Eagleton. 1990: 7) as if these authors were themselves the originators of a new, universal, radical sensibility.

Anthony Downey (2007) rightly characterises Bourriaud’s relational art as “a form of practicable social interactiveness” that “*co-opts* collaboration, participation, intervention, research-led activities and community based projects into both the form and content of the work” (Downey 2007: 67) [added emphasis]. He criticises relational aesthetics as a branch of socially oriented art practice which is intimately wound

up with commodification, and ironically implicated in the reproduction of social inequality (hence the use of the verb ‘co-opt’). He asks: “do relational art practices really operate “beside or beneath a real economic system” and thus avoid (and radically reconstitute) the service economy that underwrites our neo-liberal world order and the relationships formed within it?” (Downey 2007: 271). Further, he asks “do these works [relational artworks] expose tensions within social relations or just epitomise them?” Bourriaud’s relational aesthetic is not forthcoming in this regard. It is unable to describe in any exacting, or concrete way what these “new models of sociability” are, what, for example “the symbolic value of the world relational aesthetics proposes” (Downey 2007: 270), or, for that matter, to what purposes this new “utilitarian” aesthetic may be put.

The implicit sectoralisation of the aesthetic, as it is found in Bourriaud, defers a “politics of the aesthetics” (Downey 2007: 275) and betrays the conceptual roots of his argument- Guattari- who designates aesthetic creation as either a kind of universalised, unconscious, primal anterior to discursivity (Guattari 1995: 77 -78) or as a form of regulated psychosis which offers radical possibilities for de-territorialising existent subjectivities. In short, theories of this kind promise a Schillerian “aesthetic revolution” (Eagleton 1990: 103). Extrapolating from his work in the psychic domain, Guattari claims an aesthetic-ethico paradigm as an ameliorative to a variety of social crises, including the ecological, the social, political and existential (Guattari 1995: 119), by treating the aesthetic as a transcendental and sovereign form of social therapy (one that perpetually undoes the normative ‘everything-else’). Because the aesthetic, in terms similar to those used by Kant, exists outside the ambit of the discursive Guattari, like Bourriaud, cannot but unwittingly privilege it as a therapeutic and in the process *exclude* something from his formulation of an “ethico-aesthetic paradigm”. Guattari’s “schizo-unconsciousness” (Guattari 1995: 13), and attendant “schizoanalytic cartographies” (Guattari 1995: 98) relies heavily on a characterisation of the aesthetic as autonomous. He emphasises that “the existential registers concerned here involve a dimension of *autonomy* of an aesthetic order”. It is only logical then that he would assume to favour the aesthetic domain as the proper place for, and indeed exclusive place for the construction of new subjectivities:

The incessant clash of the movement of art against established boundaries,... its propensity to renew its materials of expression and the ontological texture of the precepts and affects it promotes brings about if not a direct contamination of *other domains* then at least a highlighting and re-evaluation of the creative dimensions that traverse all of them. Patently, art does not have a monopoly on creation, *but takes* it capacity to invent mutant co-ordinates to extremes: it engenders unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being (Guattari 1995: 106) [my italics].

In his relational logic (as it is echoed in Derrida, Adorno etc) the aesthetic marks an ‘extreme’, a limit to discursive thought operating as a sovereign category than can contaminate and transgress/traverse other fields but cannot *itself* be fully contaminated. Guattari implies that it is the very autonomy (in his terms ‘autopoiesis’) of the aesthetic category itself which brings forth its radical challenge to the established order. The invisible enemy (the other) in this discourse of universal, therapeutic aesthetic relationism (as it translates into the art speak of the curator) becomes the ordinary itself, the normative everyday, which can only be redeemed by offering itself up as an at once celebrated and abject object, as social material that artists and curators will regenerate and use to regenerate their formalisms and recycle their theoretical clichés. Such an ‘other’ subject cannot participate directly or fully as an equal in this relational logic as it is manifested in Biennales, art events and exhibitions because it would find such a place unfamiliar, strange and perhaps even alienating. In a circular way, the everyday subject (the shoemaker if you like) is physically removed from the very place it is meant to participate in because he is its subject. He can only operate as a signifier, or representation, in the vocabularies of relational thinkers, artists and curators who need an ‘other’ in order to sustain their idealist mythologies which sustain the autonomy of the aesthetic. By this other I mean the body of the proletariat- the archetypal outcast.

The relational logic is based on the eternal deferral of liberation ironically because it suggests that everyone can be an artist but only with the help of the artist. In other words, an egalitarian society can only be achieved through ‘the aesthetic education of man’, through the medium of the aesthetic. Society is deformed and requires the services of artists such as Joseph Beuys in order to redeem it. The question is who will teach this redemptory art and whose curriculum shall be subscribed to? It is no wonder then, that critics such as Wright argue against this implicit exclusionism and that an art of collaborative liberation must first remove the category of art itself:

Mainstream contemporary art is about proposing decoded and recoded experimental models of intersubjective interaction. To the extent that these models of social interaction merely seem to reconfigure and repeat dominant ideology, the artists producing them are not autonomous, and their models are by no means “self governing”: indeed, “models” tend to “modelise” rather than autonomise behaviour, urging people to conform to, and eventually identify with, the dominant model. When they are aware-or made aware- of this, they usually resort to the claim that they are using irony, always the last ditch claim of individualism in free fall, stripped of moral and evening intellectual meaning. *Art, in short, is the chief obstacle to artistic collaboration* (Wright 2004: 533) [my italics].

Relational aesthetics takes advantage of the fact that “the complete dissolution of art into social praxis is impossible” (Roberts 2004: 563) in order to maintain the unassailability of a new form of interactionist avant-gardism which is indeed premised on a privileged form of autonomy. When relational aesthetics sees that it is autonomy that produces the effect “of the instability of art as a category and phenomenological experience... is what constitutes its relation to freedom and emancipation” (Roberts 2004: 563) then it collapses into a seemingly impenetrable, theoretical solipsism. This ambitious and disembodied logic of the relational as sublimated drives, harmonised impulses lead to the art institution as the legitimate ‘home’ of the aesthetic and to all kinds of reformist endeavours.

The thinking goes that if everyone could think like an artist (from the cleaner of the latrines to the visionary politician, from the learned physician to the lowly shoemaker) then the world would surely be a more harmonious, empathetic, better, connected and open freed from the means-end rationality of capital (The Signifier). The aesthetic effect as an embodied and intuitive experience of a dialogue between things, a literacy of bodies and worlds, offers the opportunity to humanise all of ‘us’. This romantic narrative of social reconstructivist heroism (Guattari’s *Chaosmosis* reads like a revolutionary tirade) with its long history (Romanticism, Beuys, Mondrian, Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Bauhaus) assumes that if society could operate in a way analogous to that of creating or apprehending an art work (the classroom as art work, the ecosophy etc); if the citizenry could be made to partake in some way in the aesthetic experience then some kind of utopian, egalitarian plane may be reached. This kind of creative osmosis is essentially what a relational logic is after. But it betrays itself as not being able to achieve this goal without the help of legitimate culture. Guattari cannot avoid repeating the oft made claims of a revolutionary aesthetics. However, as Eagleton remarks (1990: 370- 371) the problem for the “revolutionary avant-garde” is that “aesthetics is part of the problem, not of the solution...the problem of art is art itself, so let’s have an art that is not an art... for Adorno this is an unmitigated catastrophe... for if art smashes through the formal contours which demarcate it and estrange it from ordinary life, will it not simply succeed in spilling and defusing its critical contents”?

According the relational logic the social task at hand it to deliver the aesthetic in such a form to the masses where it can work its magic and transformative power to make the world a better place by opening itself up but only marginally to participation. In order to achieve this, the practice of art as a social practice must be removed from the clutches of legitimate, high culture and dematerialised, reconfigured and recoded to work in new places, engage in new and unpredictable modalities with its audiences, and operate in a dialectical fashion with the everyday. This risks descending to pure therapeutic reformism

where it is assumed that art has the capacity to change the way “people think” with the artist cast as the dispenser of liberatory cognitive resources, an “aesthetic evangelist” (Kester 1995) can, using the catalytic epistemological tools bestowed on him by legitimate culture can make his/her audience more socially aware, perceptive and empathetic. The aesthetic must be retrieved, forcibly taken hostage from the domain of legitimate culture so that it can find its rightful place in democratizing society which in effect it cannot do without losing its magic.

This is a powerful myth. It informs much of the rhetoric around the mission of critical public art practices, and the language of interventionism which resembles to a large extent the heroicism of the early modernist project. In the interventionist mode, art is metaphorised as a social-therapeutic, an antidote to social ills, an elixir a form of “aesthetic evangelism” (Kester 1995) an anathema indeed to Rancière’s call for a “right to think” (Rancière 2000: 122; 1991: 66). Because the myth is so powerful, the notion of the privileged artist remains intact and so is the most rarely interrogated notion in the discourse of socially oriented practice. It is here that is revealed the extent to which the autonomy of the aesthetic is “policed” by the art world itself a practice which “wrongs equality” (Rancière 1991: 58). If the “interdisciplinarity of contemporary art practices is being ever more called upon to provide both insight into politics itself and the stimuli for social change” (Rancière 2006: 83), then the potential role the artist plays in defining and deferring equality needs to be interrogated and new forms of practice developed that operate beyond the ameliorative paradigm that pervades discourse on socially oriented art. If the project of retrieving a certain community/communism/communication is to be entertained on aesthetic grounds, linked inextricably to “...the archaic name of a thought which is still to come” (Nancy 1001: 377) then there is great scope for its deferral through the aesthetic, instrumentalised as a kind of evangelistic alibi for a deferred equality in the interests of reproducing an existing social order and the privileges accorded to the artist.

And yet despite these criticisms I feel that discourse around the open work has great merit as a form of participatory resistance against specular knowledge and dominative reason and as such is inherently valuable. However, in order to be taken seriously on political terms needs to be complexified, thickened and in Elkin’s terms “made difficult” in much the same way as the visual, vision and visibility has been made difficult by art criticism, history and theory. There is a tendency in the vocabulary of socially engaged relational art practices to deploy inclusivity, and an implicit moral reformism as an alibi to elide, as Claire Bishop (2006: 180-185) has argued, the “dangerous” potential of the more critical visual modalities. She argues that the “the contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention and reflect this antimony both in the structure of the work and in the conditions of its reception” (Bishop 2006: 185). Idealistic discourses such as relational aesthetics, by their very nature, challenge the perceived elitism of various art and cultural forms but at the same time, ironically in their very pluralism and “soft relativism”, become far too easily co-opted by agendas that seek closure and domination. The aesthetic can indeed operate as a place where “the political may be inoculated via its displacement into the conflict free zone of the aesthetic where every point of view is acceptable, consensus is desirable, where every “perceptive ambiguity” is incorporated and we are all equal because we all have the same, “human” capacity to communicate and appreciate the other’s point of view” (Žižek 2004: 73). The logic of relational aesthetics if taken uncritically (as it is emblematised in the rhetoric of the “open work”) becomes dangerous itself precisely because it is too open and at the same time premised on a hidden autonomy. Relational approaches to aesthetics may achieve nothing but “gentrifying the traumatic dimension of the political” (Žižek 2004: 72) by depoliticising both the work of art, the art institution, artists, art consumers and the broader field of power and positions taken toward it.

Post-autonomy 2: Dialectical Aesthetics: Denunciation and The Double Bind.

- 2.1. The work of art considered as a symbolic good (and not as an economic asset, which it may also be) only exists as such for a person who has the means to appropriate it, or in other words decipher it.
- 2.2. The degree of an agent's art competence is measured by the degree to which he or she masters the set of instruments for the appropriation of the work of art, available at a given time, that is to say, the interpretation schemes which are the prerequisite for the appropriation of art capital, in other words, the prerequisite for the deciphering of works of art offered to a given society at a given moment (Bourdieu 1993: 221).

Today, the photographic sequences, the video monitors or projections, the installations of strange and familiar objects that fill the spaces of our museums and galleries seek less to create the sense of a gap between two orders- between everyday appearances and the laws of domination- than to increase a new sensitivity to the signs and traces that testify to a common history and a common world. But outside of these professed forms, and under the cover of legitimations still taken from the critical doxa, contemporary forms of art are increasingly devoted to the unanimist inventory of traces of community or new symbolist representation of the powers of the verbal and the visible or of the archetypal gestures and great cycles of human existence. (Rancière 2007: 66).

It is not an exaggeration to say that Marx's community is, in this sense, a community of literature- or at least it opens onto such a community. It is a community of articulation, and not of organisation, and precisely because of this it is a community situated "beyond the sphere of material production properly speaking", where "begins the flowering of that human power that is its own end, the true reign of liberty (Nancy 1991: 77).

It is no mystery that throughout its history the making of art has lent itself to practices of social exclusion, to the servicing and maintenance of power and the reproduction of class distinctions (Bourdieu 1989:7). If the relational logic sees the aesthetic as a reservoir of freedom, a plane upon which equality is practiced, where truth is made rather than found, where the practice of mastery is effectively demolished by the movement between the general and the particular then it is also a logic premised, paradoxically, on radical exclusion. The fact remains that it is the mechanics of the art institution itself (as "the dominated fraction of the dominating class"), which, despite the very best intentions of its artists, which throws a barricade of decipherment around this freedom-in-the-aesthetic, making certain domains (the gallery, the museum, the discursive language of art history and art criticism) the proper place in which "we" may claim our "right to think". Theodor Adorno (1991: 107 -131) predicted this. He felt that the very openness that sustained the production of art would, in an era of mass production, become co-opted by cultural management and administration that would increasingly define, through mediation, the nature of the field and the nature of the aesthetic experience. It is no wonder then that contemporary artists deploy irony as a central representational strategy to index this state of affairs. No matter how free or critical a practice is it remains trapped in the repressive ambience of legitimate culture or mass culture. We see this recognition of this irony in the cynical, overblown commodity fetishism of Jeff Koons, the institutional critique of Hans Haacke and in a range of practices that are dissatisfied with the co-optation of the artworld by capital.

The dialectical logic of socially engaged practices attempts to address the entrapment of aesthetic work in a more assertive manner than its relational counterpart. This leads, I would suggest, to a disciplinary trauma that is involved in realising a post-autonomous, heteroglossic aesthetic. The dialectic logic retreats on the boundary of this trauma of entertaining the link between social privilege and aesthetic practice by making the aesthetic play a double role. Firstly, like the relational logic it casts the aesthetic as a transcendental category, as that site of practice wherein a better life may be imagined, but maintains that by virtue of its very ideality is opened up to cooptation by privilege and capital. The aesthetic can venture 'out there' but only tentatively. As I have alluded to earlier, a struggle exists between an

institutional and more conceptual definition of the aesthetic. The first locates the aesthetic in legitimate, official, and sectorialised culture and the second, in the psyche as a kind of generalised human capacity. The tensions that exist between these two conceptions of the aesthetic are rarely accounted for and the social-aesthetic problem as a site of struggle between official and unofficial culture becomes a kind of hermeneutic nowhere land very seldom resolved .

Dialectical discourses on socially engaged art tend to resist critiquing the aesthetic as a wholly institutional and material category in the fear that by losing its essence so it may become apparent that no social space exists for the pure play of disinterested thought, that the Kantian cognitive space is in fact, thoroughly ideological. Centering criticism about art on rationality and visuality (the power invested in ways of looking and making) rather than aesthetic essences has the effect of eradicating a place in which artists and communities can resist closure, explore freely, make connections and think imaginatively. A dialectical discourse of socially engaged art offers an account of the aesthetic in which it is cast simultaneously as a spring well of radical sensibilities (a supplement to dominative reason of the market, the state and so on) but also that the aesthetic is nothing but an effect of power which is a disabling situation. The experience of making or seeing art, both in terms of its production and reception, is therefore seen within a dialectical logic as less a of a sensibility or an essence than as a competence or skill. It debunks the innatism in the relational argument that because we are all, somehow at the core, aesthetic beings we can participate in sophisticated aesthetic experiences. However it cannot completely dismiss this idea because to do so would challenge its original premise, apropos that the aesthetic is a privileged space. So we have two positions that generally emerge in dialectical approaches to socially engaged art. On the one hand, there are those who seek to politicise aesthetics (in order to topple the hegemony of legitimate, privileged culture) and those who see the aesthetic as the very place in which that politicisation takes place. The disinterestedness of the aesthetic offers a radical promise but also prevents it from realising it. It becomes in effect, what Danto suggested; a paradox. The danger in artistic practice and representation lies in its harmlessness.

Art is harmless precisely because it *cannot* change the social order. It can only make the labour upon which it is based visible (Rancière 2004: 14). It may be argued that it is not the traditional Marxist notion that ‘the ownership means of production or capital and resources’ which is at stake in the class struggle but rather the purposes to which these means resources are put. The struggle, if one takes the idea to its most radical conclusion, becomes less about the ownership of means and resources in and of itself than it is about who has the right to use them creatively. The struggle is about the right exert creativity in the form of labour. And this right to creativity is hardly evenly distributed. In order to achieve a fully human, connected, “autopoetic”, responsible and responsive human existence through creative work one requires legitimate access to the symbolic, cultural and economic resources which requires a class struggle. The struggle is about the right to creative work more than it is about the right to a minimum wage. Without capital work cannot be creative and remains just work. Nancy (1991: 77) believes, in this respect, that Marx’s understanding of community is based in aesthetics that what Marx was after was the realisation of collective creativity:

Communism- as, for example, in the generous exuberance that will not let Marx conclude without pointing to a reign of freedom, one beyond the collective regulation of necessity, in which surplus work would no longer be exploitative work, but rather art and invention- communicates with an extremity of play, of sovereignty, even of ecstasy from which the individual as such remains definitely removed.

Nancy (1991: 73) argues that the literary and cultural has always been seen by revolutionary party communism as ‘other’. Culture played a minor role in the liberation of the masses and was sidelined in favour of the mechanistic logic of organisation and labour. Given this, Nancy argues, the aesthetic was

seen as a bourgeois construct; superfluous and peripheral to the emancipation of humanity. Similar to Guattari, who reinvents the machinic as possessing autopoietic, collective capacities, Nancy revisits the literary and the aesthetic as a liberatory practice in its own right. For him the primary function of the literary and the aesthetic is in its ability to at once construct community and also for its ability to resist and disrupt communication. Built into the aesthetic paradigm is and is a negation the tendency toward social consummation as is the case in fascism in societal communalism (Nancy 1991: 71-110). For him aesthetic activity is important because “community cannot arise from work” (Nancy 1991: 31). Instead, the aesthetic and literary surface constitutes the “ordeal of community” which makes community valuable in its own right. The aesthetic is exactly that place (a place of “chattering” and “communication”) in which the impossibility and the loss of the “intimacy of communion” (Nancy 1991: 12), a kind of mourning and melancholia for what is impossible is worked through; paradoxically in order to make a community that is always immanent. Aesthetic work produces communities that are “suspended upon its limit” (Nancy 1991:31). In other words, community realises itself through an aesthetic operation but it is in the impossibility of aesthetic consummation where community finds itself. In these terms, Nancy’s “art or thought appropriate to politics and a politics adequate to art” (Nancy. 1991: 8), a “literary communism” (Nancy 1991:25) resonate strongly with Rancière’s understanding of a “poetics of the political” or a “new politics of in-between” (Rancière 1992: 64). The literary and aesthetic surface allows the community to represent itself to itself and thus, given the characterisation of the aesthetic as a practice of reflexive suspension, allows for the ongoing clinamen between individuals, that critical degree of “spacing” which allows a community to realise its collective creativity without violence. It is through perpetual cycles of communal making (visible, sayable, thinkable, possible etc) and unmaking (invisible, unsaid, unthinkable, impossible etc) that community does not collapse into sheer homogeneity and the sacrificial exclusions this usually entails (Nancy 1992: 392; Nancy 1991: 12).

Nancy’s proposal is idealistic. I would ask if community is to be constructed, aesthetically on the basis of “spacing”, then what do these distances mean in terms of *existing* symbolic and ideological terms? Again and again we see the aesthetic problem as one being about its materialisation. Nancy writes, in relation to Bataille’s thoughts on community:

... he gave up thinking the sharing [partage] of community and the sovereignty in the sharing or shared sovereignty, shared between Daseins, between singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation- the sharing itself- is not communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor self-recognition, nor even communication as this is understood to exist between subjects. But these singular beings are themselves constituted by the sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather spaced, by the sharing that makes them others: other for another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of the sharing: ‘communicating’ by not ‘communing’ (Nancy 1991: 25).

What does this “spacing” mean outside this philosophical idealism of communities-to-be, if we understand it in terms of symbolic power and social distance as it is defined more concretely by Bourdieu (2005: 167)? How is it possible to imagine a pure communication, if as Nancy (1991: 10-12) suggests, communion is impossible. What are the differences between the power implied, for instance, in everyday transactions and the aesthetic notion of communication propagated above? If we at least agree with Nancy, that this very special, indeed authentic, aesthetic/literary place of labour *in fact* exists, then we can perhaps also consider the possibility it has already been monopolised, institutionalised and essentially privatised by particular social class. If, as Bourdieu argues, the aesthetic/literary space is ‘owned’ by the dominant faction then what do Nancy’s “spacings” mean? Does this not suggest that the aesthetic is the name for the unbridgeable social distance between art and other communities? As I will demonstrate, it is in the interests of the dominant class to monopolise creative practice for itself in a variety of institutions and at the same to advocate its definitions of creativity as universal in order to mask the possibility that this special kind of agency, community and equality, is, in fact, *not* available to others. There are

arguably powerful benefits to owning a place of social free-play and processual open-endedness. If the ideal Marxist community is an “articulation not an organisation” (Nancy 1991: 77), then how do we apprehend it in speech where differences exist in dialect, accent as markers of exclusion and privilege?

Bourdieu (1993: 37-40) argues that the art world and academy plays a key role in naturalising the power of the ruling class. This implicates artists because the products of their labour are ultimately circumscribed and addressed to privileged audiences, which Bourdieu demonstrates in his analysis of the museum in *“The Love of Art”* (1997) and in his analysis of the French avant-garde in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993). He designates artists as workers, a special kind of labourer, and by naming them thus, demystifies the privileges accorded to them. For him, artists “producers of symbolic goods” (rather than mystified makers of art) who he contends collude with the ruling class in the maintenance of their power. Bourdieu (1987: 201-210) sets out to radically denaturalise, demystify and demythologise the practice of the artist and especially artistic creation as the site of extreme privilege. Art making is socially unreflexive because the field of artistic production functions to hide, at all costs, its interest in the economic sphere by asserting that the aesthetic is universal, a disinterested practice and an autonomous realm of human practice.

For Bourdieu (1993: 70) aesthetic creation is entirely marked by the structure of its own field and the broader field of power despite its attempts at asserting its autonomy. Artworks are reductively imagined as nothing more than a manifestation of the collision of the disposition or ‘habitus’ of an individual creator and their given position within a circumscribed field of cultural practice or market at any given time and as such they are complex expressions of capital. Bourdieu (1993: 233-234) demonstrates that, like any labour commodity, the artistic product has exchange and use value, and is thus subjected to the logic of the market at the micro level of the work itself through its “ideological charisma”. This means that the very thought processes of artists are marked by and “mark” the field itself. Similarly, the reception of artists’ goods and services are “marked” by the field in which they are inscribed (Bourdieu 1993: 70, 101). No art, in effect, escapes the shadow of an economic and political logic and for Bourdieu the gestures of the revolutionary avant-garde are therefore supremely arrogant because they pretend as if they can escape the circuits of power. As Eagleton (1990: 372) remarks “how idealist to imagine that art, all by itself, could resist incorporation!”.

Art provides the social capital that the ruling classes require in order to attain, demonstrate and maintain their power, through winning a “war of manners” (Bourdieu 1989:54-68). According to Bourdieu, symbolic goods and services are acquired in order for the dominant class to exercise their taste. Thus artworks as ‘goods’ require a certain conversion in value in order to become ‘art’. This takes place through practices of decipherment which make these goods function as “badges of class distinction” (Bourdieu 1989: 60). The symbolic goods the privileged acquire through collecting can only take place because of their ability to appreciate and classify them. This competence (which requires an object to exert itself) distances the dominant social class semiotically, from “other”/lower classes. The art object neutralises the threat of the working class by naturalising the cultural and intellectual superiority of the dominant class and plays a critical role in maintaining a social order based on inequality. The dominant class’s “claim to authenticity” and “natural taste” (Bourdieu 1989: 74) is asserted through the domain of culture rather than through economics, the latter of which which would appear as a vulgar way of asserting their natural superiority. Measuring rank according to economics (rather than culture) makes their authenticity of their claims to rule more visible, easier to measure and thus open to challenge by the lower classes and so must be avoided at all costs. Artists step in as suppliers of goods that will maintain the ‘natural’ distinction of the dominant class providing the socially distancing devices. In this sense, as producers of symbolic goods, artists are not free and do certainly not enjoy autonomy. They are un-

derstood by Bourdieu (1993: 201) as the “dominated fraction of the dominant class”; a high end service industry to maintain the power of the rich. Artists therefore play a key role in constructing the illusion of economic disinterestedness of the privileged which, for Bourdieu, becomes the best kept “secret” of the artworld, the “most disputed frontier... that separates the field of cultural production and the field of power” (Bourdieu 1993: 43).

In *Distinction* (1989: 227 -228) Bourdieu elaborates upon this thesis. He suggests that artists occupy a privileged position in the social superstructure because they can translate and convert the culture of the everyday and the material life of the worker into aesthetic materials and resources that are then used by the dominant class in order to renew its purchase as the natural, primary arbiter of taste. Bourdieu argues that the classes immediately below the leisured, propertied ruling class; professional, affluent, educated class, the petite bourgeoisie class constitute a threat to its “natural place” and it must therefore constantly renew its legitimacy, culturally and aesthetically. Because the “upward movement of taste” tends to challenge and displace its appreciative codes and systems (Bourdieu 1989: 244-256) of the dominant class the services and goods of artists are required to renew its legitimacy. So a certain sophisticated alertness (a capital in its own right) to the shifts and trends in the domain of culture and aesthetics is required on the part of artists and their privileged consumers in order to maintain their power and legitimacy because “every transformation of the structure of the artistic field leads to the displacement of the structure of tastes” (Bourdieu 1993: 165). Aesthetics, in these terms, becomes nothing but a visual and cultural effect; set of symbolic resources that is being legitimised by a dominant appreciative system at any given time, manufactured by those who administer the field, increasingly defined through “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu 1989: 359) corporate sponsorship, patronage, funding etc and consecrated by a network of agents, curators, critics, journalists and publishers. This dominance of the ruling class is hegemonic in nature because the struggle takes place over taste. This is something that is intangible which further distances the lower classes from acquiring it. For Bourdieu taste is symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is intangible because it is more of a competence lodged in the heads of social actors than a graspable phenomenon existing “out there”, in the real world in an empirical, economic sense (Bourdieu 1989: 230-243). The aesthetic in Bourdieu’s terms would not exist, as an epistemological category without the legitimising functions of dominant culture. The ‘aesthetic’ stands for a complex of signifiers that come to represent the needs and values of a dominant ideology at a given time. The aesthetic is a highly exclusive domain that only appears ‘open’ to the extent to which it is involved in the struggle to monopolise meaning. It is a abstraction that is hollowed and filled in cycles by displacements in taste, endlessly renewed in order for the ruling classes to maintain the symbolic status quo and to keep the working classes in their place. Here, the aesthetic is seen more as an ideology than a paradigm which Bourdieu ultimately writes off as false consciousness designed to neutralise the masses and naturalise the interests of the powerful. Bourdieu offers a damaging hammer-stroke critique of the Kantian idealism in Derrida, Guattari, Rancière, Schiller, Adorno and the pretensions of artists who seek to change the social order through aesthetic work.

The sectoralisation of creativity and the aesthetic implied in this critique suggests that the proletariat is deprived doubly. In the sphere of labour, they are deprived of the right to purposeful, creative work (via Fordist/Taylorist managerialism, the division of labour, because the means of production are not socialised etc). Secondly, because they are dispossessed of their natural right to participate in legitimate culture, they are prevented from accruing the required symbolic and educational capital necessary to provide the proletariat with the opportunity to realise either community or their revolutionary ambitions. In Bourdieu’s analysis it would appear impossible for working class subjects to construct, without the resources of the artist, a society of creative, intellectual, embodied labour. Capital, in Lyotard’s (in Nancy 1991: 379) terms, therefore “inflicts an absolute wrong” on the working class via the exclusivities of

the aesthetic field. Deleuze and Guattari's "micro-revolutionary machinic concatenations", where the "quality of the machine" is "that of communication, exchange, of openness" may obscure the social fact that machines are owned by a particular class and by extension, within this order, the art institution could be imagined as such a machinic technology itself- one that excludes the worker from participation in 'universal', legitimate culture. Working class aspirations under the conditions of this double dispossession come to be driven by economic imperatives and the degree to which they can offer their labour power on the market to further the interests profit making. Notions such as 'art' and 'culture' can only play a superfluous role. The autonomy of aesthetic pleasure may therefore have a very limited purchase on their imaginations. The potential politicisation in culture is neutralised by being displaced into the domain of leisure time, taken off the shop floor, into time of rest from labour and becomes passive and regulated, mediated as it is by the mass media, advertising, popular culture and so on. The problem of using 'culture' as the 'proper' place from which a new kind of de-alienated labour could be imagined (micro-aesthetic, cultural practice) raises serious problems for 'socially engaged' artists. If the cultural experience of the worker is ultimately passive, regulated and ghettoised by consumerism then new forms of aesthetic interventions operating this domain would not be grasped as liberatory at all. Rather, they may be seen by the working classes as alien, threatening, artificial, and pretentious and artificial at best. From the position of the urban proletarian (active= work, passive= cultural consumption) artistic inventions may be seen as having no *use value*. For instance Raunig mentions how, Tretyakov's agitative performances, produced at the Moscow gas works were ultimately rejected by the workers on this basis:

In the midst of the workers' customary working environment the actors operated alongside the gigantic apparatuses of the plant on the scaffolding of the stage in workers' uniforms to blur the difference from the watching workers- not, however with complete success, as it apparent in a later account from one of the protagonists. 'But it already became clear after the first performance that we were disrupting their work... They put up with us for four performances and then politely showed us the door' (Raunig 2007: 155).

Following Bourdieu's logic, then, the worker simply cannot believe that the artist can be an authentic labourer (no less a liberator!) because the working class subject implicitly knows (in terms of their entrenched habitus) that what artists do is 'play'. They also play the role of providing the vital and practical function of supplying the goods by which the dominating class can sustain the illusion that its aspirations are economically disinterested (cultural, aesthetic, abstract), i.e. not profit driven, that their right to rule is a natural effect of the cultural and intellectual position they occupy. The artist working in the space of the worker cannot but help being seen by them as an agent of inequality; a "spokesperson" for the privileged, "an imposter endowed with the skeptron" (Bourdieu 2005: 193). The worker is a stranger to the world of legitimate culture, because they have been outcast, "the part that has no part" (Rancière 2004: 70). Because of the revolutionary potential of the outcast it could be said that there is, in fact, a homology between their position and that of the avant-garde artist whose role it is to defamiliarise the social world as an outsider through aesthetic work. But this is a tenuous resemblance. If the urban proletariat are radically disenfranchised, then artists may stand as their social opposite; as highly privileged, elite group of cultural producers serving the interests of capital. The implicit distinction and radical distance between the manual labour of the worker and the intellectual work of artists is a theme that hardly pervades progressivist accounts of a socially engaged artistic practice. Artists and writers on socially engaged art struggles to close this distance. The way that that distance is understood is largely constrained by the economic and political circumstances in which artists and workers find themselves. Artists, operating in a liberal democracy, are granted great freedom/autonomy by their masters (patrons, sponsors, collectors etc) but can make no substantial 'social impact' because their primary function within the context of capitalism is to supply, through creative play, symbolic goods to a minority audience who can afford them. Artists working under socialism have little autonomy (Golomstok 1990) - their work is constrained and policed by collective needs, party politics, consensus and policy, but have great scope

to affect social change through their work as cultural workers. Artists working within capitalism thus come to be valued by the means by which they make use of the autonomy that is bestowed upon them by a privileged elite but at a price: their work must serve to maintain the class distinction of their privileged consumers, severing itself from a truly radical social programme and widening the distance between artistic production and social justice.

This leaves artists in a difficult ethical position. Within a neo-liberal, democratic order artists are driven, under these conditions, to operate as a split self and have to somehow reconcile the disparity between creativity defined as a human essence manifested in an emancipatory, social project (democracy), and a sectoral, privatised definition of creativity (neo-liberalism). There are a number of easy ways to deal with this problem, which Lacy (1995) attempts to formulate: artists can simply represent (i.e. illustrate, depict, transplant, recontextualise) the interests of the working class for the dominant class in the mode of spectacle (representing social situations) and in so doing superficially address their split identity. They could also, within the context of the move from an industry to a service based economy orientate their aesthetic practices around a recondite notions of ‘participation’. Here instead of offering goods artists can offer new enlightening experiences to the privileged classes in order to entrench their social distance from the lower classes in a more embodied and ‘authentic’ manner. Ironically, this is because artists have encoded ‘conviviality’ and ‘sociability’ into their work! They could also, more radically, sever their links to the domain of legitimate culture and attempt to collaborate with the disenfranchised. However, if they do this they risk losing their status as artists in order to operate as social workers. If socially engaged artists retain their artistic identities in severing their links with legitimate culture they know that their work will never have a structural effect because they are operating on the fringes of power, without legitimate aesthetic coordinates or a home to return to.

It therefore appears impossible to close this gap between artists and worker. Capitalism, consumerism makes the manual producer and the artist essentially strangers to each other, if not enemies, without a common ground upon which to proceed with an aesthetic-social project. The worker would have every right to be suspicious of the motives of the so-called ‘socially engaged artist’. They may ask for instance: ‘if you are so socially engaged’ why don’t you give up art and do something more useful?’ or as Rancière (2004: 60) may ask: “an artist may be committed, but what does it mean to say that art is committed? Commitment is not a category of art”.

The philosopher and the sociologist of the social-aesthetic: naming practices.

In many senses these two conflicting logics, relationality and dialectics, are best illustrated in the work of Rancière and Bourdieu respectively. Their positions about the social purposes of the aesthetic is a dispute over a border around what discipline will best define the terms of the debate: contemporary philosophy or sociology. Bourdieu and Rancière, both see the aesthetic as a key category in their intellectual projects. These thinkers, the philosopher and sociologist, claim to work on the basis of a relational logic, and their field metaphors, if I may call them that, as they apply to the aesthetic-participation problem, converge and diverge at various points, centrally around the question of agency. Rancière’s (2004:141) “distribution of the sensible” as the “apportionment of parts and positions, ... based on the distribution of spaces, times and forms activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and why individuals have a part in this distribution” is remarkably similar in metaphorical, terminological and descriptive terms to Bourdieu’s (1995: 141) characterisation of social and symbolic space:

Each state of the social world is this no more than a temporary equilibrium, a moment in the dynamics through which the adjustments between distributions and incorporated or institutional classifications is constantly broken and restored. The struggle which is the very principle of the distributions is inextricably a struggle to appropriate rare goods and a struggle to impose the legitimate way of perceiving the power relations manifested by the distributions, a representation which, through its own efficacy, can help to perpetuate or subvert these power relations.

Rancière's "parts and positions"(regimes) sound a great deal like Bourdieu's "capitals and positions", "distributed in social space" which constitute "the objective structures independent of the consciousness or will of agents, which are capable of guiding their practices and representations" (Bourdieu 1995: 123). If there is a conceptual affinity between Bourdieu's understanding of the social field and Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2004: 12), then there is a serious departure point on how a subject would inhabit or occupy space within these two homologous places. Bourdieu sees social space in terms of risk and constraint where Rancière sees it in terms of possibility. The question of agency is the site of intense struggle between them.

For Bourdieu, *the habitus* is primary to the understanding of agency, a theoretical frame which implies that pure agency could not in fact exist. "Habitus" is described by Bourdieu (1995: 42-51) as a "way of occupying social space". It is social structure internalised by a subject and performed through their bodies (a variant on Vygotsky's inner and outer voice). It thus suggests that agency is always constrained and determinate. The habitus is defined (much in the vein of the Freudian conception of the psychic economy) as an internal relation between two orders of being the objectivist/ universal/conscious (social) and the subjectivist/ particular/ unconscious (individual), which in effect unite in the individual actor. The habitus as the result of an encounter between social position and disposition become an individual's "schemes of perception", their "real logic of action" which are to a large extent unconsciously inherited and practiced by a given subject. Like Rancière's "regimes" the habitus is linked to questions of visibility. In Bourdieu's (1995: 56) case, the habitus is history is made visible on the body and in voice of the subject:

The habitus- embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history- is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence of change that makes the individual agent a world within the world. The habitus is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects "without inertia" in rationalist theories.

The habitus, although characterised as a dynamic and complex discursive and relational formation, suggests that agency, as it is conventionally understood, in the discourses of critical pedagogy, social justice, community development studies and so on is an inaccurate and useless formulation. Interestingly for Bourdieu, habitus is linked (as it is in Rancière) to notions of emplacement: "Habitus is both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices... it thus implies a sense of one's place but also a sense of the place of others" (Bourdieu 1995: 19). Struggle which take place in social space become the regulatory mechanisms and codes internalised by the individual. This translates into an internal tension between their "objective chances" and "subjective expectations" (Bourdieu 1997: 216) which resolved describes the social place of the individual. Agency, if it is to be entertained at all could therefore be described as the capacity of an individual subject to accrue, acquire, maintain possession of, and to "perform" various types of capital: economic, symbolic, educational and cultural.

If Bourdieu tends to debunk the political idealism of individual agency, the rational actor, he commits the same ‘wrong’ against collective participation, aesthetics and communication which he contends are never pure, ideal or transparent. Interactionist theories of participation, such as those partially motivated by Bakhtinian and Habermasian theorists treat linguistic transaction as if it were “a closed world” between two or more rational and free agents (Bourdieu 1991: 67). Instead he casts communication and community as a more ritualised affair based in the accrual and spending of social capital to maximise returns. Community and communication is nothing but the struggle to monopolise representation (the struggle over what constitutes value) in any given “market” of utterances or social context. Agency and utterance is thus linked to questions of power:

Utterances receive their value (and their sense) only in their relation to a market, characterised by a particular law of price formation. The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers’ linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation; it depends, in other words, on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own productions. This capacity is not determined in linguistic terms alone. It is certain that the relation between linguistic competences—which as socially classified productive capacities, characterise socially classified linguistic units of production, and as capacities of appropriation and appreciation, define markets that are themselves socially classified – helps to determine the law of price formation that obtains in a particular exchange (Bourdieu 2005:67).

Bourdieu casts the social world as entirely determinable and legible because human communication, as he sees it, is nothing other than the predictable manifestation of the competitive logic of capital. His theory of community and communication would characterise “parole” as entirely shot through by the alienating effects of capitalism, constrained, indeed, strangled by “langue”. According to his field theory, the worker could indeed find no way to resist his/her habitus and class ethos, or develop the means by which to escape their preordained place in this social world of “already realised ends” because their schemes of perception are so internally entrenched (Bourdieu 1995: 53) in their class. There would, in short, be no way for an artist to apprehend either their oppression nor a means of overturning it. If we accept Bourdieu’s social theory, the proletariat would require the presence of another agent (rich in symbolic capital) to realise their freedom; one capable of unmasking the conditions of their oppression for them. It is here that the traditional emancipatory Marxist ideology collapses. The proletariat cannot rise up spontaneously of its own accord. Its fate as a group is wound up with representation “with the words that name them. There is a unifying power in a word” (Bourdieu 1989: 481). If the individual agent/subject is unable to name itself, it is relieved of the capacity for self-originating an emancipatory impulse then it follows that he/she must await the appearance of another to show the representational means by which it can free itself. This messianic idea subverts the very notion of agency. If the messianic theory promises no salvation for the working class, then by Bourdieu’s logic, social interaction must also be written off as a means of spontaneously achieving emancipation because it too is purely determinate, and constrained (despite its complexity). This is because human interaction is the mere enactment of struggles to accrue symbolic capital, a performative code, to be cracked by sociological reason. As Bourdieu claims: it would be impossible to imagine either pure participation, or a communication grounded in egalitarian or universal principles because “the discourse on a universal community of speakers... sidesteps the question of the economic and social conditions of the acquisition of the legitimate competence and of the constitution of the market in which this definition of the legitimate and the illegitimate is established and imposed” (Bourdieu 2005: 44).

This makes for a somewhat bleak, compromised, constrained and ultimately... fatal relationality. Bourdieu makes a place for artists where we cannot move. Rancière (2003: 165-202) attempts to release agency from the ideology of the “sociologist king”; to break the back of this alienating discourse by reasserting the possibility of agency. He does this by invoking the power of democracy as a category of the indeterminate, the immeasurable- “a different form of naming”, “recounting” (Rancière. 1991: 70).

Rancière explicitly undertakes this project of regenerating democracy to overturn Bourdieu's fatalism. For him, democracy allows identification to cross the breach of a society premised on transactional power. Democracy proposes an 'other' way of thinking, naming and unnameing that stresses the in-between-ness (intersituality) of utterances rather than their determinateness. Subjective excess rather than positionality is the basis for constructing human agency and participation:

... a subject is an outsider or, more, an *in-between*. *Proletarians* was the name given to people who are together inasmuch as they are between: between several names, statuses, and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial; between the status of a man of tools and the status of a speaking and thinking being. Political subjectivisation is the enactment of equality- or the handling of a wrong- by people who are together to the extent that are in between. It is a crossing of identities, relying on a crossing of names: names that link the name of a group or class to the name of no group or no class, a being to a nonbeing or a not-yet-being (Rancière 1992: 61).

This kind of unnameing/renaming, as a practice outside the stranglehold of symbolic power, is registered in Rancière's notion of the "excess of words" (Rancière 1991: 114) where powerful and fixed words come to be reappropriated, under exceptional circumstances, by the "wrong players", in the "wrong places" to achieve democratic objectives. In this process words and representations take on new more radical meanings. (A more pressing question which I will deal with later is the manner in which we can reconcile this abovementioned gap, not "under the cover of legitimization" (Rancière 2004:45) but "in the common world...the everyday"). Rancière attempts to restore a modicum of agency to the worker disenfranchised by Bourdieu arguing that the working class do not in fact require the services of social explicators to imagine new social relations. It is worth nothing that the Bourdieu makes a similar point, in *Distinction* (1989) by arguing that if naming, is the "symbolic power to make groups", "worldmaking" then it also naming which has the power to, "change the ways of world making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by with groups are produced and reproduced.... The struggle over classifications is a fundamental dimension of the class struggle (Bourdieu 1989: 23) [added emphasis].

The aesthetic representation then, rather than being an affect of private property, or the ultimate symbol of private property itself (as Bourdieu might put it) could be imagined appositely as both as a site of privilege and as the very means by which transactional practices of naming (naming as the practice of power) are thrown into crisis. The aesthetic conceived of as *an alternative practice of naming and reading* could thus be understood as a radical practice, a "poetics of the political", on the condition that it could deal with Bourdieu's criticism and made to work/play legibly and meaningfully in new places. Rancière tries to do this, theoretically, in the formulation of an 'aesthetic politics', 'a poetics of the political' wherein the aesthetic representation, "always defines itself by a certain recasting of the distribution of the sensible, a re-configuration of the given perceptual forms... undoes the sensible fabric- a given order of relations between meanings and the visible- and establishes other networks of the sensible" (Rancière 2004: 62). However, if aesthetic-political regimes redistribute and reconfigure, Bourdieu may argue that they are themselves distributed and configured within a broader field of power, so that their very liberatory modus operandi is hidden from those who need to see it most—alienated labour. In this sense, the aesthetic itself comes to be aligned with the "wretched of the earth" because, as a practice that cannot be measured, it can find no proper place because it or oscillates between two seemingly contradictory logics; the relational and the dialectic.

Rancière seems ambivalent about the democratic potential of the arts, and although a great deal of his work motivates the aesthetic as a way of reading, "a poetics of knowledge"(Rancière 2000: 5) which can excavate and apprehend marginalised, proletarian texts and voices, ("I decided to read the worker's text in another way; as literary and philosophical texts") (Rancière 2000: 5), it seems he cannot resolve whether the artist, and by extension the field of artistic production can be entirely entrusted, politically speaking, with the work of democracy. In his telling of Plato's attitudes toward the artists and their place in the polis

he remarks that paradoxically, the formation of community and solidarity is premised on the exclusion of the artist:

... he [the artist-mimetician] is condemned in accordance with a principle of division of labour that was already used to exclude artisans from any shared political space: the mimetician is, by definition, a double being. He does two things at once, whereas the principle of a well-organised community is that each person only does the one thing they were destined to do by their "nature". In one sense, this statement says everything: the idea of work is not initially the idea of a determined activity, a process of material transformation. It is the idea of a distribution of the sensible: an impossibility of doing "something else" based on an "absence of time". This "impossibility" is part of the incorporated conception of community. It established work as the necessary relegation of the worker to the private space-time of his occupation, his exclusion from participation in what is common to the community. The mimetician brings confusion to this distribution: he is a man of duplication, a worker who does two things at once. Perhaps the correlate to this principle is the most important thing: the mimetician provides a public stage for what is common to the community with what should determine the confinement of each person to his or her place. It is this redistribution of the sensible that constitutes his noxiousness, even more than the danger of simulacra weakening souls.... The exclusion of the mimetician, from the Platonic point of view, goes hand in hand with the formation of a community where work is in "its" place (Rancière. 2004: 42- 43).

The Suspension of Work And The Radical Aesthetic.

Gehlen points to the condition under which the external limitation of the aesthetic experience, which alone guarantees its alleviating impact, can be overcome and aesthetic experience can gain its sovereignty, namely, when participation in such an experience no longer occurs in institutions, but takes instead as its vehicle subjectivity released from its institutional ties (Gehlen in Menke 1998: 175).

Rancière argues that the "aesthetic state" as a "suspension of work" aims to break down "the opposition between active understanding and passive sensibility" and "an idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks" (Rancière 2004:44). Why has the field of artistic production not managed to formulate a project than can achieve the goal of achieving dealienated labour in relation to new audiences? Why is it that the irreconcilability between the worker and the artist continues to mark our attempts to link the social to the aesthetic? Perhaps this is a question of place. Where would this suspension of "institutional ties" take place, and how and by whom would it be activated? Bourdieu would suggest that it is not the figure of the mimetician that is inherently the problem (Rancière casts the artist, nostalgically as an abstract figure) but rather the place that is proper to the artist. It may be the place in which the artist operates; the field of cultural production and legitimate culture and its systems of doxic relations that has become "noxious". If Bourdieu's is an "explicatory discourse of inequality" designed to "keep the poor in their place", a closed circle" in which the poor are excluded because they don't know that they are excluded" (Rancière 2000: 51), then why is it that Rancière's theoretical framework can only account for those exceptional workers that "claim their right to aesthetic contemplation, to dead time, the right to think..." (Rancière in Ross 2000:66)? If anything, Bourdieu as a sociologist does not delineate a social project, as Rancière suggests, so much as undertake a descriptive endeavour. He wants to provide us with the *general* conditions of inequality where Rancière takes as his project the "verification of the veracity of equality" as a philosopher of the social in the *particular*. Bourdieu (1989: 373-396) explains why it is necessary for a philosopher of labour, such as Rancière, to seek to "break the idea of a worker, working by day, sleeping by night", in the first place. Bourdieu gives evidence why there are so few who would "give themselves this time that did not belong to them in order to enter into a world of writing and thinking that was not theirs" (Rancière 2000:5). The sociology of habitus outlines why this "world was not theirs" in the first instance where Rancière's poetics of politics draws attention to the exception.

The question of where art situates itself politically in relation to *general* everyday culture becomes critical not only to artists, art educators and cultural workers but also for society at large, because what is

at stake is not so much of the question of what art can or cannot achieve so much as it is a question of how labour can be dealienated more broadly and how it can reflect itself through self-representation. Art as a form of representation can play a significant role in this regard. Nancy challenges artists to ask: “how does the community appropriate to itself the meaning that it is?” (Nancy 1991:383). Rancière similarly asserts that “art anticipates work because it carries out its principle: the transformation of sensible matter into the community’s self presentation” (Rancière 2001:44). Nancy suggests something of the theoretical urgency of dealing with the social distance between the artist and the worker, “the suspension of work” by appealing to a “literary communism” wherein, “the communionless communism of singular beings takes place” (Nancy 1991:72-73). Is it possible for artists to undertake practices that develop the creative capacities of those who are marginalised and excluded (the proletarian, waged labour, the unemployed)? What role can artists play in facilitating the exercise of their creativity, so that their counterparts, the workers do not only earn a living through creativity but can realise their political and democratic agency as subjects by bringing labour into play as community; as “as articulated singularities”? The social gap between the privileged artist (as subjects with high objective chances, and high subjective expectations, possessing symbolic/educational/cultural capital and who have the right to spend it through their creative labour) living and working in the superstructure and the subaltern classes (those with little capitals, and fewer opportunities to spend it and those with high subjective expectations and low objective chances) working at the base is undoubtedly wide. The question of what mode of art making an artist chooses to engage in says a great deal about their personal relationship to the project of creating de-alienated labour. Simplistically stated, artists who make symbolic goods for galleries, may arguably prefer to maintain creativity as the property of the rich and educated whereas artists who dematerialise their practice or recontextualise it in everyday contexts arguably seek to democratise creative practice. Participation in art and aesthetics becomes problematic because it begs the question: whose aesthetic, whose culture, whose art, who’s thinking, what regimes of the sensible are distributed and how?

The reluctance to move into a post-autonomous aesthetic marks every account of a socially engaged art that takes dialectics and social praxis as its starting point. This suggests that an aesthetic that takes equality as its starting point “(everyone is an artist”) is not, in fact, now possible. If Rancière (2000:3) posits equality as given, then upon what ground, Wittgenstein may ask, will equality become visible? For example, how do aesthetics come to be legible within everyday contexts? Do aesthetics practices indeed exist in the fabric of the everyday? In what senses are everyday actions and artefacts aesthetic representations in their own right and how can they be recognised as such? This dilemma of the emplacement of the aesthetic experience is endemic to artistic practices that emphasise collaboration, participation and so on because when we begin to think in post-autonomous terms about art the following question must be asked: whose aesthetics are deemed legitimate in a given collaborative context, and to whom will the resultant form be addressed?

We can perhaps, by debunking this metaphysical discourse on aesthetic essences, retrieve a concrete social account for collaborative artistic practices by centering practice on issues such as transaction, speech genre, linguistic profit, representational strategies, rhetoric. Here, the question is not so much about the essence of art, the potential of the aesthetic, but is a question that centers on the material transactionality of communicative forms operating in specific speech contexts. Centering socially engaged practice on the issue of collaboration *and labour* manages to achieve this. It instantiates new forms of visibility for visual arts practice because by situating aesthetic practices within the context of the everyday, the purpose to which labours (alienated and de-alienated) is put within a capitalist context comes into sharp relief. John Roberts (2004) offers some serious provocations in this regard. He argues that it is the very irreconcilability in the relationship between the aesthetic-as-autonomous and the heteronomy of the social (a relationship he designates as an “aesthetic negativity”) that offers a theoretical model for how socially

engaged art practices can work in collaborative contexts. What Roberts is essentially searching for is a site of productive crisis *in* the social distance between the artist and the worker *and* in their political affinities as outcasts of a dominant social order,. Critical (rather than Habermasian public sphere) dialogue is catalysed for him, by situating “aesthetic labour in the realm of the heteronomous, socialised labour” because it “unlocks the coercions of capitalist value form”. His thesis is worth quoting in full because it highlights the conceptual problems in developing an art that could achieve this:

... I would argue that both [the digital interventionism of Critical Arts Ensemble and Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetic] are far too easily dismissive of the residual problem of art’s autonomy under capitalism. In other words, they confuse the real crisis of authorship and artistic form ... with the end of art as aesthetic negation. Aesthetic negation is that sphere of production and attention in art that derives the meanings of art from its distance or critique of heteronomous labour and thinking. The instability of art as a category and a phenomenological experience is precisely what constitutes its relationship to freedom and human emancipation. On this basis, an adequate understanding of art is one in which the de-alienated labour of art is a model for the de-alienation of socialised labour. Which is not to say that this model of autonomy will supercede heteronomous labour in all realms? This disappearance of all necessary labour is an impossibility and potentially repressive in a post-capitalist system. But, nevertheless, it is the appearance of aesthetic labour in the realm of heteronomous, socialised labour that will unlock the coercions of the capitalist value-form. Forms of artistic praxis that short-circuit this transformative presence of aesthetic labour, in the unmediated interests of “political critique” as art, will leave art if not trapped by the means-ends rationale of heteronomous thinking, at least in thrall to its functionality. Thus we might ask: how can art as critique of the value-form be anything but divergent from the constraints of socialised labour and the rule of non-aesthetic reason? This is why aesthetic negativity puts post-autonomous thinking on art into productive crisis, in so far as it registers the need for a space of aesthetic free play in the critique of heteronomous practice under capitalism. The imagined or hoped for dissolution of art into social praxis simply abandons this aesthetic experience to heteronomy (Roberts 2004: 563 -564).

Critical collaborative art practices thus have the potential to operationalise the aesthetic within the political by capitalising on the social distance between the artist and worker. This holds promise of situating creativity (as an abstract, dematerialised machine one may say) outside its normative, sectoral parameters of the artworld. By locating creativity in ‘other’ places; outside the sphere of legitimate institutional culture the relationship between creativity, intellectual labour, manual labour, privilege and power is made very explicit. Collaborative projects can expose how institutions come to legitimize some practices as creative and aesthetic (Roberts 2004: 537) and others as not; as vulgar, non-aesthetic, banal and everyday. Collaborative practices may also allow us to examine how non-aesthetic practices, in a similar way, come to show disdain for the products of high culture. We must not forget that if the worker and artist occupy radically opposite poles in a class structure, they also belong to entirely different communities each existing and operating within their own ethos, sets of dispositions, and agendas. Kester’s “dialogical aesthetic” like Robert’s collective social-aesthetic praxis see collaboration as an antidote to the embezzling tendency of artists to exoticise the communities they work with for their own gain. Collaborative art practices may be measured not by the representational prowess of artists but by the productive crises emerging within the irreconcilability between the artist’s identity and that of the worker. A dialogical approach places a great deal of emphasis on collectivity as the primary means by which alienated labour is resocialised without quite being able to deal with how this situation comes into effect in aesthetic terms. The distance between artist and worker is cast, ideally, as “a common struggle with labour against the capitalist value-form” where the shared tensions between the dominated class (the worker), and the dominated fraction of the dominated class (artists), are exploited to make symptomological readings of a capitalist economy very similar to Rosalyn Deutsche’s (1998:106) argument that the function of critical public art practice is to make visible the uneven developments in the urban fabric.

For Roberts, “[c]ollaboration through art... becomes the cultural form [a space of social experimentation and speculation] through which the aesthetic critique of the value-form and alternative uses of the technology” are co-jointly imagined. Roberts (2004: 560) argues that collaborative practices challenge us to ask if “there are problems immanent to art, rather than politics, that are resolvable by collaborative

practice...”. One would think it impossible to critique the existing social order without the aesthetic. Although he sees art as an obstacle, he also maintains that by simply eliminating aesthetics from the collaborative equation is disingenious. If collaborative artistic practices are not, in some way aligned with the aesthetic as an institutional effect, they must be “suspect”. This is because if art operates entirely within the context of the socius, the everyday, it literally dissolves, ceases to exist, and relinquishes its emancipatory and critical power. In order to retain its critical purchase, it always needs to “return to the art world to name itself as art” (Roberts 2004: 563). The problem here is that in knowing that they can return, participatory, collective artists run the risk of imposing their own normative definitions of creativity in new places. Artists, because of their dependency on the ‘home’ of legitimate culture may be again lured into exoticising communities and exploiting the resources of the marginalised in everyday contexts in order to reinvent legitimate culture for themselves and their privileged audiences.

This argument highlights a central problem which many writers on socially engaged art practices do not attend to in any critical, or tangible detail is. How do aesthetic practices come to be seen by worker-participants as ‘aesthetic’ in the first place? Surely art operating in the material contexts of the everyday and within situated political contexts risks being dissolved into them? How do collaborative statements come to be legible as aesthetic statements to the various audiences addressed within the context of socially engaged art practices? How is aesthetic experience differentiated from non-aesthetic experiences in the context of the everyday, if as Roberts suggests, the former is but an institutional and historical effect? If the aesthetic is not visible to participants as an object of knowledge, a discursive construct, an institutional effect then how can Robert’s productive critique of the “capitalist value form” take place? Following Robert’s argument to its conclusion we would have to assume a situation where artists would need to play a reformatory and ameliorative role again, taking responsibility to prepare their participants fully for the aesthetic experience. Social praxis and free-play would therefore require an artist to fulfil a didactic function in telling ‘them’ (the other community) how ‘art’ ‘works’ in order for an authentic aesthetic/ dialogical-dialectic to proceed. Further, if as Bourdieu (1989:227) suggests, the aesthetic experience is not so much a thing, as it is a competence acquired over time, a nebulous and complex disposition that requires the investment of time, and energy (which a working subject could not, under normal circumstances, afford) how could artists prepare working class subjects for aesthetic experiences? Is the habitus too resilient to its own sets of internalised dispositions to apprehend the complexity of the aesthetic domain which is a contested field at that? How do artists engage in sophisticated exchanges with workers as equals if the latter cannot recognise the aesthetic experience? How do artists retain the potentials on non-discursive aesthetic ‘free play’ if workers and their political paradigms see no place for it? How is this hermeneutic of “play” to be “retained in social praxis” (564) when it cannot even be recognised, when the labour of the working class comes to be valued as its primary contribution to society, and their play is defined as simply diversionary?

Bourdieu’s statement that art competence is the “...interpretation schemes which are the prerequisite for the appropriation of art capital, in other words, the prerequisite for the deciphering of works of art offered to a given society at a given moment” (Bourdieu 1993: 221) resonates with Roberts’ thinking but it is tautological. If the aesthetic is at once an institutional effect, a reproductive technology, and as Guattari argues also the last paradigmatic vestige of human emancipation, then how do we proceed to instrumentalise it authentically and meaningfully within the context of the everyday labour if to do so is to rob it of its power? How do we break the circle of decipherment upon which the aesthetic depends to work its magic? By appealing to the absolute value of dialogue; by suggesting that by working within transactional struggle between paradigms of reading the world (dialogicality as an aesthetic category) communities and artists can learn to think differently about their own practices. The problem here is that if Kester’s argument is accepted and dialogue is seen as sovereign (Kester 2004: 11; 2005: 82) then the

work of the artist collapses into pure orality, pure conversation, and there is, indeed no need for ‘art’, or for the *visual artist* in the collaborative endeavour. The artist’s role, as the mimetician that throws into visibility the social order of the polis is undermined and theoretical projects such as those of Roberts may, in the final analysis simply descend into sheer collectivity. Nancy’s (1991: 25) absolute “community over communication” becomes the sole means by which collaborative projects can be tangibly “measured” which returns us to ethical criterion being motivated as the primary means by which we can assess socially engaged art projects. In this circumvention of the aesthetic problem lies the admission that to a large extent the aesthetic is defined normatively as an institutional category can and must be thrown into crisis of measurement by entering into dialogue with everyday, unofficial culture. Roberts is right in demanding a new form of reflexivity on the part of the art world, “there are problems immanent to art, rather than politics” that need careful examination.

I would support Roberts and argue that the discourse on socially engaged art is itself the obstacle to engaging productively with the aporia of the social-aesthetic because it remains invested in the ideology of avant-gardism, a form of cultural chauvinism that prevents creative practice from productively interlacing the social and the aesthetic. I will argue later that what is perhaps at stake (which is often the case in the art world when the debate takes place only within its own narrow confines) in the literature of participatory aesthetics is less an ideological struggle of what logic (or disposition) will define a ‘socially engaged/oriented art’ than it is a contest around what political position in the field will monopolise defining the contemporary avant-garde. Both the relational and dialectical logic of socially engaged/oriented art seem to retain two common features in dealing with the social-aesthetic problem. The first is the historical utopianism and transcendentalism of the aesthetic needs to be retained. Because of the reluctance to throw off these two assumptions socially engaged art will continue to resist the crisis of mixing with the materials of the everyday. By containing and maintain the bare minimum of its social distinction (confused with the ‘autonomous’), while at the same time continuing to make theoretical and symbolic excursions into the everyday, the field of artistic production can renew its political purchase within a broader field of artistic power and privilege. The art community, by manufacturing a staged clash between the proponents of a new vanguard of contemporary practice sets up an a situation where a tension “between an “equality to come” (a relational logic), “with existing inequality” (an agonistic logic). Rancière shows deferment as a strategy whereby “inequality as a principle, is instituted, “whose reproduction is infinite” (Rancière 1991: 68). Infinite reproduction of the aesthetic-social aporia is useful to the field of contemporary art because it can become the principle that affords the right to aesthetic experts to claim their legitimate right to mediate between an eternally needy community and an intractable aesthetic. In such a scenario, artists, curators and cultural workers can self-proclaim that it is in the interests of a broader society to make use of their skills, knowledges to usher in a much needed aesthetic revolution.

Grant Kester, Miwon Kwon, Claire Bishop: monopolising the social-aesthetic.

In attending to this contest, the cacophonous literature of participatory aesthetics tends to reduce the terms of the debate to an unproductive binarism, a: “vain debate over the autonomy of art or its submission to politics” (Rancière 2004: 19) which plays out as a series of neo-avant-garde manifestos and denunciations about what constitutes a truly authentic socially engaged/oriented art practice. Such a vain debate takes place between Grant Kester (2004: 158-163) and Miwon Kwon (2004: 138-150) over the status of art making in relation to the “discursive construction of community” (Kwon 2004: 139), identification, dis-identification and the role the aesthetic plays in community-based settings. Kwon’s (2004: 145) position is that the artists working within the context of group identity and community

must resist merely reproducing coherent political identities. They should favour instead a practice of disruption; entertaining “the dynamics of deterritorialisation” (Kwon. 2000: 14). Similar to Deutsche (1988) she proposes that artists must make visible social-spatial disjunctures through their practice and thus critique capitalism’s cooptation of public space. Kwon advocates an aesthetic of destabilisation. Kester, on the other hand, promotes the catalytic role artists can play in constructing and augmenting the political projects of communities. He criticises Kwon’s (2004: 138) “unsitings of community” as an arrogant, and pretentious avant-garde strategy. He favours instead a more convivial relationship between artistic practice and community. His central question in *Conversation Pieces* (2004) is “is possible to reclaim a less violent and more convivial relationship with the viewer while preserving the critical insights that the aesthetic experience can offer to objectifying forms of knowledge” (Kester. 2004:27). Most of the book illustrates how various artists and artists groups create conviviality and consolidation in their work.

Kwon feels that community based art practices should achieve the opposite. She claims that, “today’s site oriented practices inherit the task of demarcating the relational specificity that can hold in tension the distant poles of spatial experience described by Bhabha” (that between the “dispossessed” and those that “own it”). Kwon (2005: 49) goes on to explain that, “this means addressing the differences of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, on place, one thought, one fragment next to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing after another” (Kwon 2005: 49) which suggests that community based artists should seek out tension which may entail representational violence. Drawing on the theories of Nancy and De Certeau, Kwon argues that artists have the responsibility of conveying “the impossibility of total consolidation, wholeness and unity” (Kwon. 2004: 154) understanding community based art practice as a “projective” rather than a “descriptive enterprise” (Kwon 2004 :154), casting the artist as the privileged destabiliser of coherent identities, who through the community paradoxically retrieves public space and a sense of being-in-common by pointing to its impossibility and criticises Kesters “dialogical aesthetic” on this basis.

Kester, recognising that Kwon’s approach favours aesthetics over dialogicality, proposes that artists, if they wish to experience a truly dialogical encounter should work with “politically coherent communities” (Kester 2000: 7; 2004: 161) which by virtue of their coherence and voice may act as an antidote to the implicit arrogance in social reformist/social ameliorative practices of delegate artists and the institutions that stand behind them (Kester 2004: 175). Like Kwon, Kester implicitly valorises the artist as a “catalyser” (Kester 2004: 69) of social change and simultaneously points to the danger of artists exploiting communities by virtue of the symbolic authority and privileges bestowed upon him/her as a delegator and mediator which becomes a key point of contention in this debate. For Kester, the dialogical is motivated as the central criterion by which to assess a given community based art projects because it yields an “*equitable* process of exchange and mutual education, with the artist learning from the community and having his or her own presuppositions ...challenged and expanded,” undermining “a sense of epistemological mastery” [added emphasis] (Kester 2004: 75). In other words Kester understands the transactional exchange between artist and communities is a symbolic struggle but refuses to recognise this. And so he argues that the condition of a truly dialogical art is one where the symbolic profits to be gained in a given encounter of artist and community must be equitably distributed which the idea of the destabilising artist tends to negate. Kester fails to account in any concrete and empirical sense what kinds of capitals are “distributed” in the projects he discusses.

Kwon claims that artists should resist easy dialogicalism and especially consolidation in their work with communities. They should avoid working with coherent ‘political’ communities because they are “more susceptible to appropriation”, “precisely because of the singular definition of their collective identity”

which can be easily aligned with the social interests of a given sponsor as shown in the easy equation “artist + community + social issue = new critical/public art” (Kwon 2004: 50). She sees institutionalism, both in terms of the identity of the artist and community as essentially damaging to collaborative, dialogical projects. Artists are susceptible to damaging communities because of “the kind of reductive and equalising association drawn between an artist and community group is not always the work of a self-aggrandizing, pseudo-altruistic artist but rather a fashioning of the artist by institutional forces” (Kwon 2004: 141).

She goes on to argue that the institutional mediation of collaborative, community based art projects determines the nature of the dialogue that takes place within them:

This is not to say that artists and community groups are innocent pawns in a conspiracy devised exclusively by curators and art institutions. The important fact is that, within the community-based art context, the interaction between an artist and a given community is not based on a direct, unmediated relationship. Instead it is circumscribed within a more complex network of motivations, expectations and projections among all involved... critiques of community artists need to be qualified by the recognition of the central role that institutions and exhibition programs play not only in delimiting the identities of those involved, but in determining the nature of the collaborative relationship between them. (Kwon 2004: 141).

Kwon accuses Kester of promulgating artistic practices such as these that unwittingly allow artists to reproduce essentialist notions of identity or “a closed system of differences”, and engender an “idealised spectre of community” (Mouffe in Kwon 2004: 149). Making communities ‘coherent’ can do little else but consolidating the hegemonic influence of various institutions (private and state) over communities. Kester responds to Kwon’s criticism by saying that it smacks of the same paternalism with she indicts him with. For him it is the institution of the avant-garde that constrains the work collaborative community based projects in much the same way as other institutions do: “it is hard to avoid the implication that union workers and public housing tenants simply do not know any better than to embrace these forms of experience and that it is the artist’s responsibility to instil them with a properly self-reflexive attitude...” (Kester 2004: 162). “Kwon’s privileging of “uncertainty” over “predictability”, and “mutability” over “coherence” effectively consigns a great deal of work in this field into the realm of apostasy... Kwon does not seem to grasp the pragmatic consequences of her exclusive focus on self-criticality or the particular privilege implied in her causal dismissal of the political fulcrum provided by collective identities and voices in political struggles” (Kester 2004: 162 -163).

Two privileging positions emerge: Kwon (2000: 43) contends that artists must disrupt coherence through their mobilisation of aesthetic resources: bearing the “burden of the necessity and impossibility of modelling new forms of being-in-place, new forms of belonging”. Kester asserts that this is unhelpful- artists must rather augment valid social struggles through their dialogical work with “communities” (Kester 2004: The problem seems to center on the definition of the artist and in whose name he or she should/ must speak which are somehow, discursively, at odds with one another: the community and the art institution. The debate tends to veer into an unhelpful instrumentalism. To what purposes should the competences of artists be put? Neither critic really interrogates the competences themselves and accept that artists are privileged social actors. Kester feels it necessary to mythologise and valorise the artist, as “catalyst”, “durational”, “imaginative, spatial thinker”, “empathiser” and instigator of “empathetic identification”, “skilled facilitator” who possesses, “an open attitude”, a skill in “listening”, can “accept a position of dependence”, showing “intersubjective vulnerability”(Kester 2004: 59-69) without being able to account for where these competences come from or why they are special. But at the same time, he also feels the need to balance out this idealism by suggesting that artists, or rather the institution of art as it works through the sensibilities of artists, cannot itself be trusted with community and solidarity building because artists seek to “exploit the inner resources of the poor” and plunder the materials of

the everyday for their own purposes. He assumes that it is not possible for artists to both resist the internalisation of the exclusions upon which the field of legitimate culture operates and the reproductive tendencies of coherent political communities. The issue is that without reference to either constituency how will the artist indeed function? As an antidote to address the split identity of the artist working in community-based settings, (as split between being an institutional-coloniser of the everyday and the egalitarian convivial-facilitator) Kester proposes a theoretically ungrounded dialogism as a catch all to resolve the tension, issuing a set of recommendations to artists as to the kind of work they should do: engage in ‘durational’ processes with politically coherent communities, investigate interdisciplinarity and so on, ultimately bureaucratising the work of artists.

What Kester forgets is that the artist may enter into dialogue with a given community and find legitimisation of their approach through them, or indeed collaborate with them to produce works and affect change, but in order for the activities of the dialogical artist to be classified as art, valued as aesthetic activity in itself it needs to be legitimised by agencies outside the circle of artist and collaborator/community, by discourses that may be alien to the constituency working with the dialogical artist. How does an artist resolve these tensions becomes of central concern to a “dialogical aesthetic”. The point is that Kester cannot resolve the antimony of the social and the aesthetic because to do this would be to give up the idea that pure dialogicality is ever possible: that it is indeed always, as Kwon (2004: 134) points out, institutionally contaminated; by contractual exchanges, the accrual of profit, and exploitation. Simply put, Kester cannot accept the intrusion of the the discursive or mastery into his dialogical idealism. Dissonance, displacement, discomfort, the irreconcilability of the social-aesthetic (misrecognised as the avant-garde) becomes the anathema to pure dialogicality. Avant-gardism is rejected outright as a form aesthetic orthopaedicism.

Both Kwon and Kester tend to mythologise the artist as a monad. It is assumed, for example (despite Kester’s arguments to the contrary) that ordinary people do not possess their own creative capacities, that somehow they belong to the realm of the normative and the artist by virtue of their aesthetic sensibilities have the innate capacity to dialogise everyday situations. There is a confusion at work here. It is assumed that there is something intrinsic aesthetic identity of the artist that allows them to dialogise where indeed any other practitioner operating in an unfamiliar paradigm would instigate dialogue and reflection. The artist in this scenario could just as easily be replaced by a number of other practitioners to catalyse conversation and facilitate the attainment of tangible political outcomes; scientists, social workers, sociologists. The discourse of the dialogical artist thus sectoralises creativity and buys into the notion of the aesthetic as a privileged domain of creative practice. Kester’s work really centers on the roles artists *should* play in community based settings, suggesting that they are more “accountable” to their critics than they are to their constituencies in which they work. In this way the discourse of socially engaged/oriented art simply cannot dispense of the notion that the artist is, and should be somehow socially privileged, because without it, what would the critics contest?

As to be expected a third party, with the same stakes in the struggle (as a curator, published commentator, critic who plays the role of asserting the responsibilities of artists) intercedes to clear up the conceptual quagmire created by Kester and Kwon. Claire Bishop clears the air by stating that:

[t]he emergence of criteria by which to judge social practices is not assisted by the present day standoff between the nonbelievers (aesthetes who reject this work [socially engaged art] as marginal, misguided, and lacking artistic interest of any kind) and believers (activists who reject aesthetic questions as synonymous with cultural hierarchy and the market). The former, at their most extreme, would condemn us to a world of irrelevant painting and sculpture, while the latter have a tendency to self-marginalise to the point of inadvertently reinforcing arts autonomy, thereby preventing any productive rapprochement between art and life. Is there ground on which the two sides can meet? (Bishop 2006: 179).

Bishop contends that the move to a ‘socially engaged art’ has raised questions about how artistic practices, more broadly speaking, should be evaluated. She contends that Kester:

...challenges us to treat communication as an aesthetic form, but, ultimately, he fails to defend this, and seems perfectly content to allow that a socially collaborative art project could be deemed as a success if it works on the level of social intervention even though it flounders on the level of art. In the absence of a commitment to the aesthetic, Kester’s position adds up to a familiar summary of the intellectual trends inaugurated by identity politics: respect for the other, recognition of difference, protection of fundamental liberties, and an inflexible mode of political correctness (Bishop 2006: 182).

Bishop bluntly exposes the terms of the debate; a contest over the way projects *should* be seen, how artists *should* work in new settings. In Bishop’s critique of Kester’s “dialogical aesthetics” she puts forward again the model of the aesthetic as non-discursive (asocial) domain that cannot be instrumentalised but asks, crucially if “is there a ground on which the two sides can meet?” (Bishop 2006: 179). At the same time, she points out that what is problematic is not so much aesthetic practice itself but the universalism indexed in the critic’s use of the ‘the’ in ‘the aesthetic’. She unwittingly reveals that the stakes in this debate between Kwon and Kester are more about defining a universal, totalising and formal definition of the aesthetic (‘the’) as it relates to the social than it is about paying attention to how a polyphonic, heteroglossic aesthetic practice unfolds in its particularity in new, everyday settings. If the social-aesthetic relation represents a limit to both discursive categories, or more aptly represents a *boundary* of the field of artistic production, a point at which mechanisms that frame and define it are exposed, magics fail to work their wonder, and illusions are differentiated from realities then the stakes in a debate such as this are high because this is a contest over a definitional border. Under the banner of ‘the’ aesthetic it can be endlessly contested and make contestants endlessly.

It is interesting that Bishop’s (2006: 179) evokes the metaphor of faith (“believers and non-believers”) in the above cited quote. She insinuates that what is at stake in this debate between Kwon and Kester is not the metaphysical relation between the social and aesthetic but really about which consecrator (Kwon, Kester, Billings, Bishop) in the field of ‘socially engaged art’ will come to monopolise it. The presence of a definitional border suggests the operations of monopolisation and consecration. At the same time, Bishop also exposes her position in the game by employing three strategies typical to struggles in the art world. Firstly, she assumes the position of overseeing mediator, secondly invokes the unnameable taboo in the art world (that art is based on acts of collective magic) and finally, in the name of this taboo displaces her competitors by remaking claims to absolute authenticity—“that there is a productive rapprochement between art and life”. No critic would dare to challenge this strategy because, as Bourdieu (1993: 73) argues to do so, would be “to utter “in public” the true nature of the field, and its mechanisms is sacrilege *par excellence*, the unforgivable sin which all the censorships constituting the field seek to repress”. By thoroughly examining the relationship between the ethical/social and the artistic/aesthetic the role artistic production plays in the construction of economic privilege would be exposed. Bishop, by brushing up dangerously against the boundary, by naming the unnameable “embraces the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice” (Bishop 2006: 180)! This may be less about defining the terms ‘aesthetics’, ‘social’ (which act as ciphers for the assertion of political power) than it is a struggle between various players in a discursive and political field (of so-called public, socially engaged art) to monopolise the terrain, to frame the terms in which the debate takes place: a right to police a boundary. In other words the internal political struggle over “the boundary of the field” (Bourdieu 1993:42) explains why the voice of the participant, those with which artists engage is so markedly absent from this debate from being offered as evidence to warrant the critics’ claims.

Bourdieu’s (1993: 81) notions of art as a field of collective magic, or “*illusio*” *par excellence* are useful in unmasking the terms of the debate as it is outlined above and is also useful in explaining the absence

of the voice of the participant. Bourdieu asserts that the auratic quality of aesthetic representations (and the decipherment required in their reading) is constructed through *struggles over claims to truth* which is the raison 'd'etre of art criticism:

If there is a truth, it is that truth is at stake in the struggle. And although the divergent or antagonistic classifications or judgements made by the agents engaged in the artistic field are certainly determined or directed by specific dispositions and interests linked to a given position in a field, they nevertheless are formulated in the name of a claim to universality- to absolute judgement- which is the very negation of the relativity of points of view (Bourdieu 1993: 263).

In terms of this we could say that the positions adopted by these writers we may assume that the struggle for truth is itself an illusion, a legitimate cover for a struggle over professional reputation:

What makes reputations in the field of cultural production understood as the system of objective relations between those agents and institutions as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate of which the value of art and belief in that value are continuously generated... the disavowal of the economy is placed at the very heart of the field as the principle governing its functioning and transformation (Bourdieu 1993: 42).

The debate therefore becomes less about engagement and participation than it is about defining the authenticity of certain artistic practices, displacing others within a political field. This would perhaps explain why Kester would promote Leeson over Whiteread (Kester 2004: 18-25); Piper over Morris (Kester 2004: 70-73); Crujido over Critical Arts Ensemble (Kester 2004: 158 -166); Kogler over Lyotard (Kester 2004: 85-80)' Bakhtin over Nancy (Kester 2005: 79; Kester. 2004: 154 -158) or why Bishop would promote Sierra over Tiravanija; Collins over the collective Oda Projesi; Rancière over Bourdieu and why Kwon would promote Ukeles over Serra (Kwon 2004: 71-80; Kwon 2004: 19) and so on. Without being able to mark out this complex of position takings in the diagrammatic texture it deserves, I would like to propose that this strategic game, is a sophisticated way "of denying the social world" (Bourdieu 1993: 87) because to incorporate the voice of the participant into the debate (as a voice equal to that of artists) into that of theorists, art critics would mean to "overturn the hierarchy of the field, and "disturb the principles upon which the field is based" (Bourdieu 2003: 87) which is a radical and ambitious egalitarianism only a writer such as Rancière could imagine. More powerful voices and practices are elevated over that of the lowly participant who, despite the pseudo-ethical rhetoric, is ultimately, by their absence, cast out, characterised more a surface to be worked upon than an authorial agent in its own right. Artists are interviewed, projects are catalogued, reviews are written, curators select works for publication in the name of the participant when it is really just about art. The discourse therefore must center on defining the *universal* ethical and aesthetic parameters of socially engaged art practices. As Bishop rightly admits, it is the authorial renunciations of the artists that are valorised in the ethical paradigm of community-based art. Rather than attention being focussed on the enunciative universes and practices of the participants engaged in those projects, attention is diverted to universal generalities emblematised in 'the' social and 'the' aesthetic.

Bourdieu perhaps sheds light on why this is the case that the discourse on socially engaged art prefers essences to material heterogeneity. According to him, "essentialist thought" is at work in every social universe and especially in the field of cultural production... where games in which the universal is at stake are being played out. In the field of cultural production and especially in texts written about art essences" are norms" (Bourdieu 1993: 263). Bourdieu's *Field of Cultural Production* argues that the *illusion of struggle* is an essential principle to the workings of the field of artistic practice, which is reiterated in *Distinction*. Adorno (1997: 238) characterisation of the aesthetic ground as a paradigmatic irreconcilability between two levels of experience, the general and the particular, for Bourdieu, is merely an effect within the political field of cultural production. How are we to make sense of these two models of agonism; one of

the level of the artwork itself and the other on the level of the field of artistic production? Kester reveals in a statement in an interview that he buys into the struggle to monopolise readings of social engaged practices, by reifying one practice over another on dubious interactionist grounds. This in effect masks the particularity at work in contemporary art practices and in so doing does them an injustice:

TS: First of all, you talked yesterday about there being a paradigm shift could you describe the basic characteristics of that shift?

GS: Yes, this shift is taking place on two, related levels. First, there is a shift towards collaborative approaches in contemporary art. And second, there is a shift towards participatory, process based experience, and away from what I'd describe as a "textual" mode of production in which the artist fashions an object or event that is subsequently presented to the viewer for decoding... today's boundaries between socially engaged art practice and the avant-garde are harder to determine..." (Kester 2006:1).

The relegation/assignment of the "textual mode" to "works of art whether it's an object, a space, or an event, is programmed ahead of time and then set in front of the viewer" (Kester in Wilson 2007: 112) could be read as an avant-garde of valorising practices that do that and dismissing those that do not. The social/aesthetic debate is less about what truly constitutes a participatory aesthetic than it is about whom has the right to speak the pure language of aesthetic reformism associated with socially engaged/oriented art practices and which artists are then required to enact. What we find instead of a serious engagement with aesthetics and participation on the level of how it plays out on the ground of the everyday as it were, or the tensions as they are exhibited at the level of the radically particular visual statement, is the sub-textual institutional politics of the art world and avant-gardism mapped onto the mythical fiction of the everyday. Kwon uses the same strategy of universalist disavowal by co-opting the speech of the artist in order to stereotype Kester as a member of the "professional-managerial class" which ultimately reveals Kwon's uneasiness about their homologous positions within the field of artistic production that are too close for comfort.

Artist Martha Fleming has pointed out that what critical projects like Kester's are addressing is not so much the actual practice of community based art but one discursive characterisation of it, its commodification and promotion as "new public art" by "professional-managerial class (PMC)- the critics and curators currently creating careers and fiefdoms for themselves by harnessing and bringing into the fold an artist's activity that has been threatening the institutions that employ them (Kwon 2004:143).

In this way both critics reveal their expertise *as explicators* of socially engaged practices operating somewhat as "mediators between society and bodies of knowledge", who "translate competence for those in other fields... into authority" (De Certeau 1984: 7). They cannot in effect, realise what De Certeau attempts, a "reading of the world as prose" (De Certeau 1984: 11) offering instead a "totalising discourse". I mentioned earlier that it is difficult to disentangle the avant-garde ideology operating in this debate, from a genuine argument that proposes nuanced relationships between artistic practice and constructions of community. Rancière aptly describes two models of avant-gardism that make sense of this tension between the metaphysical (the discourse of anticipating the future) and ideological (a military notion) aspects of the avant-garde:

The notion of the avant-garde defines the type of subject suitable to the modernist vision and appropriate, according to this vision, for connecting the aesthetic to the political. Its success is due less to the convenient connection it proposes between the artistic idea of innovation and the idea of politically-guided change, than to the more covert connection it establishes between two ideas of the "avant-garde". On the one hand, there is the topographical and military notion of the force that marches in the lead that has a clear understanding of the movement, embodies its forces, determines the direction of historical evaluation, and chooses subjective political orientations... that derives its ability to read and interpret the signs of history. On the other hand, there is another idea of the avant-garde that, in accordance with Schiller's model, is rooted in the aesthetic anticipation of the future (Rancière 2004: 29).

Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural field (consumerism, the literary field, the artistic field, the avant-garde) sits precisely in the understanding of the avant-garde as a "militaristic attempt" to "interpret the signs of history" rather than being able to account for the aesthetic as a radical, dialectical, educational practice of "anticipating the future." Bourdieu manages to elucidate the stakes of a debate over 'socially engaged art' and also says a great deal about how power is invested in everyday speech acts (as I will argue later as providing a framework for how artists may understand their relation to participants in terms of symbolic power) but has very little to offer in terms of how art works function in their radical particularity or how it is possible to imagine new, egalitarian forms of conversation. He is uneasy of the aesthetic because it attempts to occupy the position of the social in a field he is in fact attempting to master. His theories, read within their barren commonsense empiricism, tend to imagine a world defined by the social (or more accurately the sociologist), where literature, art, performance, culture as such has been exterminated as false, bogus, bourgeois consciousness. As such, his ideas are practical and even useful but extremely unimaginative. He cannot understand how the aesthetic can be said to "anticipate the future" on the level of the particular artwork or the specific responses of viewers. He shows a certain bias against artistic practice in claiming that "science can attempt to bring representations and instruments of thought" to their proper place, in other words, "back to the historical structure of the field in which they were engendered (Bourdieu 1993: 160).

For Adorno (1997: 239), rather than the aesthetic representation being emblematic of the fetishist acquisition of social capital (as Bourdieu sees it), it is within the material and essence of the artwork itself, in the play between disidentification and identification – (it is in fact, its particular presence rather than its magic) where its radical social function is to be found. The negative dialectic which he contends is essential to the functioning of all powerful aesthetic representations is what Bourdieu fails to apprehend, because it falls outside the domain of dominative rationality or totalising logic. Bourdieu misrecognises the "work of art's suspension of identity without cancelling it, its broaches and breaches of itself, its perpetual deferrals" (Adorno in Eagleton 1990: 347) as its "disinterested" autonomy (Bourdieu 1993: 19). For him, the artwork's ambiguity is as an absolute sign of complicity with power- that the irreconcilable dialectic as it is manifest in the form of the artwork can simply be written off as mere "illusio", a social act of collective magic, symbolic goods for the rich (Bourdieu 1993: 72). The aesthetic representation must have a transcendental value beyond merely being private property if we ask why it was privatised and hoarded in the first place. Eagleton, in discussing Adorno (Eagleton 1990: 341- 365), links the aesthetic to the cultural. He argues that because aesthetic representations are cultural expressions operating in an economic system they are "deeply locked into the structure of commodity production" and because of this possess an "ideological autonomy of their own". However, because artworks are also cultural manifestations (and not just commodities) they can "speak against the very social order with which it is guiltily complicit" (Eagleton 1990: 370). There must be embedded in the grain and texture of the little art work and indeed, in its cousin in the modesty of the everyday act where an equality can be found. Artworks like everyday acts have a quality of indeterminacy, an animation which cannot be apprehended or discerned by the logic of a reflexive sociology. Eagleton, rather finding artworks as just aesthetically defined, he gives them a "paratactic logicity" which links the cultural and the commodity status of the artwork, an idea that resists Bourdieu's anxious reductionism. The artwork,

It revokes the violence inflicted by such reason by emancipating rationality from its present empirical confinement, and so appears as the process by which rationality criticises itself without being able to overcome itself... the transcendence of the artefact lies in its power to dislocate things from their empirical context and reconfigure them in an image of freedom; but this also means that artworks "kill what they objectify, tearing it away from its context of immediacy and real life (Eagleton 1990: 351).

I am not attempting here to fetishise the emancipatory potentials of the aesthetic representation nor to elevate it but rather, I would suggest as De Certeau does, (in a wry critique of the sociology of Bourdieu), that there do in fact exist “places of miracle. “They tell the truth” (De Certeau 1984: 113). They are modest and often invisible. There are “spaces” that “exist alongside the analysis of facts” (De Certeau 1984: 17) as “silent witnesses”. The everyday and the aesthetic as orders of paratactic logic cannot be made visible, sayable or thinkable because as Adorno remarks:

The aesthetic We is a social whole on the horizon of a certain indeterminateness, though, granted as the ruling productive forces and relations of an epoch. Although art is tempted to anticipate a nonexistent social whole, its non-existent subject, and thereby more than an ideology, it bears at the same time the mark of this subject's non-existence. The antagonisms of society are nevertheless preserved in it. Art is true insofar as what speaks out of it- indeed, its itself- is conflicting and unreconciled, but this truth only becomes art's own when it synthesises what is fractured and thus makes its irreconcilability determinate. Paradoxically, art must testify to the unreconciled and at the same time envision its reconciliation; this is a possibility only for its nondiscursive language. Only in this process is its We concretised (Adorno 1997: 221).

Heteroglossia: facing no obvious measure.

Rancière (2004: 62) argues that the aesthetic as it relates to the socius inherently resists measurement: “there is no criterion for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics”. Although the political can seek out the aesthetic in an attempt to represent it and unrepresent itself, the same is generally argued to be not true for the aesthetic. It does not require the political to give its sense. Art it is a practice of seeing blindness, of marking contours and limits beyond the capacities of language (Menke 1998: 215) which explains why a relational logic of socially oriented art tends to conflate artistic autonomy with non-discursivity. An aesthetics of politics is all good and well, but “betrays and undoes itself as soon as it enters material existence” (Eagleton 1990: 165). I will argue, later, that it is exactly here, in the space between speech and image; in the literacy practices of the social and the political that socially engaged/orientated artistic practices may be provisionally ‘measured’. In this regard, the agonistic model of socially engaged art does two things: it grants the aesthetic a degree of autonomy in which it can enter into social free play, but also a symbolic site in which political conflicts can operate. When it is insisted that the aesthetic and legitimate culture cannot be entirely disentangled, that the aesthetic is thoroughly institutionalised, contaminated by notions such taste, appreciation (Bourdieu 1989: 63-96), field specific doxas, it becomes political space and relinquishes its critical autonomy, is emptied of its imaginative potential and becomes a place in which meaning is policed. It therefore makes sense that critics of socially engaged art deploy territorial metaphors in their writing: “the demarcation of...” (Kwon 2004: 148), “today's boundaries” (Kester 2006: 1). The discourse of “claiming territories” and demarcating “shifts” in effect restores aesthetic to its proper place (the avant-garde as it is defined by critics), the “sentence” not fully understanding the radicality aesthetic representations and everyday experiences propose. What socially engaged art seeks to propose, as a solution to the literacy-aesthetic struggle, is a model of social activity where the dialogical is understood as an aesthetic category in itself, disingenuously collapsing the latter into the former which seems to cast out the aesthetic by making it an ethical category.

Is it possible to debunk and evacuate the aesthetic discourse and to subject it to a more modest “visual turn” to promote an open visibility over the specious and transcendental language of aesthetics and mark out a new, more neighbourly departure point for socially engaged art practices? It is surprising that so much literature on public art prefers to evoke the aesthetic in their discussion of participatory art practices in terms of essences rather than in terms of visibility. This Foucauldian approach may offer a more nuanced account of why images are made and the uses to which they are put. Visibility effectively

empties out the aesthetic as a modernist, bourgeois naivety, a dream linked to particular time and place and so with it the unnecessary ideality attached to it. Perhaps the issue at stake in the discourse of participation and aesthetics is less formal than it is political; more about how the institutions of art work than it is about transactional limitation of the forms as they appear in political everyday contexts. ‘Participatory art’, as many authors argue, attempts to break the stranglehold of ‘the institution’ over the cultural practice but outside the institution what will culture do, how will it be seen, worked, operated, dialogised? The modernist argument attempts to free the aesthetic from the cultural. It asserts that art must autonomously realise its own limitations and participative modalities but at the same times pays a price for this by lifting art out the culture of the everyday. The modernist mantra that “each individual art would thus assert the pure potential of art be exploring the capabilities of its specific medium” (Rancière 2004: 27) ultimately institutionalises aesthetic practice. A given cultural form is not necessarily inherently exclusive, inclusive or less participatory than another- it is arguably rather the uses to which it is put, and the contexts in which it finds itself that makes it exclusive. Cultural and artistic forms are not participative or elitist per se, but may be re-contextualised, reinvented, reconfigured and as I will argue in Chapter three, *reappropriated* in the everyday offering distinct possibilities for participation which vary in quality, intensity and nature within given contexts. We need to find and invent practices that are open to appropriation, reassembling, being rereading and de-territorialisation.

The absence/invisibility of the engaged participant in the discourse of socially engaged art practices constitutes a crisis in the discourse of art criticism because it disallows for the complexity of the reappropriation of art in everyday contexts. Socially engaged art is a good thing for the art community because throws into sharp relief the exclusions upon which the field depends in order to operate within a capitalist system which are in fact based on *essences* emblematised in the terms “the” aesthetic and “the” social. I contend that we imagine a social-aesthetic relation as a *literacy machine*. If the primary contribution of the participant to ‘the’ social- aesthetic project is their speech, the enunciative act, their occupation and their movement through social space, their bodily hexis as opposed to legitimate visual-conceptual competences then why is their speech and their bodies, their writing, their reading so markedly absent as a representational force, an identity intervening in the textualities of socially engaged art? Where is the direct quoting of the participant, the seminal marker of a dialogised text in works such as *Conversation Pieces*, *Relational Aesthetics*, *Art and Participation*, *One Place After Another* and so on? Where is Rancière’s Jactotot (1991) proletarian inscription? “From what position can we analyse everyday life?” (De Certeau 1984: 24) Can socially engaged art criticism deal with the radical heterogeneity of the everyday; the unrepeatability of dialogical situations; the undoing of community for communication, as it is espoused by Nancy or does the art institution become “the very negation of the relativity of points of view by not being able to imagine or incorporate difference itself, but employ the terms of difference for its own ends” (Bourdieu 1993: 263). The problem, as I see it, is that despite the aspirations of the aesthetic as a space of imagining emancipation, in its current form (as it is embodied in the avant-garde discourse of socially engaged art remains), it remains, in a somewhat sophisticated fashion– radically exclusive. I need to think of new ways to imagine art operating outside this practice of exclusion.

By granting attention to the participant’s voice and body in these projects in all their radical particularity (not essences but presences) would lead to the admission on the part of various players in the field (art critics, art historians, curators, gallerists, artists, publishers, the art lover, collectors, museums) that there is *no one aesthetic*, nor a single measure of it, but rather *many aesthetics* and also that the aesthetic, as it is historically defined is inextricably linked to questions of institutional power. If the participant truly co-authored/collaborated in the production of a work on the terms of their own lived experience, their appreciative repertoire, habitus, class gender, in other words; from the point of view of their everyday *aesthetics* there would appear *no obvious measure* by which the art institution could make sense of these

collaborative objects, phenomena, project intelligible, readable, visible, legible *to itself* and its privileged audiences? In other words, does the art institution itself, as an instrument, and technology lose possess the vocabulary for measurement other than its ability to legitimise, name and consecrate with authority? In the same way (as a neighbour you might say), the aesthetic representation imagined as a gift to the everyday (outside the logic of avant-garde strategy), cannot be located because the gift works “in the interstices of a capitalist economy” (De Certeau 1984: 28). The aesthetic representation/gesture imagined as gift becomes a “decolonising process” (Barber 1996: 1), for De Certeau (1984: 28), a “diversionary tactic”, as a surplus “excess (waste)”, and thus constitutes “a challenge”, as a “rejection of profit”, and becomes to be viewed as a “crime”, an “attack on property”, and a kind of practice which must thus be policed by language. De Certeau (1984: 28) names the practice of gift giving, “an art of diversion” which is a “return to the ethical”, and a “parruque of writing itself”. So we return, via the gift, to the relation between the social and the aesthetic as a question about the situation of literacy (De Certeau 1984: 173).

Informality and ambulation.

The project (if it is possible to call it that) I am about to describe attempts to deal tactically with many of the problems outlined above. The following section of the report looks specifically at how a post-autonomous art could function on the ground of the everyday, not as art-as- interventionism, art-as-social orthopaedism, or community-based art but rather a messy process where I attempted and failed to establish some kind of equality between the social and aesthetic. In the next section, I ‘walk into’ the problem of measurement by attempting to make sense of two years of walking the streets of Yeoville. I tried not walk these streets as an artist-researcher and enter into engagements with strangers in an attempt to lay bare the structure of the everyday, to explicate, but rather seek points of “rupture and suture” (Guattari 1995: 132) in my identity as an artist and identify moments of repetition and difference in the speech of others and my own. For me, the practice of “storytelling, recounting”, imagined as a research methodology, “verifies”, a kind of “equality” (Rancière 1991: 69) which is not so much about finding or making knowledge, but a kind of blind navigation through different kinds of spaces so the proceeding chapters in the report read almost novelistically. I wanted to work in the medium of social distance between the artist and the worker, that fraught gap between two forms of labour and living attempting to inhabiting a social landscape in which I was a stranger. In this sense, these moments I am about to ‘tell’ are a kind of a story, a being-in-common dialogue between myself as the narrator (the artist, researcher, the social voice, writer, totaliser, theoretician, ego), and myself as the hero in novel (the walking and speaking character, the inner voice, resident) holding a conversation with other artists about this social-aesthetic antimony in the fictional place of an informal-writing and walking. So, I attempt to speak embodied ways of our wanderings through the “project of immense failure” that was *Speak English to Me*.

Chapter Two: Yeoville as the research site.

“Beer-soaked conversations in Time Square inevitably invoke an escape plan- to a better suburb, country or continent” (Prabhala 2009:308).

This novel type of procedure is not reserved for the analysis of psychotics but is also applicable to neurotics, psychopaths, normopaths... It both puts into question future analytical apparatuses in the domain of pedagogy, the life of the neighbourhood, the ecology of retirement- in a whole field of molecular revolutions: and it works toward an escape from contemporary social desertification (Guattari 1995: 72, on ‘schizoanalysis’).

The neighbourhood as research site.

I cannot hope to give within the scope of this paper a full account of my relationship to Yeoville (I have my own escape plan!). However, I can set the ground for the project by giving the reader a general sense of the schizophrenic place in which the project *Yeoville International: Speak English to Me* unfolded. Yeoville (Figure 17) was selected as the research site because of the project’s focus on making collaborative aesthetic representations in informal places and also because I happen to live there which complicates matters. I sought to explore the effects of being a researcher, artist and resident simultaneously, operating within a definite neighbourhood and to examine the ways in which my investment in place affected my identity as an artist, researcher and writer. The decision to work ‘here’ (rather than ‘there’) was informed by the understanding, drawn from a constructivist paradigm of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 2003:3-5) that the subjectivity of researcher, the design of the research instrument itself both affects the subject of the research. Because research is wound up with the situations it observes, findings are “quilted” or “bricolaged” “to the specifics of a given situation” (Denzin & Lincoln 2003:3-5). Research, like art-making, needs an audience and I was interested to think about what purposes findings and artefacts could be put to in the research site itself; in what takes place when a researcher is as heavily invested in the situation of research and situated art making as he/she is invested in a research and art community. What tensions exist between producing research for a community-as-research site and the research community (academics, lecturers, writers, critics etc)? Many of the events triggered in the course of the project I knew would take place in the presence of people that knew me as a resident of Yeoville, rather than an artist, an employee of the university, or student undertaking research. What effect would my tenuous involvement in the place of Yeoville have on my identity as a researcher-artist?

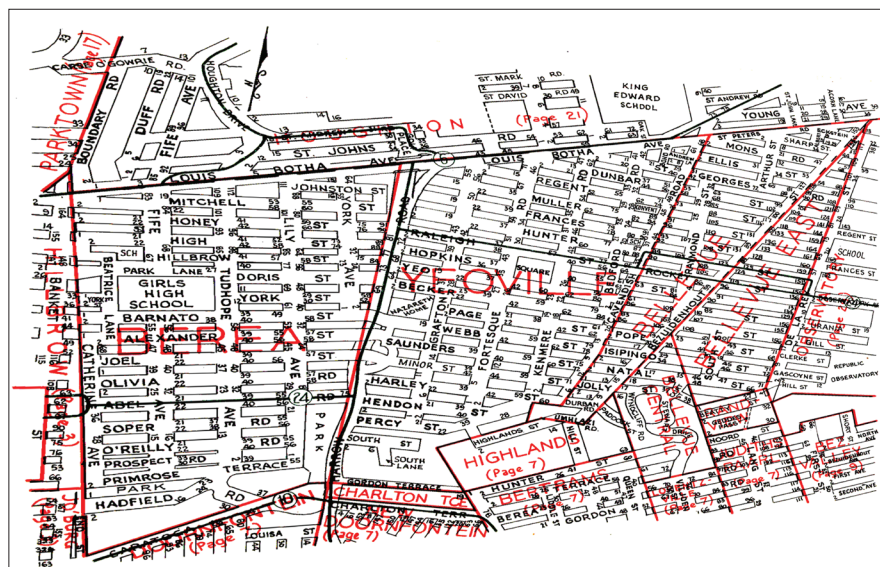


Figure 17: Street map of Yeoville, Bellevue, 2008.

I was interested in formulating a method of making art, or at least a theoretical framework for an artmaking practice that could work and play outside any institutional context; whether that be the gallery, museum, a funded community-based project where I worked as an artist in an institutional setting such as a school. So I opted for the ‘street’ as an informal contact zone between myself and those living in Yeoville. It became important for me not to work in structured, formal institutional settings so that I could investigate how my art making practice would mutate within ‘other’ places and sites, specifically those not easily implicated by normative cultural work, constructs such as ‘community development’, ‘site specific art’, ‘artistic intervention’ and so on. I instead attempted to work as a researcher, writer and artist in a variety of informal places, non-places, places whose identities were in flux, lacking definition; one might say places that did not need nor necessarily want ‘art’.

Figure 1-3: Walking in the Yeoville Neighbourhood, photographic documentation. By the author.

I wanted to explore not so much the experience of the flaneur as the migrant, and the “inability of the city to be a home” (Nuttall 2008: 197). The art and texts I wanted to produce would be informal, closer in its aesthetic to the enamel street advertisements, window signs, graffiti, healer and prophet pamphlets and Nigerian 419 scam letters than finished artwork. I found it necessary to generate a kind of ambulatory art practice within informal places; those that could be considered as “interstitial” cultural economies. Yeoville as a neighbourhood tends toward the informal but at the same time resists the binary of formal and informal because it incorporates both within its fabric- the “formal economy” where “positive gratifications” are provided for “those working within it” and the “informal economy” where precarious jobs and insecure living conditions” are the norm (Altvater 2005: 53). One might say, that as a residential area, Yeoville is undergoing simultaneously “informalisation” and “formalisation” which would allow me to work in the strange and dangerous tension between these two somewhat opposing forces. As Altvater (2005) points out in his study of the barrio’s of Caracas, informalisation is not simply about the loss of power, or social exclusion because of the disappearance of public goods (Altvater 2005:53) but rather that it gives rise to “the development of alternative forms of economic and social cooperation”, potentially “supportive communities” and as such “informal places within the global space represent so much more than just an excluded area. Informal places represent an alternative form of response to the overarching tendencies of globalisation and urban involution” (Altvater 2005:55).

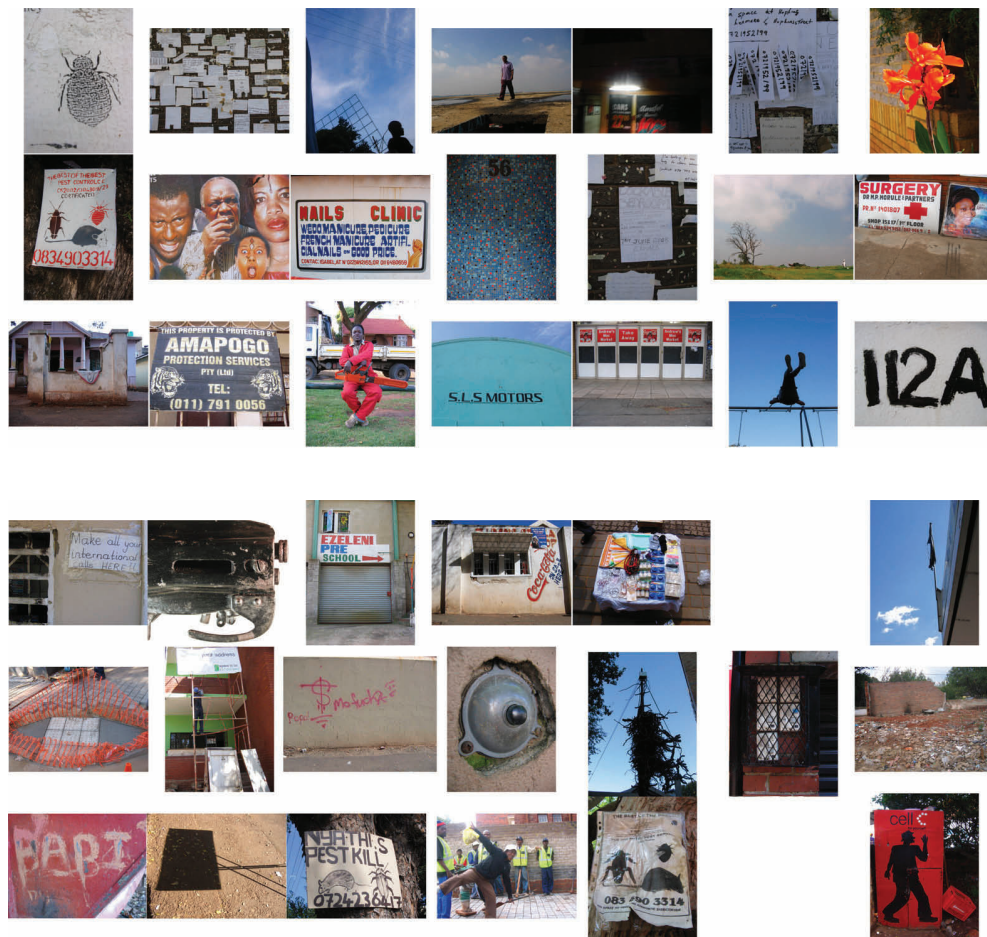


Figure 4, 5: Walking in the Yeoville Neighbourhood, photographic documentation. By the author.

With this in mind, I sought to facilitate the emergence of a project in Yeoville that was non-instrumental, serving neither the immediate “needs” of a given community, or one that did not address the expectations of a sponsor to enhance its public image by spending money on communities in need, or that needed me to work against a broader mandate to transform social relations. I wanted simply to engage with the ‘forgotten’ in public, community-based art (and also in the discourse of urban planning)– those ordinary

people who have no explicit need for aesthetic experience in their lives; who do not require artistic interventions to reform their lives or worldviews; who do not want to be worked on as subjects by some external agency that requires but who are, to a large extent, tacitly caught up in the aesthetics of the city form. I did not want to “write the city into being” (Nuttall 2008), by speaking for a neighbourhood community but rather sought to develop out of my encounter with it methodology of art making *in the street*. Working on the street rather than within an institution would allow me to meet others (strangers) on equal terms, rather than in terms of a social contract, the mutual exchange of profits in the formal economy of cultural production. I hoped that from these encounters in Yeoville a project would emerge rather than being imposed upon the neighbourhood. I understood Yeoville, like Johannesburg, as an aesthetic construct:

...not simply a string of infrastructures, technologies, and legal entities, however networked these are. It also comprises actual bodies, images, forms, footprints, and memories. The everyday human labour mobilised in building specific city forms is not only material. It is artistic and aesthetic. Furthermore, rather than opposing the “formal” and the “informal”, or the “visible” and the “invisible”, we need a more complex archaeology of things, forms, and signs in order to account for daily life in the city (Nuttall, Mbembe 2008: 8).

Given my first hand experience of Yeoville as an economy of a different kind (elusive), I decided that working on the street, *with strangers* would provide me with the interpersonal, informal context I needed in order to test whether a new kind of aesthetic value would emerge outside institutional contexts. Would it be possible for me to generate a sustainable community- based, public, participatory art project in an informal place without the benefit of the framing and legitimising mechanisms so commonly required to make an art project convincing and successful as an expression of communal jouissance etc? If Yeoville is, as Prabhala explains, “at once a destination and a point of departure” then the project would be, similar, in its “errant” (in Glissant 2006), idealist orientation. By taking place on the street without any institutional programme, funding, support or visibility I hoped that the project would emerge and grow informally. Without a mandate I would need to be ‘just present’ as an artist and possibly migratory and opportunistic in relation to the research site. There was an element of errantry involved in embarking on such a mad project that had no clear aims, problem, rationale or programme and because of this, a danger existed throughout, that given this myself and others involved in the project could simply get lost, that the project would become unhinged, dissipate into absurdity and mean nothing to anybody in the long run. At the start of the ‘project’ I realised that I would need to take these risks in speaking and drawing outside my comfort zones as an artist, educator and writer operating in spaces of others rather than in my own, risking total failure with the body of failure produced by the project becoming the place from which I could later ‘draw’ my findings.

Yeoville was, in retrospect, the perfect place in which to explore errantry and failure in public art because Yeoville is often spoken about in urban development paradigms (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008: 13) as an inner city problem; in terms of crisis, failure, chaos and decay. When one confronts Yeoville as an outsider (even insiders in Yeoville are outsiders), the familiar coordinates to apprehend it are lacking. Yeoville is mostly a community of renters rather than a static community of home owners loosely aligned by their proprietorial interests and neighbourly traditions. Although in the past Yeoville may once have possessed certain signs of legibility (a mining settlement with a ‘bohemian reputation’) it has undergone many radical changes in demographic, culture and economy over the past 20 years. Even before that Yeoville has never really achieved the status of a coherent community because it has always been a home to people on the move; immigrants and exiles, opportunists and idealists. I selected Yeoville as the research site for these reasons, because it “is a transient area of internal complexity” (Beall et al 2002: 118).

Yeoville, like Johannesburg, has always been defined by narratives of mixing, aesthetics, segregation,

desegregation a place which symbolises “novelty, exuberance, adventurism, and to a large extent, the possibility of freedom” (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008: 25). The area was established a century ago (in 1890) as a working class settlement for semi-skilled white miners and their managers. Interestingly, in the 1920’s, because of the accommodation crisis in the Johannesburg inner city, “for a time at least, the principle of segregation was abandoned by the Johannesburg municipality finding that their African workers be housed close to the factories in the city and not in distant segregated locations” (Parnell 2003: 619). From the late 40’s to the mid 70’s Yeoville was once again a segregated, white area. Black tenants resided in servant quarters in back yards of white property owners and apartment rooftops under Group Areas Act legislation (Parnell 2003: 119). An aerial view of Yeoville and its adjacent neighbourhoods reveals its origins as part of the early mining settlement and as an outcome of segregationist government. One sees a stark contrast between the privileged leisured classes and working class registered the compact grid of residential properties in Yeoville in contrast to the larger more organically shaped estates which surround it; particularly Observatory and Houghton. In the 80’s Yeoville was known as a “grey area” in that it became racially mixed (Figure 18), with many struggle activists, politicians, artists, and cultural workers living in the area. At this time the demographic in Yeoville was mostly middle class white, with a strong orthodox Jewish presence. Gradually because of its proximity to the inner city (especially Hillbrow) and the state housing subsidies given to whites to make their homes in the suburbs (Parnell 2003: 112), Yeoville, famously, like Hillbrow, became a ‘victim’ of white flight and became one of the first areas in Johannesburg to become desegregated (Beall et al 2002:119).

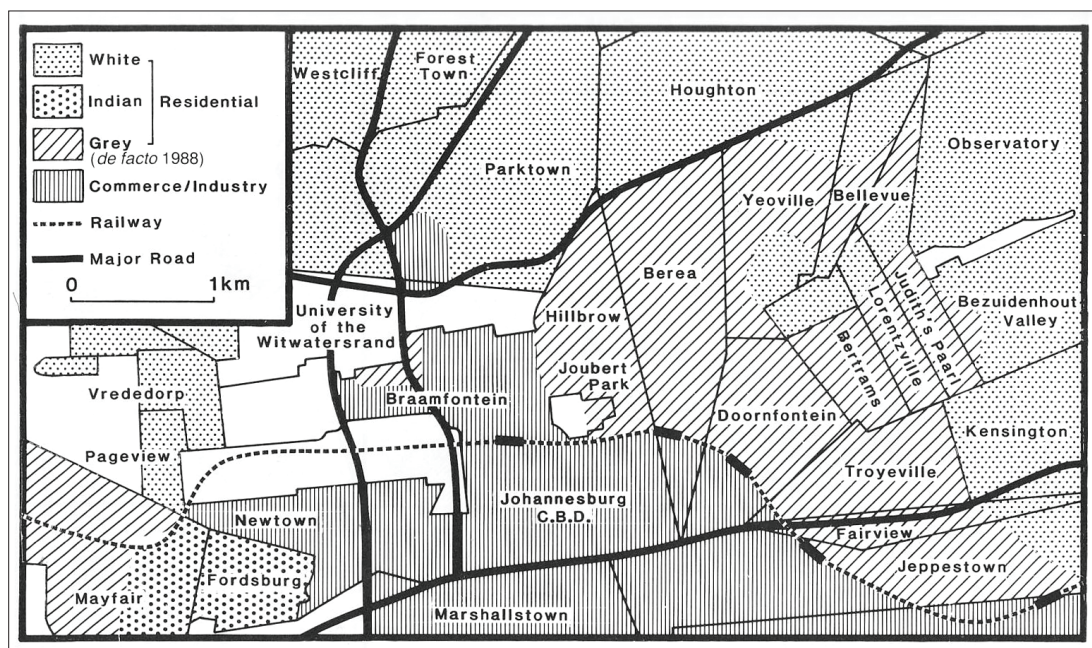


Figure 18: Grey Areas in Johannesburg, 1988. (S.P. Rule (1989).

In the early 90’s the demographic of the neighbourhood gradually became more black but soon after the first democratic elections in 1994 Yeoville’s demographic transformed entirely, signalling the end of its era as a primarily white community. Middle and working class whites moved out of Yeoville and sold, leased or ‘abandoned’ their houses to black residents (Beall et al 2002: 120). As apartheid crumbled, the Johannesburg CBD was emptied of white businesses which relocated to suburban centers such as Sandton and Rosebank. White communities gated their suburban streets, moved to fortified housing complexes and hired private security police companies to protect themselves from crime in the new South Africa. Because of the draining for whites from Yeoville, from the late 80’s onward, black South Africans assumed residence of what were previously white houses, schools, and flats in Yeoville, looking to flee the turmoil and difficult living conditions in the townships in order to live nearer to

the CBD (with the abolition of the Influx Control Act in 1986) in order to cut down on daily travel expenses and have access to 'better' city schools and infrastructure offered by the Johannesburg CBD and surrounding areas. Beall et al (2002:119) give a good sense of how the demographic of Yeoville transformed in this tumultuous late 90's period:

According to the 1996 Population Census, only 9 percent of today's Yeoville residents were born in Yeoville and the majority (71 percent) moved to live there between 1991 and 1996. Of these, only about 7 percent were foreign born: 4 per cent in neighbouring African states, 1 per cent in African countries further north, and 2 per cent in Europe. More recently, the extent of foreign in-migration to the Yeoville area has become much more marked. A variety of census reports confirm... racial desegregation was not accompanied by dramatic changes in the social class and educational profile of its residents (Crankshaw, 1996). However, although a high proportion of residents continued to be employed in professional, semi-professional and routine white-collar occupations, a substantial and growing proportion is employed in unskilled manual jobs, so that the occupational profile is fairly polarised. There is an impoverished minority living among relatively well-resourced inner city residents.

Yeoville's history as a suburb is wound up with that of its 'grey' neighbours Hillbrow and Berea where the intense politics of accommodation tended and still does tend to spill over into its residential fabric. In this way, Yeoville could be said to be part of the Johannesburg inner city and also, somewhat not. Prabhala's (2008: 308) characterisation of Yeoville and the areas to the west of it gives a good sense of Yeoville's relationship to its neighbours in the 80's: "if all departures need a getaway vehicle, then the bed in Yeoville is a rented car. Precisely, an early 1980's Japanese model with mouldy seats, a reliable engine, and a radio that catches pure static. Hillbrow is a borrowed VW Beetle- lots of character, malfunctioning taillights, and frequent engine breakdowns. Berea with its giant blocks of concrete is a bit like that Trabant you inherited from your East German Aunt: presumably functional, but entirely mysterious".

Because the infrastructural decay of the inner city began with the inhabitancy of the area by a new, black community some urban commentators have assumed a dubious and causal link between the two which usually indicts a certain prejudice rather than speaking to the complex processes taking place in Yeoville in the 90's. Speaking of the white 'hardliners' that stuck out this decade, Beall et al note (2002:121 -122) that "what emerges from the accounts of many older residents... is a sense of increasing dislocation and unease, resulting from the flight of better-off (usually white) homeowners from the area and the influx of new tenants, usually black and often foreign... their anxiety and fear often expresses itself in the form of escalating racism, and their indignant paralysis has encouraged the sense that Yeoville is a place where 'community is dead'. However, much literature points to poor management of the formerly white properties on the part of landlords and city urban management (Chipkin 2005:94 , Beall et al 2002) rather than racial prejudice, or white flight as being responsible this urban decay which escalated in the 90's. Chipkin (2005: 92 -96) notes that the factors leading to the 'deterioration' of the inner city were complex and manifold (rather than being simply based on white flight paranoia). A combination of factors; "the massive demand for accommodation", "the weak bargaining positions... of 'illegal's' meant higher rentals, overcrowding which inevitably "pushed up maintenance costs" made it difficult for white landlords seeking to make a profit and to pay their bills in the midst of a decline in the property market, lack of municipal support and the demand for new business premises in new areas in Johannesburg.

Given its continental reputation for cheap and readily available accommodation, human infrastructure, lax municipal control, proximity to transport routes and economic hubs Yeoville quickly also became home to people from all over Africa. Refugees, immigrants, exiles seeking opportunities, connections and a better life in South Africa moved into Yeoville. As a result of this Yeoville is now 65% African-immigrant. French, Lingala and Portuguese are now routinely spoken alongside Zulu, Xhosa and English, and many other languages are spoken here such as Hausa and Chichewa. In one

block of shops in the main road one can find shopkeepers from all over the world: Pakistanis, Nigerians, Chinese, Slovakian, Gujarati and Greek. The area has always been marked by change and diversity and continues to change so rapidly that, generally, conflict arising from differences in race, culture, language, religion, access to resources and space have not taken place (as they have for example taken place in Alexandra). Residents have little time for politics and tend to keep moving in the face of the need to survive on a daily basis. Rather than being defined by its segregationist history, Yeoville, like Johannesburg could be said to be in the present moment an “Afropolitan” (Prabhala 2008: 312). There are no major conflicts of any kind in Yeoville, perhaps because its residents are united by their tenancy, by the factual realisation that survival and living is here defined as the capacity to endure and accommodate change. Residents are united and divided in their situations of finding and making opportunities relentlessly. In this way, Yeoville could be said to be defined by its “porosity”; its ability to “continually fashion and refashion itself” (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008: 30) rather than defined by its segregationist past now that it has been “released from the iron cage of apartheid”.

This is of course a romantic overgeneralisation because, although to a large extent, the area is defined by its short term tenancy there are those residents who see it in a more propertied sense as their home and its promise of becoming a more stable post-apartheid suburb. The white residents who survived the ‘fall out’ of the 90’s generally find themselves in two categories: middle class liberals who are committed to the multiculturalism of the area, as a kind of microcosmic test case for the broader issues facing the country and the continent and those of a more desperate and conservative kind who continue to stay because they cannot afford to live anywhere else, hoping that over time ‘things will get better’. Both groups nostalgically lament the loss of community, place, stability and safety of the earlier multicultural (rather than intercultural) Yeoville which they feel can never be fully retrieved or remade from the human infrastructure that exists here presently. Yeoville, like much of Johannesburg suffers from amnesia of an industrial center. Pan African Yeoville emerges today as a neighbourhood of “strangers, aliens, and foreigners...”, a neighbourhood “with no former history” (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008:17). Apart from the white permanent residents living in Yeoville, there is also a large South African and foreign national black middle class who have recently moved into the area over the past decade or so who seek to build homes for themselves and their family members near to the city who quietly renovate their homes, water their gardens, soap their cars and fixing their fences amidst the diasporic make-do culture of tenancy.

Because of these very rapid, disparate and particular changes taking place and because of its present demographic, Yeoville is indeed a litmus of the broader social transformations taking place in South Africa and indeed for the effects of globalisation on national and ethnic identities. Given the cultural complexity of Yeoville as the expression of the culture of major metropolitan cities and its ability to accommodate difference it has become of interest to geographers, researchers, cultural workers. One just needs to glance at the accommodation notice wall outside the Shopright Checkers on Cavendish Road to ascertain that Yeoville is a culture of accommodation. The sheer proliferation of requests and offers for living space suggests that Yeoville does a good turnover in human traffic. It is a desirable destination for the aspirant whether it be the first time homeowner or the simply desperate survivalist. Yeoville, as a destination and point of departure has been and still is thus an aggressively multicultural/intercultural area. Most of its residents, whether new or old, propertied or not propertied essentially come from ‘elsewhere’. Whether, as a resident you are Joe Slovo, a black middle class South African making a home, a Nigerian foreign national opening a guesthouse, a white liberal die hard, an elderly Greek shop owner, you are to some degree an outsider living away from your ‘proper’ required, but virtue of your situation to live in close proximity to strangers from other places. Given this, Yeoville is a place of rampant mixing and connection-making. In Yeoville you are only as good as who you know; as Abdolique Simone (2003: 530) has noted in the African inner city opportunities are built on the acquisi-

tion of human capital and the capitalisation of human infrastructure.

So whatever ‘other’ ‘outsiders’ to the area may think, Yeoville cannot be summarised as being characterised by just one thing (a dangerous place, a drinking hole for Johannesburg, a Little Africa, The New York of Africa and so on). A cursory glance of its high streets is enough to realise that it is indeed a complex place. Although Yeoville may be characterised as makeshift, mixed and culturally heterogeneous community diasporic ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups tend to keep to their own. Yeoville undoubtedly fits the stereotype of urban decay and crime-riddenness but it is only modestly troubled, fractured and dangerous. For many of those who live and work in it, it is more than this; a place of dreams, aspiration and learning. Depending upon your perspective, Yeoville is “not a nice place for the walking classes at any time of day, especially after dark”, it is also “a place just like home: except so excitingly foreign” (Prabhala 2008:316). Yeoville is a place of contradiction and heterogeneity and because of this it is a place of events rather than of ‘character’. Because of this there is a certain danger that it may be aestheticised. In this area events occur spontaneously and simultaneously side by side, as the sewing machine sits beside the umbrella: the desire for stasis and aspiration jostle; friendship and xenophobia co-exist on a street corner, recreation centers and police stations lean against shebeens and brothels; heaps of dumped retreads languish outside a newly renovated block of flats. In Yeoville, Jesus and Black Label, hospitality and parking in my driveway somehow manage somehow to manage to live in harmony. This makes Yeoville an appropriately mixed place to situate a research project which sets out to examine how aesthetics can operate within informal places, with strangers. Yeoville lacks any of the familiar co-ordinates a public art project may need in order to succeed with ease because everything here is about accommodation.

Given all of the factors that I have outlined above, Yeoville possesses a weak sense of community but a strong sense of place or ‘neighbourhood’. This feeling is accentuated by the fact that the ‘Greater Yeoville Area’ (Bellevue, Bellevue East and Yeoville proper) has discreet and definable spatial/economic/geographic boundaries. It is bordered on the East by the affluent Observatory which is heavily gated and patrolled by private security guards. Observatory is a predominantly white area, a Democratic Alliance Ward. Visually, Observatory is a more organic area situated on a slight incline with winding, wide streets that meander around the Observatory Golf Course. Observatory Girls, its municipal houses and grounds, Sacred Heart High School, St Mary’s orphanage form a strong buffer between the end of Yeoville on De La Rey Street and the beginning of Observatory. The boundary to the south side of Yeoville is made by a natural geographical feature; the Bezuidenhout ridge which separates Yeoville from Ellis Park, Bezuidenhout Valley and Kensington. It is also bounded naturally on this side by Highlands, a tiny suburb, made up of a strip of flats that sits on the koppie between Yeoville and Ellis Park and an empty plot of land over looking Ponte tower which is used for prayer by the Zionists in the inner city residential areas.

To the north, Yeoville is separated from the affluent, quieter and greener Houghton area by the major arterial road, Louis Botha Avenue, and smaller street, St Peters, which creates an infrastructural boundary between these areas. The proliferation of flats between Louis Botha and Yeoville, and the small businesses along Louis Botha reinforces the boundary between these areas. Louis Botha is an important road for Yeoville residents because it serves to carry many to their place of work in the city, or other areas such as Rosebank etc on bus or taxi. To the West, Yeoville is separated from the more densely populated residential Hillbrow and Berea by Joe Slovo Drive (formerly Harrow Road), marking off Yeoville as a neighbourhood from the inner city proper which is made up primarily of high rises, massive blocks of flats. A line of parks and sports facilities (such as JZ de Villiers and Donald Mackay parks) also serve to create a buffer between Berea and Yeoville.

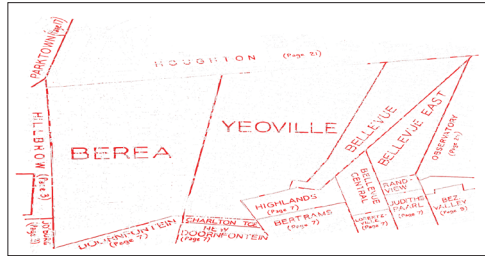


Figure 19: Boundaries of Yeoville.



Figure 20: Yeoville Square, Recreation Center, corner Kenmere and Rockey Street. Photograph by the author.

These four distinct boundaries (Figure 19) contribute to a sense of Yeoville being a place with which residents can identify. The one feature that residents can identify in the most distinctive and singular way is the high streets; Rockey and Raleigh street. This has always served to ground the area's identity as a community in the past and as a neighbourhood now. Rockey/Raleigh Street registers in a more concentrated way what Yeoville is about and is the nervous center of the area. These streets were known in the 80's and 90's for being home to the 'alternative scene' in Johannesburg; famous by day for its quite neighbourly, convivial atmosphere, alternative home-grown health shops, bakeries, second hand book and record shops, delicatessens, restaurants; and by night for its more aggressive underground culture; its bohemian lifestyle, leather and tie dyed pretension, its milkshake bars, 24 hour cafes, night clubs, dagga, good food and booze. Today it retains some of that dualism between night and day but is presently less of a street known for quaint difference than it is a place of incessant bargaining, clutter and make-do heterogeneity. At night the high streets are 'high' attracting visitors from all over Johannesburg to its shebeens, internet cafes, clubs, black diamond bling, gospel music, bottle stores. By day the streets are more harmlessly residential attracting people from their flats to frequent its hairdressers and braiders, Rastafarian clothing, tailors, vegetable market, roasted mielies. But there are some signs that the informal character of Yeoville is changing, heralded many say by the formal arrival of a KFC franchise in the area! The frenetic quality of the high streets is somewhat grounded by the civic node situated between Grafton, Cavendish and Rockey street. Most of the council's activities are to be found here comprising of a tiny police station that operates from a house, Yeoville Square, Yeoville Park and childrens's playground, the library and recreation center (Figure 20).

Rockey/Raleigh Street continues to be the economic spine of the area where by day the most interaction within the neighbourhood is concentrated in terms of business, recreation, shopping, administration. The civic, daylight pretensions Rockey and Raleigh street invert at dusk. By the end of the working day one set of users replace another. The daylight community clears the space to make way for outside visitors who come to these streets at night looking for alcohol, drugs, entertainment and sex at places such as Tandoor, Piccadilly and Times Square, and the many illegal restaurants and pubs that operate from the high streets that are slowly trickling down into residential Yeoville. At night especially, as a variety of visiting communities makes their entrance we see contrasts and mixing as essentially characterising Yeoville's high streets. Hawkers roast mielie cobs, and skewered meat on filthy corners, whilst only a few meters away one would find high class clubs kitted out in expensive decor, BMW's park beside beat up Datsuns, high end Cameroonian clothing outlets appear beside spares and oily fish and chip shops. Religion and sin also sit side by side on Rockey Raleigh Street. Nightclubs compete with Gospel choirs. Musicians pack up their equipment as midnight congregations seep back to their homes in Berea and Hillbrow.

'Yeovillites' who live in residential houses on either side of the high streets tend to measure the health of their 'suburb' in terms of 'the state' of urban disease on Rockey/Raleigh and by the the ability of

government and state officials to cure it (Yeoville had one of the worst performing police station in the country in the early nineties). Signs of ‘decay, such as the number of liquor outlets operating on the high streets (both legal and illegal), noise (from clubs), violence, illegal activities taking place on the streets such as the pedalling of drugs, cooking of food on the pavement, prostitution, demolished buildings, wear and tear on the streets, pavements, the number of hawkers obstructing the traffic, poor upkeep of apartment blocks, hijacking of buildings are visual markers of decay for conservatives living in the more leafy regions of Yeoville. The phenomena of informality and mixing, as they are to be found on the high streets, are generally of concern to those living in the more urbane, propertied and middle class streets in Yeoville whose residents complain, constantly and lackadaisically that the area is ‘going down’. For these residents there is a war going on between the aggressive high streets and the more urbane residential streets of Yeoville. Many propertied, die hard residents of Yeoville share the perceptions of outsiders and believe that Yeoville is “crime ridden and Dirty”. Beall et al argue against such stereotype suggesting that:

Public perceptions, at times reinforced by our research, see Yeoville as an area deprived of ‘community’. Indicators given to support this view are the impression that the place is dirty and that people do not venture out and mix for fear of crime. The picture we present rests on a more textured view of community life that dwells less on the demise of old forms of community and more on the changing nature of social interaction. Unlike earlier accounts that emphasise lack of social capital in Yeoville (Harrison 2001) we argue that Yeoville’s future is not inevitably one of urban decline, anomie and apathy (Beall et al 2002: 121).

Indeed ‘public perceptions’ may have informed recent attempts made on the part of the city to ‘rejuvenate’ in preparation for the Fifa Soccer World Cup. Yeoville is part of the drive of the City of Johannesburg to regenerate the inner city which has included the upgrading of the Yeoville market (Figure 21), the development of a poorly supported community improvement district programme (Beall et al 2002: 126) and the recent refurbishment of the paving, street lights, and tarring on the high streets and adjacent streets, the subsidised renovation of derelict flats, the rebuilding of Yeoville Square and renovation of the Yeoville Recreation Center and the moving of the library to the old Fire Station. It is thought that by upgrading the physical infrastructure the human element in Yeoville may perhaps become more ‘respectable’ and enjoy a ‘better life’. Moves are afoot to relocate the police station from its cramped premises in a house on Kenmere Street to a custom built police station above Yeoville Square but many doubt whether that will ever happen. As I write this report, Rockey and Raleigh Street is looking more and more like any main street in a suburb, with its attendant branded homogeneity; fast food chains such as KFC, Caesars, Debonairs and Nandos are slowly replacing the less ‘attractive’ family restaurants run by foreign nationals. Shops such as Checkers continue to dominate the Yeoville Market, indexing a commercial tug of war between the formal and informal economies. In the few months that my project took place, Yeoville really existed in a transitional phase beginning to move from itinerancy to gentrification. I would find myself walking over ripped up pavements, stepping into puddles, chatting to red ants evicting residents, and neon-bibbed construction workers as I walked down Rockey/Raleigh street.

As I have argued earlier, given the contingency of Yeoville, in the minds of its residents Yeoville, it has a strong sense of place, because of its differentiation from surrounding areas, visual appearance and cultural heterogeneity, but a weak sense of community (shared values, a sense of belonging to a people rather than to place). Among the many reasons for this it is that because of the radical changes in its demographic occurring over a very short period of time there is a lack of a shared history (very little has in fact been published about the history of the area and few signs remain of its hey-day). More pertinently, because Yeoville is seen by many who live in (including the homeowners as a way station rather than a home, a place where one rents rather than buys, a place from which to move on (Figure 22) it cannot exhibit the signs of community. Al-

6. See Altbeker, A. 2007. *The Dirty Work of Democracy: A Year on the Streets with the SAPS*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball.

though Yeoville has its fair share of organisations that attempt to forge a feeling of community, neighbourhood unity and solidarity this has largely been unsuccessful. Most religious groups in Yeoville, and particularly the Christian churches have, by and large, failed to generate a strong sense of community. Among the reasons for this is that churches compete for the attention of residents and can thus not speak with one voice and also that residents may feel that there is no point in joining more ‘formal’ organisations if their presence in Yeoville is short term. Hence the interest in religion is based on the belief that faith is a portable commodity where civic duty is not. Participation in government structures, activist community organisations, the NGO sectors and so on is weak because most of the residents in Yeoville are not invested in the area as their permanent home.



Figure 22: Accommodation notice wall outside Shoppriest, Bedford and Rocky Street. 2008. Photo by the author.

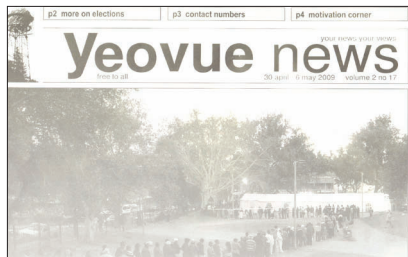


Figure 23: Yeovue News, Community Newsletter.



Figure 21: Yeoville Market, Rocky Street. 2008. Photo by the author.

Many of the organisations in Yeoville belong to the YSF (Yeoville Stakeholders Forum) a body, existing over the past decade or so, that takes the concerns of various interest-based groups (businesses, NGO's, NPO's and religious organisations) to the attention of council and various government agencies. Their primary aim is to lobby for more effective ‘service delivery’ in the area which it generally sees as the primary antidote to the ills that face the neighbourhood. The YSF has recently embarked on establishing a local newsletter (**Yeovue News**, Figure 23) which publishes materials that inform residents about developments in the area and which also interestingly attempts to educate residents about their rights and responsibilities, the law and marginally gives members of the community opportunities to ‘voice their concerns’ about the area. Although the publication fulfils many important functions within the neighbourhood it remains thin in terms of community participation, run by a small cohort of stalwart activists struggling to maintain its current circulation through advertising, sponsorship and so on. The publication clearly has as its ambition the desire to construct a rehabilitated neighbourhood citizen. To use Chipkin's terms, the newsletter aims to “transform real communities into good communities” (Chipkin 2003:65) but attempts to do so so from within the community itself because it is written, largely by residents connected to local government.. Despite its ambitions, the publication tends to impose a normative citizenship code (‘development’) on the residents in the area. Chipkin, in his critique of the White Paper on Local Government, is illuminating with respect to **Yeovue News** because Chipkin points to a certain mentality in how authorities deal with make-do cultures. He argues that a certain paradox is at play in how they deal with “dysfunctional communities” among which Yeoville may be counted:

The notion of development as furnished by the White Paper is haunted by a certain imprecision concerning the notion of the citizen. A resident is deemed a citizen to the extent that she is able to exercise her rights to a sustainable livelihood. From the point of view of government, however, it is not enough that citizens do so by any means (violence, coercion and so on), or that this livelihood takes any form (crime, corruption, illicit activities). Residents are expected to do so in a way to becoming citizens! What this brings to the fore is the following hidden surmise: that the figure of the citizen is also an *ethical* character; it is someone that conducts herself “rightfully” and sustains herself in and through activities deemed virtuous by the state (Chipkin 2003:69).

The suppositions that inform the construction ‘citizenry’ tend to underpin many efforts to ‘tame’ the Yeoville make-do community. Chipkin (2005) suggests that attempts at constructing citizenry (where there is a perceived lack of one) tends to exclude those who would benefit most from its developmentalism. **Yeovue News’s** achieves exactly this and struggles to formulate an activist approach to Yeoville because it is based on an normative ethical appeal for its residents and officials to behave ‘correctly’. Note in the passage below how those who cannot exercise their rights to a sustainable livelihood are excluded and denounced.

At the Ward 67 Public Meeting on Saturday 19 September, almost all of these issues were discussed. But one important issue kept on coming up - the lack of law enforcement. Speaker after speaker said

- we need police on the streets all the time.
- we need better treatment from the police in the police station.
- we need control over street trading.
- we need protection against building hijackers.
- we need to chase away people selling fake goods like DVDs and CDs.
- we need to do something about people using their businesses to do illegal things like selling false papers we want the police to deal with corruption, not to be part of it.
- we want to be able to trust the police.
- we want to see more work.

The publication formulates based on the problems it perceives in Yeoville, “three pillars of real change”: It is clear from the meeting that there are three things that must be done to change:

1. People must be educated and informed about their rights and responsibilities.
2. There must be proper facilities and proper systems to help people to obey the law.
3. There must be ongoing law enforcement by the SAPS and the JMPD and the other law enforcement officials in the City of Johannesburg (Yeovue News. September: 1-3).

The street traders, the homeless, those selling fake goods, the illegal immigrant are excluded from participating in the discourse of citizenry because they are the ‘bad other whom the more gentile and ethical residents ‘we’ need protection from . Unwittingly, the passage evokes the image of the “community invader”, “people who are perceived as incomers without any real commitment to the area” (Beall et al 2002:123). Their participation in the dialogical construction of citizenship is only permitted by only if they allow themselves to be subjected to the efforts of authorities control, enforce and survey them. This is implicitly asserted despite the fact that Yeovue News professed to be “written for the people by the people”.

Within such a “ethical imaginary” (Chipkin 2003: 80) it is assumed that authorities can ‘educate’ the residents of Yeoville about good citizenship. This prevents education understood in a more transformative and dialogical terms. The passage cited above indicated that the police/council can be mandated by a fictitious ‘good’ community (the YSF, Yeovue news) to solve the citizenship problems. In this, they fail to imagine that there may be within the community other educational-aesthetic-cultural paradigms that may be employed in order to maintain a conversation with the citizenship ‘problems’ facing the area. Ethical definitions of citizenship tend to assume that only enforcement will realise the ideal citizenship education in the face of make-do culture. The ethical position on citizenship tends to create

an imaginary high ground and blind spot. Proclaimers of morality and ethics cannot imagine that there exist resources within the make-do community (for example volunteers living in the area with high social/cultural/educational capital) to enter into a dialogue with the excluded and dispossessed. Those survivalists who have succeeded in escaping their situations can educate others about how to live and work responsibly, prosper within the context of their circumstances and abide by the law. This ethical blind spot is a clear case on the exclusions upon which party politics is necessarily based (Mouffe 2006). An illustration of this is how in a 2008 public meeting, the Ward Councillor in Yeoville told immigrants in the area that sections of the local newsletter should not be translated into French but rather in Zulu which she saw as the legitimate alternative for English. Enforcement, party politics and community organisation as the only solution to the “problems facing Yeoville” is flawed. It will only serve to drive ‘the problem’ (in this case the poor community in the neighbourhood) elsewhere and Yeoville will become gentrified, ironically, much to the dissatisfaction of the activists who proclaimed to resist the dominance of middle class values in the area in the first place. Proponents of ethical reformism in Yeoville cannot expect the police/council to solve the ‘problems facing the area’ because they do not have the means or capacity to achieve this. In fact, this call to enforcement suggests certain desperation on the part of community organisers to read the new social landscape of Yeoville aesthetically or culturally:

This historical position only recognises community organisation as such when it is party politically engaged and motivated... the disparate networks and loose organisations that characterise what one of them described as the “lumpen proletariat” are not, somehow seen as valid. Among the many immigrants from other African countries, there are numerous social networks, but these are seen as beyond the political pale. (Beall et al 2002 : 123)

The JDA’s critical involvement in the infrastructural development of Yeoville and the attendant criticisms have highlighted some of the problems of operating ‘officially’ and organisationally in informal cultural economies such as Yeoville. Much of the criticism of the JDA’s interventions centers on the inability of local government and the JDA to formulate consultative processes and viable partnership models in places such as Yeoville. The JDA “plays lip service to participatory democracy” (Beall et al as cited in Chipkin 2005). Chipkin’s (2005) criticism of the JDA resonates with some of my experiences of creative projects undertaken in Yeoville including a defunct public art project I was involved in and others, for example, the delayed renovation of the Yeoville recreation center. Chipkin argues that there are two reasons for the JDA’s difficulties in dealing with areas such as Yeoville. The first is that it subscribes to a neo-liberal agenda: “although they... engage in widespread consultative processes and pay lip service to participatory democracy, the project to which they give rise remain dominated by powerful interests” (Beall et al in Chipkin 2005:103) which happens because “leading the inner city regeneration drives are suit-and-tied, middle-class, middle-aged white men who lack the authority or imagination to make it succeed”. Attempts to regenerate areas like Yeoville center on an inability to create functioning, formal and enduring partnerships with “informal social networks” which is essentially a failure of the imagination or the ability to construct a relation between the formal and informal domains.

I suppose that everyone living in Yeoville, to an extent, recognises the impossibility of community and compliance. The paradox lies in the failure of totalising logics that see “make-do”, survivalist, heterogeneous, informal networked culture as inherently problematic. They fail to understand that there may never indeed emerge a unifying system of values or investments that can guide define or regulate the behaviour of its residents. For example, conflicts between various interest groups (between residents, landlords and tenants, community organisations and street traders, the police and building hijackers, City Power and flat residents) can never be fully resolved because of the radical heterogeneity and informality of the area and the discrepancies between this and the formal logic of authority. Given the impossibility of consolidation, a certain apathy pervades the political atmosphere of Yeoville. It was



Figure 6-8: Walking in the Yeoville Neighbourhood, photographic documentation. By the author.

often by project participants that ‘no-one cares’, that no-one attends public meetings but also, on the other hand, that Yeoville is vibrant and hopeful community. The conflicts in Yeoville are minor and take place between neighbours, people living in close proximity to one another rather than between ethnic or political groupings. The terms of the conflict are usually over the definition of the urban environment and the opportunities particular spaces provide which is usually resolved, ultimately not through persuasion, dialogue but through enforcement and displacement; whether this be because one party is stronger than another or because the police are stronger than both of us. This the logic of hijacking is the dominant subtext in the communal logic of Yeoville.

How does Yeoville as a place accommodate its heterogeneity and hijackings? How can the residents of the area define it as a place when the very idea of place is always contested in its daily occurrences? Is a park a place for children to play or a soccer field for men? Is it field a place for the playing of soccer or a refuge for the homeless? Is a pavement a place for pedestrians to walk or a business opportunity, a place to open a carwash, to open a stall, a place to park your SUV or is it a convenient place for drunken men to piss? What are the ethical implications of braiding hair on street corners when pigeons get their feet wound up in the mess? Do internet cafes need to go beyond performing the modest function of connecting the neighbourhood to the rest of Africa and give access to immigrants to the South African economy or make profits through the manufacture of illegal documents? In other The question for Yeoville is less about its residents ascribing to normative notions of citizenship than it is about formulating ways of being-in-common and co-existence which, for me, is an aesthetic and cultural problem. Attempts have been made in Yeoville to develop a more dialogical and cultural approach to the co-existence ‘problem’ with the emergence of the Africa Diaspora Forum. In a workshop that was held at St Aidan’s church on the 22nd of November 2008 to deal with xenophobia the following statement was made in **Yeovue News**. The workshop interestingly failed to reach consensus.

...proceeded with a fascinating and often heated exercise. Participants were divided into three discussion groups, namely, South Africans and immigrants, men and woman, English-speakers and French speakers, and youth and elders. These discussion groups were then subdivided according to the category that each participant belonged to. For example, youth congregated with youth and elders met with elders and so forth. The youth were then asked to discuss how they saw themselves, how they thought the elders felt about youth, and what they thought about elders. The elders had to answer the same questions as elders. The other groups went through the same process. The sub-groups then came together and gave each other feedback. Each group was then asked to share with the whole meeting what they learned from the exercise. Many of the points that came out showed that people had learned more. It was also clear that there was a lot of cultural prejudice (inter-national, between men and women, between youth and elders) which is quite natural in all human groups. Karl von Holdt stated this quite succinctly when he said, “Many of the things that immigrants and South Africans think about each other are quite deep and will take a lot of time to change”

(Yeovue News 2008:1-2).

Generally by-laws are ignored in Yeoville (the law of the street reigns) and there are constant neighbourly conflicts because the area lacks ‘elders’. Its cultural heterogeneity (there are no embodied coordinates to suggest how the street may be governed) needs a form of cultural mediation. Because it is an economically depressed area with many of its residents unemployed residents take and make opportunities in order to merely live. Educated outsiders see this as a form of creativity where those for whom the neighbourhood is their home, often see it as a transgression of their rights and an invasion of sorts. As a result of this atmosphere of ‘non-compliance’ in Yeoville means that there is a great deal of what the police may deem minor crimes committed, by law infringements, petty theft, alcohol abuse in the areas, domestic violence, illegal places building, common assault and so on which the police see in a rather *lasse faire* manner. (They understand that their work is essentially about the condoned and forcible movement of bodies.) Because the movements of bodies (displacements of all kinds) is what defines Yeoville, here it is not only the idea of place that is undone but also notions of home. The neat and bordered ideal of the nuclear, residential home is overturned. Many residential properties function as home only because of their hybridity. A “home” is not necessarily a place of wisdom and safety but

can double as a tavern, a spaza shop, a carver's workshop, a hairdresser, a car wash, hostel, shebeens, gambling joint, brothel, tyre fitting workshop, church, drug dispensary, a funeral business.

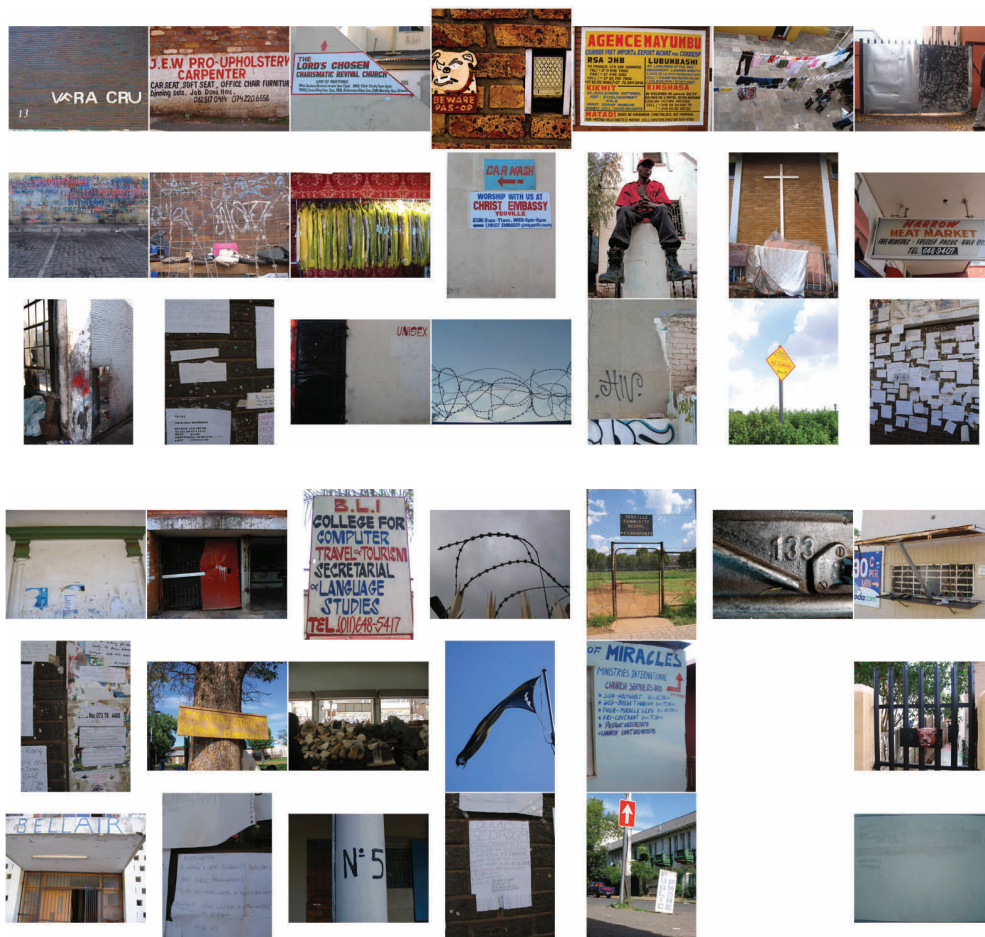


Figure 9, 10: Walking in the Yeoville Neighbourhood, photographic documentation. By the author.

In Yeoville, homes are occupied, they are hijacked, they are built out of thin air, on the spot, from moment to moment in a constant state of preparedness. You may see for example conventional homes, public amenities and established institutions sitting beside these more ‘make-do’ hybrid places, a situation which inevitably creates conflicts over the definition of neighbourhood space. Because so many residents are just trying to make a living the way they know how, tactically in the place where they live, Yeoville becomes very difficult to define as a conventional residential area (the nightmare of the zoning inspector). Is it a settlement, a township, a suburb? What do we call it when there are so many strange adjacencies contained within its fabric? This situationism of Yeoville makes for a street culture in Yeoville which is at best, vibrant and flourishing, but at worst frustrating and dangerous. This makes it an insecure place to raise a family, build a home but a great place to initiate a community-based art project! In the case of my preparation for the project *Speak English To Me*, I knew that working and living in an informal place (my own floating tin home) would mean facilitating, for myself, (a recoding of sorts) a collision between my aesthetic-pedagogical practice-identity and the everyday experiences of ‘ordinary people’ and strangers who are by and large ‘making do’. By working in the concrete, everyday, informal places I thought could force myself into a situation where I would have to accept, from the outset, that there was nothing inherently privileged or special about my identity as an artist, educator or writer, and even resident in a place such as Yeoville. There would be nothing stable upon which I could draw in order to legitimise my aesthetic-pedagogical practice. I could not assume at any point that there was anything ‘given’ about my creative identity that could elicit interest from a stranger never mind achieve the kind of intense, intimate participation I was seeking in this project. The work I would do would need to do would need to ‘speak’ for itself. The project as it was situated in

Yeoville would thus demand an ontological vulnerability. The informality of the places I was working in would prevent me from relying too heavily on any institutional frame to legitimate my work or my position hence I needed to become tactical in the constant entertaining of the prospect of failure and feeding off the crumbs of hope and creativity. The thinking was that by adopting the Situationist derive (Debord 2004: 254) as my ambulatory methodology, and combining this with the relationality inherent in working in the medium of ‘public drawing’ an aesthetic theory of sorts would emerge. I hoped that the project would, over time, become relevant to people who have no need for ‘art’ and later possibly relevant for other artists working in informal places.

Given the emergent/organic aspect of the project, I would paradoxically have to be managed and instrumentalised by the forces on the neighbourhood street by being guided conceptually by my dialogical encounters with strangers. Participation would need to be developed through rhizomatic networking and, most crucially, the project would grow by walking, looking and note-taking which would ‘thicken’ my experience of this fraught neighbourhood place. A more ambitious and unlikely goal of the project would be to explore the ways in which by bringing strangers together through aesthetic experience, it may be possible to address the lack of community in Yeoville. I hoped that I could work against the tendency of Yeoville to split on the basis of ethnicity where “new forms of social organisation remain small scale and often constitute exclusive rather than inclusive groups. There is evidence that social interaction is spatially confined...” (Beall et al 2002:127). I thought particularly that the collaborative act of drawing and writing in public and private spaces, collective listening and speaking would be used employed to create new forms of mixing and interlacings in Yeoville between the “interest-based” and “identity-based “ groups. Writing and drawing, collaboratively, the “literary city” (Nuttal 2009) through the visualisation of conversation would perhaps become the key generative vehicle for the project.



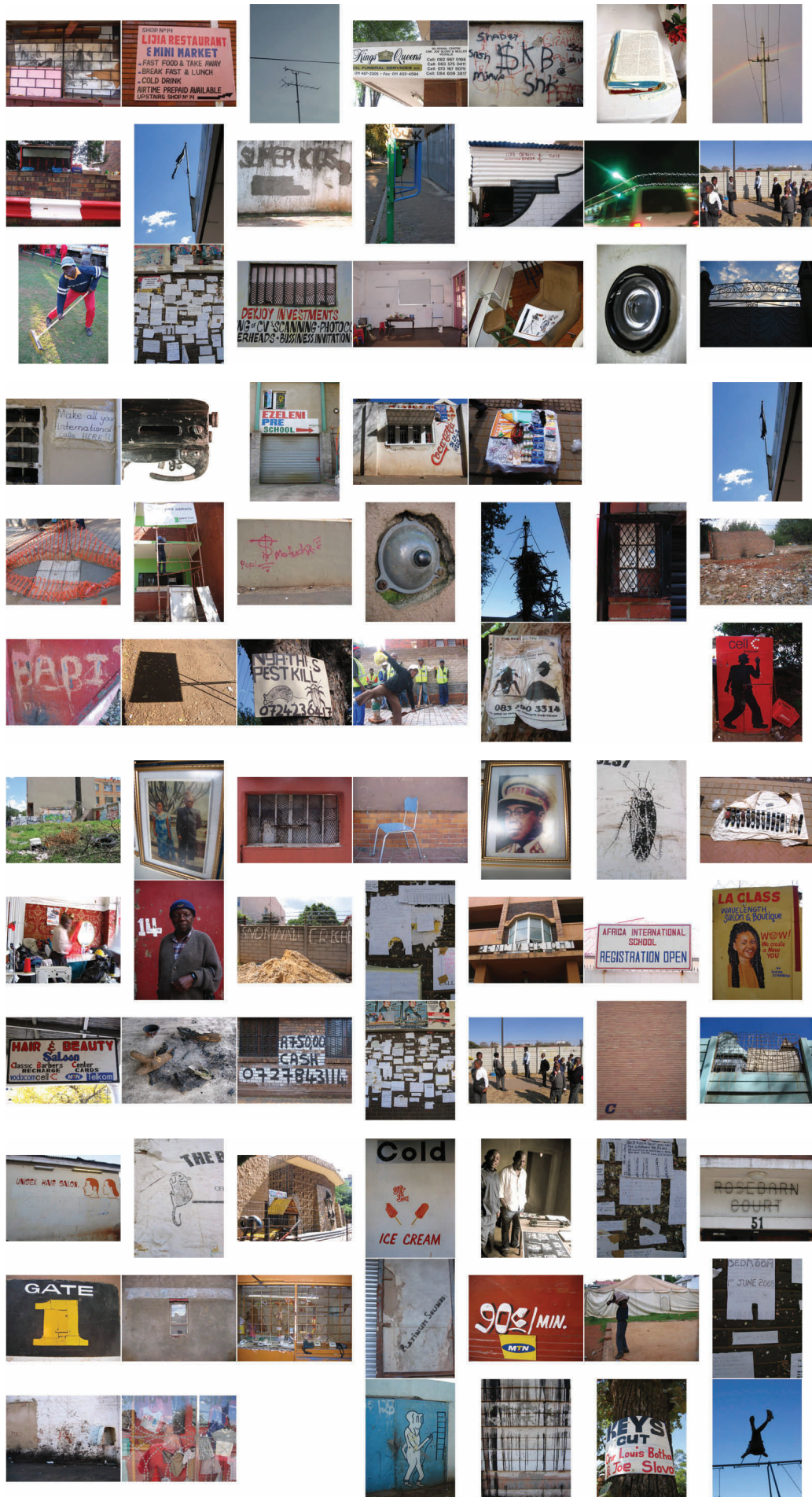


Figure 12-16: Walking in the Yeoville Neighbourhood, photographic documentation. By the author.

Chapter Three: Drawing, testing the ground and lucky breaks.

What follows is a fairly straightforward description of the making process in *Speak English to Me*. I do this in order to contextualise the findings in Chapter Four of the research report. I orient the reader by providing the key components of the project as it emerged on the ground and provide a sense of the thinking in the making process highlighting its tacit dimension. Chapter Three presents an artist's narrative of my "conversation with the materials of the situation at hand" (Schön 1990:43). A 'thick' description of the project is important, given the its duration and open-ended quality and also because it took place in a particular place at a particular time in my career as an artist. In some senses, this chapter highlights my reflective practice of "research through art" (Mcloed & Holdridge 2006: 7-12). Specific instances and critical moments in the project which are now described are more closely scrutinised in the findings section of the report; Chapter Four.

In 2007 I initiated a series of small scale aesthetic/situational 'tests' in Yeoville undertaken at the time of writing the MAFA proposal. I sought, in the first phases of the project, to familiarise myself with drawing in new places and also to formulate a conversational approach to art making. Testing the site become necessary because I was unfamiliar with working in a public terrain as an image-maker previously spending most of my creative time, prior to my MA studies, working as an artist in a studio or as an educator-artist in the classroom. By initiating a series of modest encounters in informal spaces I sought to develop a loose methodology and set of research problems with which to proceed toward a more ambitious neighbourhood project which culminated toward the end of 2007 in *Speak English To Me*. During this time, my making process could be described as deconstructive, where speech in informal places would intervene upon the ground of my existing art-making practice, destabilizing my habitus as an artist. Practically, this would entail moving between two creative zones— the street, an informal public/informal domain, and my studio, a private space. I carried materials back and forth between them, observing the effects of the speech of others on my own aesthetic practice. Reflecting back, many of the processes described in the first phase of the project, proceeded in an overlapping way, often simultaneously, informing each other constantly. This was concretised into a more formalised methodology in *Speak English To Me*.

A critical problem throughout the project was defining for myself what I meant by 'drawing'. As the tests proceeded I began to understand drawing as an expanded field of practice which could include and cross a range of modalities from making marks on a page to the simple act of walking. I was attracted to drawing as the medium for the project because it "has come to be associated with intimacy, informality and authenticity", "drawing forever describes its own making in becoming... drawing is nothing more than that, and in its eternal incompleteness always re-enacts imperfection and incompleteness" (Dexter 2005: 5). I was interested in seeing how drawing, as an essentially private practice, could "re-enacts desire and loss" (Newman in Dexter 2005:5) and how it could become ambulatory: "a locus for signs by which we map the physical world... a device for understanding our place within the universe" (Dexter 2005: 5). As I will demonstrate below, drawing came to be understood as a kind of speech, a practice of walking a neighbourhood, a method of translation and reflection, inscription and collaborative meaning-making. The narrative that follows represents my trajectory as an artist that draws and the reader should see how the function of drawing in my practice shifts from "an unmediated record of an event" (Dexter 2005: 4) to "its anecdotal and narrative potential", "storytelling" and ultimately toward a collaborative practice of drawing as "formulation or elaboration of ...thought itself at the very moment it translates itself into an image (Dexter 2005: 8-9).

For me, draw is a productive medium to explore how the aesthetic operates in informal places because it is a medium that prizes entanglement and incompleteness. A theoretical problem could be investigated through it and upon it in because the practice of drawing seems to scintillate between sentence and word formation, pure arbitrary mark-making and image formation. I was particularly interested taking drawing as a practice of intimacy into the streets of Yeoville, whose urban fabric aggressively challenges easy distinctions between the public and the private. At the same time, there appeared to me a strong resemblance between the makeshift informality of the neighbourhood and drawing as a practice of art making as such. As Dexter (2005: 8) remarks drawing is an “under theorised”, “overlooked and “repressed” practice. In contemporary art discourse drawing does not have the visibility of more consummated practices such as painting, sculpture, installation and printmaking because of its make-do status. Given these complexities, I imagined that drawing (as a practice that has no place) as a medium that to think through the antinomy between the social and the aesthetic. I was particularly interested in the “conferring role” of the “graphic line” and how drawing, as an expanded practice could create relational fields in terms of *social space*:

Is defined by its contrast with area. This contrast has a metaphysical dimension, as well as a visual one; the background is conjoined with the line. The graphic line marks out the area and so defines it by attaching itself to it as its background. Conversely, the graphic line can exist only against this background, so that a drawing that completely covered its background would cease to be a drawing. This confers on the background a specific role that is indispensable for the meaning of the drawing, so that in a drawing two lines can be related to each other only through the background- a feature, incidentally, that clearly distinguishes the graphic line from the geometric line. – The graphic line confers an identity on its background (Samuel 1996: 83).

The narrative below will give the reader a sense of how I tackled drawing as an expanded field over the course of the project, taking a “line for a walk” (Klee in Sanghani et al 2006: 222) through the neighbourhood of Yeoville, its various “attachments”, “conferrings” and “cessations” in relation to a real place.

Experiments in Drawing Responsively: Highlands: Under Development, Nelson Mandela Bridge.

Acquainting myself with drawing in new places began modestly with two ‘safer’ projects undertaken in April and May 2007. Here I responded through drawing to urban environmental stimulus in what may be termed a conversational way producing two sets of commissioned landscape drawings. The first set was made for the Joburg Art Bank drawn in situ from various vantage points around the Nelson Mandela Bridge (Figure 24). The second set were drawings of views of Johannesburg from Highlands/Yeoville Ridge including Ellis Park, Kensington, Hillbrow (Figure 25). Both sets of drawings were made by applying black white board marker onto clear, small scale Perspex surfaces; a technique I derived from my teaching practice. I was interested in transplanting a medium designed for teaching into a landscape genre context. The drawings allowed me to test the responsiveness of this unusual medium in relation to, specifically, the Johannesburg social landscape with which I have always been preoccupied. I discovered in drawing in situ that the double sided, clear Perspex surface allowed me to make marks over layers of waste material found or related to the drawing site and situation (maps, detritus, found textures, photographic elements). In other words, my experience of the place could be integrated in a double register in the drawing process. The generative mark-making (expressive-responsive/perspectival) and the archival register (locating, selecting and arranging found objects) which were brought into tension on the perspex surface as I drew on the site and then later resolved in the studio. I also found that the white board marker ink could

be applied to a clean Perspex surface with a great immediacy and sensitivity, offering a range of mark-making opportunities, a wide range of tonal variations and also that the marks could be erased, diluted, and modified with great versatility in relation to changing and elusive environmental and social conditions I perceived: the movement of traffic, shifting light conditions, the speech of pedestrians and so on. Stimuli was snatched and incorporated into the drawing process in an ad hoc manner on site. This kind of landscape drawing allowed me to become familiar in an embodied way and cognitively intimate with a particular place, to construct a relation between myself and a physical site through drawing. The idea was that by making these more traditional landscape works, I would feel more confident about ‘drawing speech’ in my later engagements with interlocutors in *Speak English to Me*.

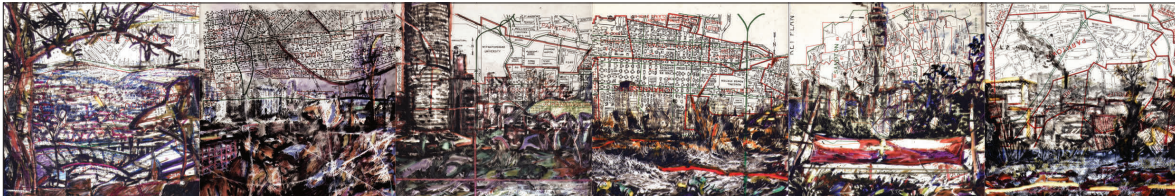


Figure 24: Brenden Gray, *Highland Laments; Under Development*, 2007.



Figure 25: Brenden Gray, *Nelson Mandela Bridge series*, 2007.

Once the series of landscape drawings had been resolved they were then scanned into a digital format which presented a new set of opportunities. I could edit these images for production and editioning purposes but more significantly, given the mutability of the medium, instances of the drawing-in-progress could be recorded digitally as stills which may later be animated and projected. Also, the finished image could be re-worked as the ground or background upon which animated elements would appear. Based on this discovery, I began to generate short animation clips (Figure 26, 27) by drawing directly on a scanner bed, working onto a finished drawings in Photoshop to generate the key frames, and later by drawing directly onto Perspex with whiteboard marker and capturing the changes photographically at 12 frames per second in order to create stop motion sequences. It now become possible to generate both artefactual artworks and digital motion based pieces in response to everyday dialogue.



Figure 26: Brenden Gray, *Stills From Nelson Mandela Bridge animation*, 2007.

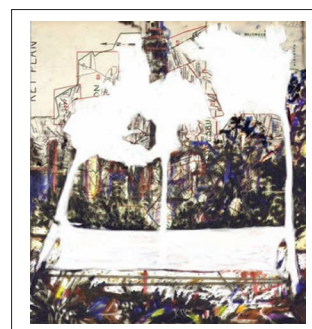


Figure 27: Brenden Gray, *Stills from Highland Laments*, 2007.

Experiments in drawing in relation to speech: Five Christ, and others: the neighbourhood.

With these possibilities in mind, I was able to move into a series of discreet interlocutory, drawing interventions in Yeoville. These were initiated through a community development/design project I conducted with a multidisciplinary group of students studying at Greenside Design Center (Figure 28, 29) who spent three days in July 2007 interviewing residents, workers and users' of the park in my street with the view to creating design proposals to enrich the park users experience of the park. Their activities in the park allowed me to meet a variety of residents and users and especially become better acquainted with my immediate neighbours on Muller Street. I began by making off-the-cuff drawings with them and working mostly with children. I was attempting to make drawings that would integrate unobtrusively into the daily fabric of Muller Street (Figure 30) and attract small groups for discussion. The experience of working with people in my street would later inform the development of one of the key guiding principles for *Speak English to Me*: 'neighbourhood' as a unique kind of public space, or discursive construct which demanded a certain quality of situated drawing. However, I found this process of 'just drawing' with others unproductive and no real significant movement emerged from this process. Participants tended to find what I was doing merely amusing and at best vaguely interesting.

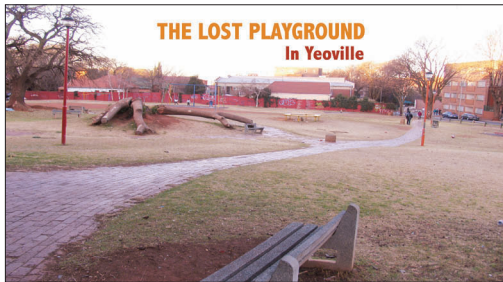


Figure 28: Cover from the 'Lost Playground', Greenside Design Center Student Publication, 2007.



Figure 29: Greenside Design Center students conducting research in Muller Street Park, 2007.



Figure 30: Drawing with children in Muller Street Park, 2007.

The first sustained drawing project emerged in collaboration with a Seventh Day Adventist church youth group ('The Pathfinders') who used the park opposite to my house every Sunday afternoon for training, drilling, marching and worship. After speaking and drawing with the head counsellor, Patience (Figure 31) (and sometimes his peers) over a period of a few weeks in the park, a point of contention in our conversations became the basis for a project with the whole group. Patience felt that Christ represented the discipline of the spirit over the body, and I argued that this as it was translated into the militaristic treatment of children which was hardly a loving position. I argued that there may be other ways to compel virtuousness and asked if did the children share his authoritarian views. After extensive conversations held with Patience in June 2007, it was decided that I would conduct drawing portraiture workshops with the children where they visually interpreted the idea of Christ (Figure 32). Based on what they had made I generated a semi-figurative 'banner' that would representing conflicting ideas about Christ, Biblical texts and narratives around Yeoville. I made the underdrawing in my studio in July and August 2007 (and documented this through stop motion techniques) by dismantling an abandoned piano I had found, and tracing the shapes of the keys and hammers onto cotton rag paper (Figure 33). This matrix, or ecology of suggestive forms became the surface against which the children in the park could project their visions of Christ, Biblical stories, personal neighbourhood narratives and so on giving me instructions for the drawing process and also making their own contributions to other peripheral elements of the banner.

Drawing took place every second Sunday in September and October 2007, with pairs of children waiting in a queue to work with me. This attracted many other children in the park (Figure 34) whom I supplied with materials to draw on a rubber surface in the corner of the park where the roundabout used to be. The Pathfinders children successively layered their stories and knowledge on the banner as they worked with me and moved to the rubber tarmac afterwards to make their own drawings. Every other Sunday, the work-in-progress would be presented for discussion with the counsellors. The near finished drawing was ceremoniously presented to the whole youth group in the park on the 18th of November 2007, and ‘completed’ in consultation with the children. This process was not without its moments of crisis. The first occasion was when the junior counsellors (Patience was not present) showed aggression toward the combination of Christian figuration and abstraction, revealing that they were actually alienated from the image itself despite their investment in the drawing process. I realised that they were merely following Patience’s lead in securing the interest of an artist who could further the material interests of the church. Despite this, at the end of the project, the drawing became a site of group cohesion and even celebration and a badge of honour for the children and counsellors (Figure 35).

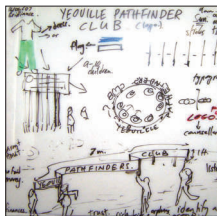


Figure 31: Sketch for Pathfinders Project, 2007.

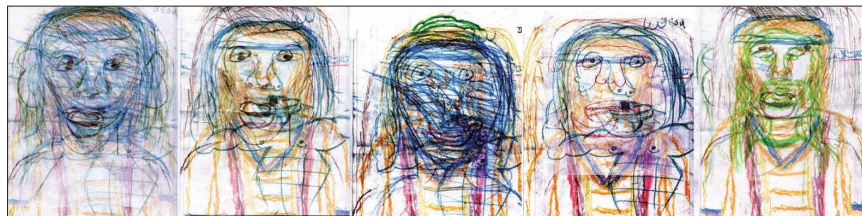


Figure 32: Children's drawings for Pathfinder's project, 2007.



Figure 33: Brenden Gray, 'Five Christ' in progress, 2007.



Figure 34: Pathfinders members working on 'Five Christ' in Muller Street park, 2007.



Figure 35: Publication of 'Five Christ' in Muller Street Park, 2007.

I realised only later, upon being invited to a church recruitment drive, that to the counsellors the drawing was not valued in its own right, but rather operated as an index of my cooptation as a white, educated, artistic resident into their church ethos, a fact that they could use for promotional purposes in their recruitment drives. This confirmed (and reconfirmed) my suspicion that by working with coherent community organisations my work may be instrumentalised and reduced to achieve their ends, and subscribe to their interests with the aesthetic having no real place within it. My interest was in establishing dialogue and argument through drawing rather than playing a role in facilitating consensus. I would need to find a way of working instead on a more intimate basis with individuals (whose interests may open to discussion than a collective's) and in so doing working outside the normative parameters of 'community'.

At the coal face: William Kentridge and *The Sophist*.

I asked, after this experience, whether it was possible to conduct a dialogical project with people I did not know; ‘strangers’. It seemed easier to work with a coherent and established community group. At the time, I resisted Kester’s suggestion that dialogical artists should work with politically coherent communities in durational ways in order to eschew issues of exoticisation (Kester 2004: 147 -151) thinking that there was no point in merely reproduce existing social structures by consolidating the existing interests of a group (Kwon 2004: 153). In September and October 2007 I attempted to investigate the responsive potential drawing by working directly with individual strangers, at the coal face as it were. I began a small intervention where I attempted to engage directly with pedestrians on the corner of Bezuidenhout and Hunter Street Yeoville (Figure 37). This led to the production of a composite print, *The Sophist* (Figure 36) which, as I reflect back now, was obliquely influenced by reading in my youth how Kentridge responded to the Bertram’s environment (his neighbourhood at the time) in the 80’s. I was sympathetic toward these neighbourhood images such as “the broken figure begging at the center of *Waiting out the Recession*” in his *Industry and Idleness* series”, which Sean ‘O Toole (2009: 1) notes, “speaks powerfully of a South Africa still visible on any street corner” (Figure 38). Immediately before making *The Sophist* I had also recently seen William Kentridge’s production of the *Magic Flute*, 2007 (Figure 41) at The Civic Theatre and interviewed him for an article for *Art South Africa* that dealt with the relationship between drawing, otherness and the animal. I felt, after seeing the *Magic Flute*, that in comparison to Kentridge’s apartheid-era work, the opera was rather flat and lacking in resonance. Where in the late 80’s and early 90’s, he relied on marking out the disjunctures between the colonial privileges represented in the suburbs of Johannesburg (*The 2nd Greatest City After Paris*) and the radical poverty that existed on the edges of this privilege, often reworking the canonical works of Europe in a colonial context (*Faustus in Africa*, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, *Zeno Writing*) in local, Johannesburg terms, *The Magic Flute*, in its seamless and puristic poeticism was somehow lacking in criticality. The *Magic Flute* set out only to poeticise European culture, especially Enlightenment culture, with Kentridge attempting to canonise himself on an international stage by associating his work with Mozart and those ‘great artists’, such as Schinkel, Hockney and others who had previously had the honour of interpreting *The Magic Flute* for the stage. In the light of this disappointment and given my formative predilection for mimicking and appropriating Kentridge’s style (an adolescent urge many young South African, aspirant artist experience) I felt I needed to challenge a mentor. I wanted, in *The Sophist*, to examine the aesthetic effects of situating the exclusive, bourgeois style of Kentridge, particularly, as it was manifested in *The Magic Flute*, onto the streets of the inner city- Yeoville. I experimented with the effect of bringing, for example the radical particularisations of a ‘pretentious challenger’ such as Robin Rhode into play with the high art pretensions of a canonised and established William Kentridgesque visual lexicon.



Figure 36: Brenden Gray, *The Sophist*, 2007.

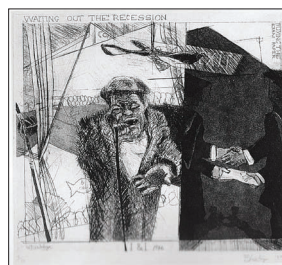


Figure 38: William Kentridge, *Waiting out the Recession*, From *Industry and Idleness*, 1986/7, Etching.



Figure 37: The ‘Rasta House Wall’, corner of Bezuidenhout and Hunter Street, Bellevue, JHB. 2007.



Figure 39: William Kentridge, *Portage*, 2000.

This wall on the corner of Bezuidenhout and Hunter became a potent site for some kind of dialogical intervention simply because it stood as an everyday monument of sorts, resembled a double-spread page and was visible ‘as a canvas’ that could hail pedestrians from the street corner to register their voices upon it. (Incidentally it was at this point that I came up with the title ‘Wall Literatures’ (Figure 37) for the animated sequence made in *Speak English To Me*). At the same time, the fact that this wall, with its small, seat like extrusion was home to a qualified doctor from Ghana, who as the myth has it, fell into madness and was living on the streets, returning to the wall every evening to sleep and seeing him there regularly resonated strongly with the image of the broken man in Kentridge’s *Waiting out the Recession* (Figure 38). If Kentridge illustrated his experience of marginalised others, a reappropriative relational/dialogical pastiche of his work would necessitate working directly with ordinary and ‘broken people’. The idea of taking the visual vocabulary of *Magic Flute* onto the street to interpret the speech of strangers struck me as both patently absurd and ethically problematic but there was a certain appeal in pushing this forward. This thought led me to parodying Kester’s (1995) “aesthetic evangelism” as the basis for the production of an absurdist, situationist event which would be documented in a Kentridgesque series of prints. Because so much community-based art practice is driven by a moral reformism that can be traced back to the Enlightenment, (a key metaphoric device in the iconography of the *Magic Flute*) and specifically Kant, I wanted to parody the idea of the artistic intervention in the inner city and the grandiose character of Kentridge by playing the learned, universalist-humanist philosopher/ artistic quack/radical pamphleteer/artistic genius bringing his superior knowledge to the downtrodden of Yeoville, producing a print that intermingled the unofficial, carnivalesque discourse of the inner city street (‘proletarian inscriptions’) and the official discourse of legitimate culture (*The Magic Flute*).

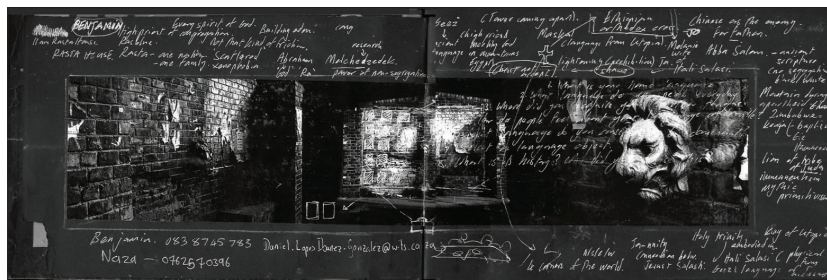


Figure 40: Brenden Gray, *Sketch for Wall Literature*, 2007.



Figure 41: From William Kentridge’s *The Magic Flute*, 2007.

Added to this already fraught and absurd drive to parody high culture, I added more confusion to the situation by asking the strangers that I met on the street corner to translate English terms from an obscure 19th century publication: *The Beeton Universal Encyclopaedia of Information* (Emerson: 1870) into various African languages. I drew our misinterpretations and semiotic slippages in generating the imagery of the print. Based on these encounters of misinterpretation, I began to make impressions (one-off printed fragments, dry points, etchings, collographs, relief prints, stencils that were glued together in an ad hoc way) on the waste left over from the street experience (torn pieces of publication), to produce, a throwaway on-off print that could not enter the formal art economy as an edition. I drew my imagery for the print from three four sources: the visual/enunciative environment of Yeoville; dried fish, snuff boxes, thorn tree branches, maps, sweet wrappers, church print advertisements; the stock motifs used by Kentridge over his career: the double spread page broken with black figurative silhouettes, maps of Yeoville, dry points of birds in flight, the radiant eye and combined this with a third set of materials: modernist typographic elements. Lastly I rendered statements drawn from Jacques Rancière’s *The Philosopher of the Poor* (2003). Here he looks at how the voice of the poor are come to be mediated, and elevated through philosophical discourse. Making this work was catalytic experience for me because I could make a break with a deep seated obsession to produce an auratic fine art

object in response to my experiences of walking the streets of Yeoville and talking to its residents. At the same time it offered me an internal mechanism by which I could eschew ‘legitimate culture’ as my frame of reference when working on the streets. The Sophist marked a break from legitimate and high culture allowing me to enter the informal dynamics of the streets, its unofficial discourses and aesthetics.

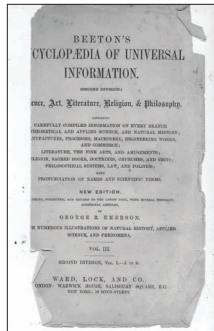


Figure 42: Beeton's Encyclopedia of Universal Information. Emerson: 1870.

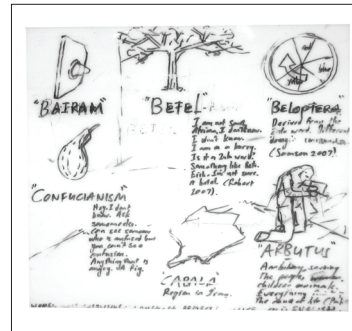


Figure 42: Brenden Gray, Public Drawing made in preparation for *The Sophist*, 2007, whiteboard marker on plastic.



Figure 43: Brenden Gray, Detail from *The Sophist*, 2007, mixed media print.

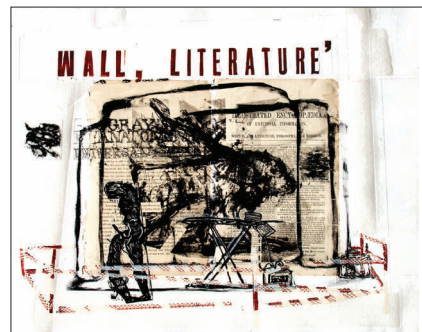


Figure 44: Brenden Gray, Detail from *The Sophist*, 2007, mixed media print.

A processual, conversational aesthetic.

With these experiences and approaches in mind, I considered intensively what production techniques may be used in a more ambitious neighbourhood, dialogical art project. Apart from a range of journal drawings, private ‘thought experiments’ (Figure 45) conducted over December 2007 I produced a 30 second animation clip (Figure 46) that brought together a set of formal and conceptual concerns around how a dialogical drawing project in Yeoville might emerge. The technique developed here would allow me to achieve a number of results. I could make sketches in response to the speech of others using whiteboard marker on Perspex, in situ, and develop these drawings in the studio (if the project demanded that). I could also use two dimensional material gathered in the street to make collages, This allowed me to work in layers in situ and in the digital studio and bring everything together into time-based pieces that could be projected onto walls in Yeoville or in a gallery setting for the participants and other residents in the area. The first animation clip brought all of this together and was satisfying because it provided a series and complex of cognitive/modal spaces in which I could operate, where I would be able to produce a variety of aesthetic forms that could be shown in Yeoville and if needs be, the gallery. This little animation sequence was compelling to me because it could be the place where dialogical materials could intermingle. Experiences and encounters in the street could be carried back to the studio in order to produce new works (other digitally or autographically) that could then be returned to a given participant in order to ‘set their capacities in motion’ (Ranciere 2004) in a variety of ways. In short, what I found was a striking resonance between my continual returns to strangers on the street and the programmacy of animation. A drawn image made with a participant and returned in cycles could be activated through animations produced in the studio

and another, characterizing Yeoville as a make-do environment where a variety of visual/material registers and discourses (strategic/infrastructural vs. informal/ tactical) meet and mix. Photography emphasized the temporal and durational aspect of a dialogical project conducted in a neighborhood. The photographs also managed to evoke, through the documentation of traces the temporal space, the physical movement through the area. At the same time they suggested the sense of discreteness and intimacy that characterized the project. Later, in the exhibition context, the strip of photographs were not an “overview of the city” but represented the way the “city is walked”. The photographs represent to a large degree reading “the city from its street-level intimations, to encounter the city as lived complexity, to seek alternative narratives and maps based on wandering” (Nuttall 2008: 198).

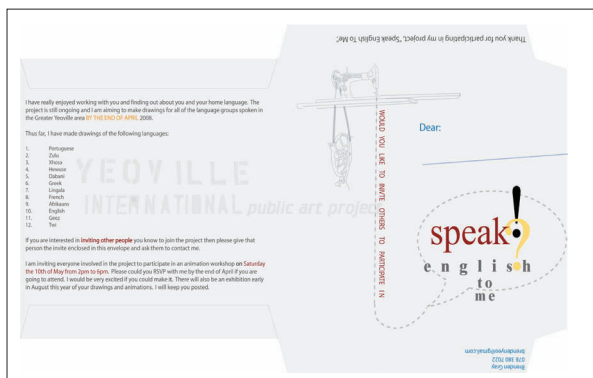


Figure 46: Brenden Gray, Promotional Material for *Speak English To Me*, 2008.



Figure 47: Brenden Gray, Promotional Material for *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

There were also innumerable smaller events that took place before and during the project that I viewed as tentative ‘stabblings’ into the fabric of the area. It became increasingly important for me to become familiar with the everyday culture of Yeoville in an embodied way, resisting the temptation to understand the neighbourhood and its residents (in advance of beginning the project) as subjects to be reformed.

An example of such an approach was when, in one of my walks, I came upon Tebza’s gym (Figure 48) and asked the owner if his body builders would be interested in being drawn for a sculpture I had been asked to produce for the Visa Olympics of the Imagination Project (Figure 49). Based on my conversation with Tebza, in May 2008, I produced a mobile sculptural assemblage. I collaborated with children I had met in Yeoville to produce the work and when it was completed shown to them so that they could pose beside it, and drag around the streets. During the construction of the body builder assemblage (Figure 50) children from the neighbourhood made suggestions about what Yeoville street iconography could be ‘tattooed’ and stencilled onto the wooden body of the athlete (made of the piano keys used in *Five Christ*) whose grandiose pose was mocked by his height which was the same as that of a child. I also approached community activists invited to 2007 New Year’s Party to participate in making a fictional map of Yeoville, a ‘complaint cartography’. I envisaged this as the beginning of a more ambitious project which ultimately failed to take off because I continued to resist working with an established community organisation. I could enumerate more examples (such as working as the chairperson for the Yeoville Community Policing Forum), but I remember thinking at the time that what I was attempting was impossible: to collaborate with strangers. It occurred to me at the time that there was no way to develop an informal participatory aesthetic. How could I work with strangers? This ultimately depended on what I meant by ‘work’.

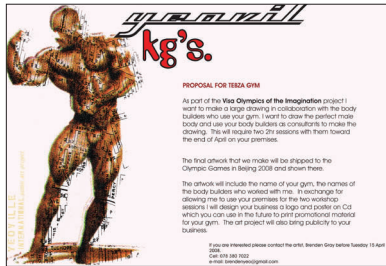


Figure 48: Brenden Gray, *Proposal for Tebza's Gym*, Joe Slovo Drive, Yeoville, 2008.



Figure 49: Brenden Gray, *I Have Destroyed Everything*, with two children from the project, *Visa Olympics of the Imagination Exhibition*, The Premises Gallery, Braamfontein, 2008.



Figure 49: Brenden Gray, *I Have Destroyed Everything*, under construction, 2008.

The beginnings of a project: strategies and tactics.

So with a mixture of confidence and resignation, I began to formulate a the beginnings of a project, which from its very inception would proceed messily and haphazardly rent by crises and failures. The project *Speak English To Me* never really gained a real sense of consistency and stability. I had begun the process of formulating a makeshift aesthetic and an approach to drawing that I felt could incorporate the voice of an—'other', be it a stranger, a neighbour, or a friend. The question at that stage was how *to find* those intervening voices, and more significantly how to address them. I had decided, in writing the proposal, that making-as-walking, 'an ambulatory aesthetic' would feature strongly in establishing a relationship with place and considered a situationist derive/ parcoures as a way of entering into chance engagements with residents of Yeoville (as opposed to spaces and structures). However, I felt that this 'psycho-geographic' approach was perhaps too arbitrary a method in moving through the area and meeting others. The point was to avoid the arbitrary and the programmatic at the same time. I knew that if I could speak with and connect strangers in some kind of errant way a rhizomatic or lattice-like structure may emerge as the guiding principle for the project. Would it be possible to develop a method of errantry, when the systemacity of method and the chaotic and complex nature of the errantry are so at odds with one another? Was it possible to use conversation, the quintessential practice of disinterested errantry, as a generative device in the making of connections between places and people so that something significant and consensual could emerge? Informal 'talk' could become the vehicle through which to induct participants into the project and the basis upon which I could ask them to guide me to new project participants through a system of referrals.

By facilitating social networking between strangers I could avoid instrumentalising my role within the neighbourhood and resist constructing a sense of community based on self-interest and existent group ties. I hoped that by activating a chaotic movement between residents, a tangible, political outcome may emerge in conversation with others, rather than being externally induced by myself. I felt that there must be 'hidden' dynamics and organisations on the street that could become legible and visible through collaborative aesthetic work. I felt that my research problem necessitated working outside normative constructs such as 'community', 'development', 'upliftment', 'voice' by talking to strangers (rather than a politically constituted group) *about strangeness* "in the wrong

place”. It was important to privilege the informal space as the site of production of meaning and community. In developing an approach I thought it may be possible to ask a group of individual project participants (as strangers to each other), but living in the same neighbourhood, to enter into dialogue with one another in a public forum. In order to emphasise *emergence* as the primary indicator of the success of the project it became necessary to *put myself* (as a vessel of legitimatising discourses- ‘Art’, ‘Research’, ‘Culture’) ontologically at risk, or “intersubjectively vulnerable” (Kester. 2005:81) , by inviting strangers to enter into conversation and art making activities with me. Principally, I would need to recruit participants and ask ‘initiates’ to act as guides who would walk with me through the area and introduce me to new places and participants, based on some kind of criteria, which were at that stage unformulated.

Where to begin?

The problem was that, at that point, I had no conception at that point of where or how to begin. Then by chance, as I was consolidating a formal/visual approach for the project, in November 2007, I made contact with ‘Diogo’ (Gaspar Vunda) (Figure 50), a homeless Angolan foreign national who was living on a pavement opposite the Trinity Congregation Church and Meals on Wheels. He had built an immaculate white lean against the wall of Yeoville Boys School on Muller Street (Figure 51), two blocks down from my home. I introduced myself to him and he related to me how he had suffered language discrimination in Yeoville from some ‘South African blacks’ who he said refused to speak with him in English. When he greeted them, they demanded that he address them in an indigenous language such as Zulu. He refused to cooperate with them and alleged that, as a result of this, he was ostracised. He did not tell me who these people were and when I asked him about his nationality he said he was Angolan but did not indicate whether he was a legal or illegal immigrant, a refugee or exile. Diogo was clearly angry. After listening intently to his story, I asked if we could meet again, and after an intense subsequent conversation about our experiences of the area, I asked permission to adopt his sign (Figure 52) as the title of what would later become the project *Speak English To Me*. I asked Diogo what he thought of the idea: if I investigated his claims about language discrimination by walking through Yeoville and conducting a series of conversations with residents and strangers and collaborating with them to produce a body of drawings based on the issues he had related to me: strangeness, discrimination, home and neighbourhood. Despite the apparent aimlessness of this spontaneously made proposal, Diogo agreed. This conversation provided me with a seed I would use to activate a more sustained dialogical drawing project. In order to get it off the ground (on the ground!), I would need to find a way to approach strangers, elicit their views, through a system of referrals and through a process of drawing with them, find connections between their narratives from which answers to Diogo’s questions may emerge.



Figure 50, 51, 52: Gaspar Vunda (‘Diogo’) on Muller Street and his sign ‘Speak English To Me’, 2007.

The prospect of undertaking a project like this was risky because it, like so many of my previous encounters, could degenerate into sheer absurdity; an aesthetic statement that produces no knowledge or findings. This was, after all, a research project. The question that remained was how would it be possible to initiate these intimate conversations with strangers when there are more than 30 000 people living in the Greater Yeoville area and within the time frame of a few months, perhaps a year? How would I know who to speak to without imposing some sort of external programme, or totalising conceptual framework upon them? The danger here was that, if I did not, the project would crumble into aimless indeterminacy? Was there some way of developing an approach that would allow me to eschew programmaticism altogether without losing coherence? With a curiosity to find out what language resources exist in Yeoville (sparked by the production of *The Sophist*, 2007) I may simply have moved through the area with a stack of questionnaires asking strangers what languages they could speak and whether they would be interested in joining a community-based art project, but this seemed to me even more absurd (which was proven later in attempt to do exactly that!) (Figure 19). Arguably, Simone's idea of 'human infrastructure' (2008) in African cities, offered an approach to recruiting participants that may have been viable, where by using some kind of generative concept, or issue derived from Yeoville, I could be guided through Yeoville through a system of referrals. The question then became: by what criteria could these referrals take place?

“Home” and “language” as generative devices.

Roots make the commonality of errantry and exile, for in both instances roots are lacking. We must begin with that (Glissant. 2006:71).

Thinking through my conversation with Diogo, I identified the theme of '*home language*' as the criteria to guide the referrals. I thought that it may be able to ask an existing participant to lead me to the next "recruit" on the condition that the home language of the new recruit was significantly different to the original participant. This may ensure, in my chaotic walkings, that I would "cover" a diversity of languages spoken in the area, experience visiting a range of sites and possibly, later, assemble a group of residents. This would allow the final group of participants to open enough in terms of identity in order to stimulate a conversation between them at critical points in the project. Perhaps, at its culmination, we could collectively speak to notions of strangeness, home and neighbourhood catalysed by the artworks made on the street. By adopting this approach, I would be able to move through Yeoville in a relatively unprogrammatic and chaotic/complex/errant way and at the same time, through this process of chance meetings, referrals, introductions, encounters and intense interlocations, develop an approach approach to drawing that was dialogical. I hoped that through this process some kind of movement (social/political/institutional/developmental/aesthetic?) would emerge. I considered Diogo's status as the quintessential outsider to the economy of Yeoville as a potent starting point for a neighbourhood-wide, conversational art project.

Given Diogo's account of living in as a migrant in Yeoville (an illegible sign to the Yeoville community), the notion of 'home language' became a potentially important generative, interlocutionary device with which to engage other strangers because of the inherent difficulties involved in defining both terms 'home' and 'language'. For me, 'home' and 'language' bring notions of selfhood and otherness to the heart. Diogo's placard *Speak English to Me*, as a bodily representation, is complex and slippery signifier for a number of reasons. One would assume that a homeless, South African black person would project his indigenous language and black foreign national his home language as a mark of pride to others given his economic and symbolically vulnerable position in what is a Pan African community. This expectation is inverted by demanding (rather than requesting) that

the viewer-reader-resident speak to the bearer of this sign in a dominant colonial language, English, rather than an indigenous African language. Why would a black man demand to be addressed in English? The issue at stake for Diogo was that he could only speak Portuguese. Being Angolan and English speaking meant he was being rejected by other residents on a daily basis. Although it is questionable whether this took place because he was foreign, or just homeless, seen as a vagrant by residents, Diogo's status as an 'other' to the Yeoville community was incontrovertible. The fact that the placard signified Diogo's struggle to enter into a spatial, affective, and ethical conversation in this community on the street indicated that the issue of xenophobia may provide an aesthetic activation point for the project.

After speaking with Diogo, I meditated on what 'home' meant to me. 'Home', has simultaneous connotations of groundedness/rootedness. Home constitutes a centered and stable self-identity but is thrown into question when one asks where and how it may be located. Is 'home' to be found in place (nation, region, province, neighbourhood), in language, memory, the body, family, community, the self? Home is defined in relation to what is *not familiar*. It is a space apart, unique, distinctive, acquired through individual experience which means that it is constructed in relation to that which is not familiar, other, strange, alien. Home becomes an internalised symbol of continuity, of trust in structured place but always in relation to threat— to that which cannot be trusted or understood. Home is a refuge from strangeness and otherness. In this way, because of the term's complexity, ambiguity, arguably *its aesthetic nature*, I thought that it may provide the entry point into conversations with residents in the area due to the fact that Yeoville is, essentially, a home to immigrants. Also, given that for many people living in Yeoville, including South Africans and foreign nationals, home is defined as being 'elsewhere' and imported into the area. The term provided me with entry points into individual autobiographies and collective memory, allowing project participants to narrativise across a wide spectrum of personal themes; of moving across borders (seen, unseen, geographical, affective, cognitive etc) of discrimination and acceptance, of being visitors and hosts, into all that is involved in making do in a place that is your home but not really your home. These fecund thematics could therefore become generators of conversation between myself and a participant, and further between project participants. I would be able to ask a stranger, 'how did you arrive in Yeoville? Where is your home? Why do you define it as such? Do you see Yeoville as your home?' The theme may also give speakers an opportunity to reflect on the differences between Yeoville and their 'home', their status in relation to the neighbourhood which I could mark out through drawing. I would be able to access tensions that may exist in a speaker's mind between the remembered idealities, the real and the experiential. In this way drawing could articulate a participant's "thinkings" in a "quest for totality" as it is indexed in the notion of travel, home and neighbourhood:

- the thinking of territory and self (ontological, dual)
- the thinking of voyage and other (mechanical, multiple)
- the thinking of errantry and totality (relational, dialectical) (Glissant 2006: 75).

At the same time, the focus on 'language' and its links to place positioned me overtly as an outsider willing to learn another language before another, as a subject lacking, rather than an invasive and colonising presence. I would be able to acknowledge that I am in reality unable to access the worldview of another because I cannot speak their language. My status as an exile to their worldview could create a homology between myself and a 'stranger'. Yeoville residents live under the condition of exile and "readily admit that that [they] suffer most from the impossibility of communicating in [their] own language" (Glissant 2006: 73). My status as a white, male South African would make me a outsider but because I also lived in the area, as yet another stranger, I could perhaps become

visible as a subject to to project participants. The thematic of ‘outsiderness’ could give the project enough difference and enough stability to instantiate sustained and intimate conversations between myself and a participant.

Networks of strangers.

This network has a noticeable property, it always involves an impossible identification that cannot be embodied by he/she that utters it (Rancière 2000:61).

There were a number of pragmatic and conceptual problems involved in realising such an approach. The first and most urgent was how to introduce myself and this project. This would mean asking to what extent would it be necessary to legitimately explain the complexity of this approach to an absolute stranger. Furthermore, how would the participants take to me drawing in their homes? Would it be necessary to invoke some kind of instrumentalism and authority to sustain their interest in the project? As I was thinking through these issues, I began to identify potent public/informal sites in Yeoville (Figure 53 -55) in which to publish the ‘results’ of these anticipated conversations and my ‘findings’. In scouting for these sites, I happened to meet Samuel again, a Rastafarian man I had met while I was busy making *The Sophist* and invited him in December 2007 to be the 2nd participant in the project (after Diogo). Here I tested my conceptual framework, aesthetic and art-making approach. Given the relative success of this encounter (Samuel was eager to continue his narrative and people who gathered to listen to our conversation), I began the process of designing the recruitment materials for the project.

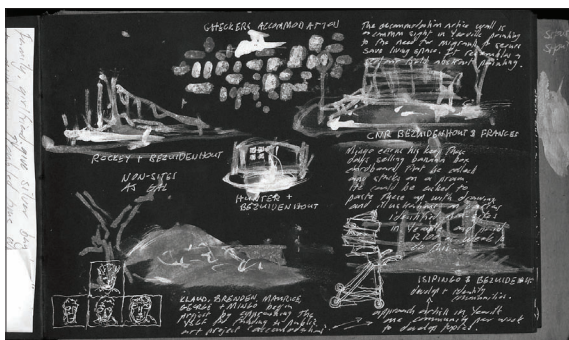


Figure 53- 55: Brenden Gray, possible sites for intervention in Yeoville, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Beginning with Samuel, a chain of referrals began that led me through Yeoville through the most part of 2008. On weekends, public holidays, and on weekdays when I wasn't teaching at the university, I would familiarise myself with the streets documenting this process in writing and photographically, soliciting interest from strangers, recruiting participants, maintaining relationships, entering into sustained conversations, drawing and writing with a variety of places with them.

Over the period of roughly a year, I spoke with hundreds of people on the streets and managed to solicit the interest of fifty nine strangers (Figure 24). Of these, twenty four engaged in all of the major activities in the project. By end of the project, 21 participants remained who had completed all the components of the project and attended the culminating exhibition. Each of the 24 possessed a different mother tongue were radically different in terms of cultural, ethnic background, class, profession, age etc. For the most part, they were met through referrals by existing participants, but some joined the project by chance, interest or solicitation. The decision to use home language as a strategy to deny programmacy and a cohesiveness meant that participants often felt motivated to assist me in formulating my quest. Some saw it as necessary to assist the ignorant white artist in his safari quest in this African neighbourhood. This sometimes lent a Quixotian, ethnographic absurdity to the project. Chaotic networking and connection-making meant that in consummating the project, I would be able to bring strangers into conversation with one another, most of whom would not know each other. The only thing the participants would share in the culminating event would be their status as residents living in the same neighbourhood, and the fact that they had all agreed to participate in the project.

Speak English To Me.

In what follows I narrate the art-making process loosely adopted for each participant, describing the role drawing played in our conversations, touch on some of the issues that informed the development of the project as they emerged in these encounters. I relate to the reader the specificity of the art making process and my emerging intentions as the project unfolded. Later, in Chapter Five where my findings are presented, I will reflect critically on the effects the project produced.

On the whole, the networking I envisaged did not proceed neatly and generatively from a single node. I simply could not employ a chain system in establishing a community of strangers, because a break in one link would mean a collapse the whole process (this became apparent after Samuel had not re-established contact with me after two months). It would become necessary to work from a number of points simultaneously (Figure 56) and becoming intimate with a small number of key contacts/'informants'. This allowed the project to branch out, virally as it were, from various nervous centers. My role would be to facilitate this growth and look to establish a generative structure for the project. I managed, by various means, to establish this nodal group and from which the process of walking, speaking and drawing began. I kept a log (Figure 57) of the people I had met, their contact details, addresses to track my movement through the area. I realised, after recruiting about ten participants, that opportunities for being guided by others may begin to grow exponentially and that hopefully the constraints of the home language referrals system I had developed would limit it. Because I was working with 'social materials', the project became a balancing act between generativity/fecundity and entropy/dissipation. There were a number of risks involved in relying on existing participants to make referrals because it assumed that they were interested enough in the project to secure the interest of another, and that they had the time to do so. For many people living in 'make-do' Yeoville, there is simply not the time nor energy to get involved in community development initiatives, or art projects. Earning a living is a central priority and people move where the opportunities lie. It is for these reasons, that some participants would simply disappear or drop out in the middle of the project. At the same time, it was surprising the extent to which existing participants were willing to introduce me to new strangers from backgrounds different to their own. It also became apparent to me, very early in the project, how often and easily friendships in this neighbourhood crossed identity and cultural lines. As the network of strangers thickened, it became clear to me that I was managing a system of relations (albeit a small one) and giving myself over to something that had a life of its own which presented its own set of vicissitudes and challenges. Managing and tracking the participation of each initiate and recruit in project became a tiresome, expensive and exhausting affair.



Figure 58: Brenden Gray, *Walking Journal* cover for *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Figure 59: Brenden Gray, Language Questionnaire for Yeoville Residents *Speak English To Me*, 2008.



Figure 60: Brenden Gray, Invitation to residents to participate in *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Drawing 'home objects'.

Once the interview was completed, I would then invite the participant to select what I termed 'a home/ home language object' from their immediate environment which registered in a compelling and resonant way the themes raised in the interview. They would then show this to me so that I could draw it. I realized in my interviews with Samuel, Diogo, and Njabulo that for them their speaking and my listening/ recording/ commenting with the view to publishing this later as part of a public art project was enough to sustain a relationship between themselves and myself. The question at what point was: I should introduce a visual/making/aesthetic element into our relationship (the participant knowing in advance that this would take place at some stage) in what would constitute a break in their storytelling/monologue. The request for the participant to *do something unfamiliar*, to be active in another way, constituted an intrusion in their life space, to varying degrees, and had to be negotiated in each and every case because the safety associated with those objects would be disrupted:

The aesthetics of place is stamped by our existential structures; in one sense of the word, it is more subjective than the aesthetics of unfamiliar surroundings. It is more subjective exactly in the ontological sense...this does not make the aesthetics of the everyday less satisfying than the aesthetics of the strange. Ordinary everyday objects lack the surprise element or freshness of the strange, nevertheless they give us pleasure through a kind of comforting stability, through the feeling of being at home and taking pleasure in the carrying our normal routines in a setting that is "safe" (Leddy 2005:12).

In comparison with the ease with which speakers related their stories and conversed with me, the introduction of an object or visual element (Figures 59-61) into the informal discourse posed a challenge which often meant that the choice was not immediately made, but often deferred by the participant. So another appointment was made where the object was presented to me (sometimes ceremoniously) for drawing. The drawing ritual was sometimes also postponed because I had felt it necessary, on some occasions, to contest the participant's choice of object. Some participants opted for objects/images that stereotypically and reductively represented their cultural identity (eg. flags, national symbols) that I rejected because it existed too far outside the immediate environment of the participant. I wanted an object that referred, even in a

superficial manner, the autobiography the participant had shared with me in the interview. Sometimes the choice of an object became the subject of argument between me and a participant. These dynamics listed above often meant searchings for the right object (Mother Johnson's sewing machines, Mzila's chinzala) which sustained our relationship, celebratory, collective showings (Desta's coffee maker, Samuel's cross, Stefanos garden), rummages and further storytelling (Jacques's jug, Njabulo's Stetson hat), argument, borrowing and lending (Joshua's statuette of Theodor Hertzl), ritualized activities (David's wedding suit and invitation), quiet non-response (Victoria's sewing machine), didactics (Alfonso's jacket), historical excavation (Mrs Singh's family album), polemic and complaint (Julie's daughters doll) and confession (Brilliant's staff). Simply choosing an object instigated a wide gamut of modes of sociability. The choice of object also threw into sharp relief the participant's perception of me (artist, resident, researcher, student, ethnographer, friend etc) and what they expected I wanted from them. It was clear to me by the end of the project that the 'home language object' was centrally responsible for a friendship being forged between myself and the 21 engaged participants and their continued engagement in the project. In short, the introduction of a distance-instantiating object (a totem) created a particular kind of relation between myself and the participants in the project which I will explore in more detail later in Chapter Five.



Figure 59 -61: Participants selection of 'home language objects', for *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

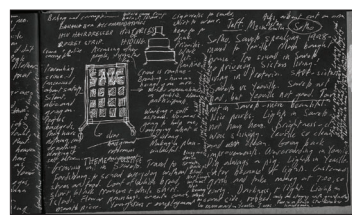
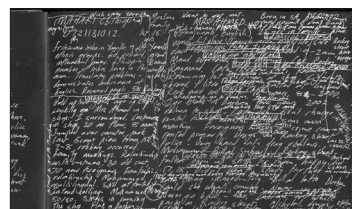


Figure 62: Conversation notes from *Walking Journal, Speak English To Me*, 2008.

The interview notes (Figures 62) became extremely valuable, as a dense aesthetic text, because they could be used by the participant to frame the selection of their home/home language object and in some cases my references to the conversation notes allowed me to participate in their decision-making process. It became a real challenge to phrase my request appropriately; in such a way that the choice of the object was interesting to the participant rather than simply meeting my expectations. Our 'conversation notes' tended to direct the choices of the participant. The immediacy of the writing conducted during the interview and the fact that it sat 'between' us allowed the participant and myself to backtrack *together*, survey our recorded speech in order to facilitate the selection of the home/home language object. If the demand to choose an object constituted an intrusion into the private space of the participant, I was worried that drawing it in this space would exacerbate in intrusion. I therefore felt it important to produce a less aggressive image and made a naturalistic and sympathetic drawing of the participant's object (Figure 63). The idea was to make an image, in the initial stages of my relationship with them, with *which they could strongly identify*. Drawing as a sympathetic and sensuous medium (as opposed to the brutal exposures of photography or panopticism of video) allowed for a situation where the participant was not documented as such. *They* could observe *me* drawing; shifting in my chair, making mistakes, staring, and translating what I saw onto the clean, white Perspex surface. I usually drew in the company of the participant taking up conversation with them about the drawing or critical issues raised in our earlier conversations. This made the

drawing process more convivial and less threatening. It was at this point that the conversation became truly informal because a participant could move around their space at their leisure, continue working, and feel comfortable while I was drawing. A drawing was usually completed in 2 to 3 hours and once it was complete I would present it to the participant usually on the spot for commentary and invite them to engage in the third stage of the project which asked them to introduce me to a new participant (one whose home language was different to their own, or not yet included in the project).



Figure 63: Home language object drawings, *Speak English To Me*, digital print on archival paper, 2008.

A difficult question that arose in the course of the project was how to frame the interlocutor's participation in the construction of the drawn image. For me, it was important *not* to ask the participant to draw or make material visual statements other than selecting and showing an object. I could not expect participants to draw because, in hindsight, many did not feel confident when they were asked to write, make images and even in some cases speak English to me (practices that may have been viewed by some participants that are performed to be appreciated and judged). This project was patently not in the business of 'skills transference' or exposing participants to the transformative and therapeutic nature of embodied aesthetic activity. The point was to work with the participant in a modest way validating their own communicative competences in the construction of the artwork through my own attentive listening. Speech had to be prioritized as the participant's primary creative input into the construction of a given text, artwork or statement. In the first stage the participant would tell stories, simply choose an object that reflected this and only much later intervene more actively in the construction of an aesthetic text whether it be it a drawing, photograph, print, animation. I decided to give sovereignty to speech of the participant in the dialogical art making process because this was a mode of communication that a participant could feel most confident in 'operating' the contents/structure/form of which I could realize through an act of drawing. There was a need throughout the project to produce the kinds of aesthetic representations that could be dialogised through speech. At the same time, I did not want not to overstate the role drawing played in our conversations. Often it would be incidental to the process of oral conversation, an alibi to continue our joint project *in talking*.

Clearly, many of the participants could not formulate for themselves an adequate response to the showing of the finished drawing, feeling it necessary to 'say the right thing' in their response, saying sometimes that 'it is beautiful' or 'you did a good job here'... 'nice'. On the whole, the drawings did not elicit the quality of response I was looking for. It is interesting to note that it was often not the drawing itself that provoked meaningful reflection on the part of the participant, but the process prior to its production. Holding an object in their hands or scrutinizing it on a desk, bed, bookshelf more often elicited the quality of speech (rich, autobiographical, reflective) I was looking for than the showing of my completed drawing to a participant. That being said, there were other non-verbal/non-formal indications that suggested the participant's attitude toward the drawing, shown gesturally, performatively rather than in words. Participants responded in the way they knew how, mobilizing the resources of their habitus within the unrepeatable dialogical situation by showing me more things, inviting me to participate in their rituals and life-world. As the project progressed, I realized that this required that I exercise a competence; facilitation. In teaching, it becomes important to notice the 'little details' in the behaviours of learners (intonation, register, vocabulary, sentence construction, posture, facial expression, body space and so on). I found that the reading these informal responses was often more interesting and telling than the 'formal' responses to given stimulus. As an artist, I could not expect a normative or sophisticated appreciative response to the drawing that I had produced and felt, often, that I was unable to elicit from the participant their authentic reading of the drawing.

Note-taking and the keeping of a reflective journal would also become integral to my reading of the participant as our relationship developed. Along with the conversation notes I was making I kept a journal (Figure 63-65). These recorded my own responses to the places I had visited and people I had met, similar in a sense to the photographic record I was keeping of my ambulations. This reflective journal allowed me to sustain my relationship with a given participant and to generate texts that could be dialogised or operated upon by them in later stages of the project. Over the course of walking through Yeoville, conversing with participants, the writing in the pages of my journal increasingly became a form of drawing, a place where I could make insights, marshalling fragments of information, interweave my own commentary (ideas for projects, identification of trends) with the speech of the participants (Figure 63).

Because the goal of the project was to examine the effects of drawing and the making of aesthetic representations in relation to situated speech acts and communicative events, and to understand how from this process, movements toward consummation may *emerge*, it was difficult for me to frame the project for individual participants. I could at no point say definitively: “this is what I am doing and this is the purpose of what I am doing it, or this is the goal of the project”. At many points I would attempt to rationalise the project in different ways, but soon gave up, opting instead to say to participants, that “I am interested in seeing what happens when... strangers are brought into conversation with one another, or making art in collaboration with others in informal places”. For many of the participants, the opportunity to speak reflectively, outside the instrumentalism of formal speech and everyday talk was enough to sustain their participation in the project, which often looked less and less like a project, than a neighbourly conversation between an artist and a participant. The problem as I will explore later, is that if one operates within a context of dialogue for its own sake a project loses direction, but if the dialogue is goal directed then the aesthetic quickly becomes instrumentalised. Throughout the project, I was asking myself how it was possible to understand what motivated so many residents to enter into this process and how would it be possible to sustain their participation until something emerged in the space between their narrations?

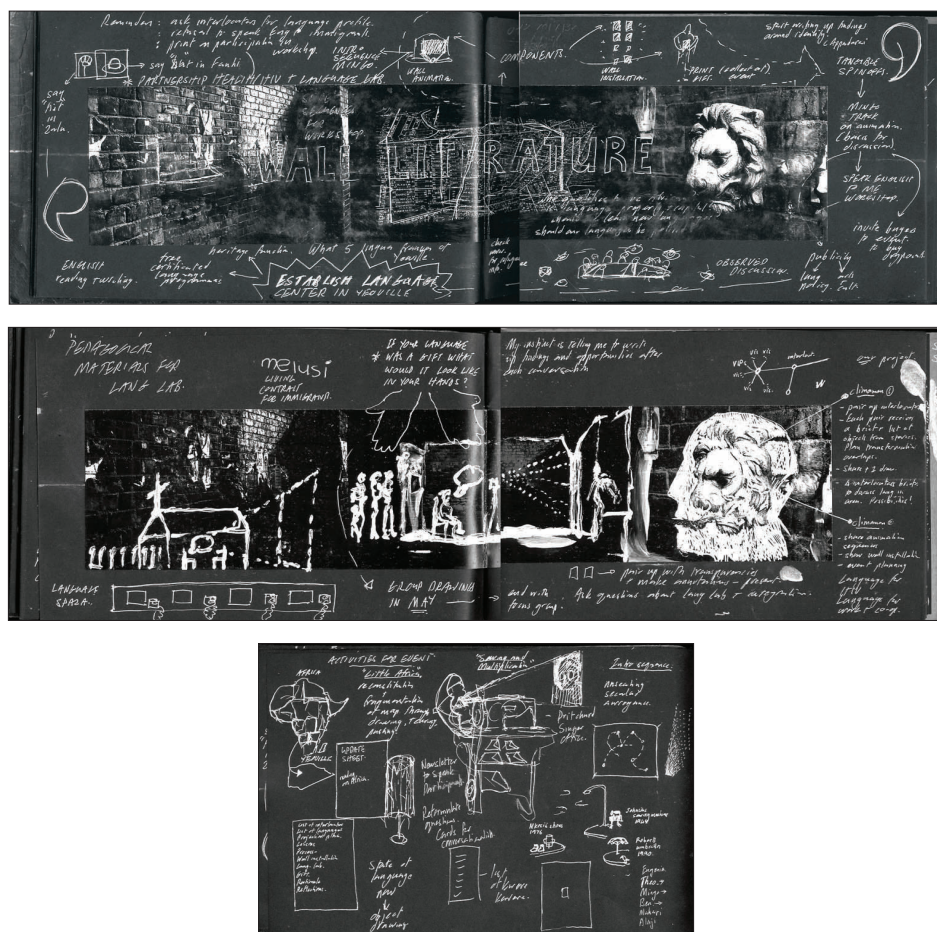


Figure 63- 65: Notes and sketches from *Walking Journal, Speak English To Me*, ink on paper, 2008.

Setting objects in motion through neighbourhood speech.

Once the participant had completed the first two stages of the project (culminating in a drawing of a home/home language object) I began the process of setting the home/home language object in motion with them. This meant referring again and again to the narrative of the participant. Story boards were made with each participant in a workshop-type situation or for a participant in my studio as a gift. When consolidated these were later presented to them for discussion in their home, office, on the street etc. Groups of participants (and their guests) were invited to collaborate in the planning and construction of these rough storyboards in ‘animation workshops’ (Figure 67) held in June, July, August 2008. The first two took place at St Aidan’s church (Figure 68) in Bellevue and the last workshop at my home. A session would generally last two hours working with each participant and their guests.

The purpose of the workshop was to think about how the home/home language object could be animated in order to speak to a set of broader issues linked to the neighbourhood, raise critical issues raised from their autobiography with the view to developing a polyphonic animated film that could be projected in a formal or informal public context. This animated sequence, I told the workshop participants, was to be made either for the participants themselves, as the final audience for the project, and that members of the broader Yeoville community may be invited to view it. The thinking was that the final animation sequence may activate a broader community conversation around the key themes developing for the project: home, stranger, neighbourhood.

In the workshop, critical elements in the participant’s recorded narratives/our conversations were brought to bear on the home/home language object drawing so that it could transform in some way in time. Participants in the workshop were told that their private objects and ontological narratives would be transformed into a more public narrative. At the workshop, I asked the participant to identify a theme, issue, concept derived from their initial narrative that related to broader neighbourhood concerns. Animation became a useful starting point for a kind of “worldmaking” conversation because animation is the “child’s world”, it represents a “freedom from law” (Cavell in Krauss 2000:13) “the world we inhabit is not the world that animation is, governed by physical laws... the difference is that we are uncertain when or to what extent our laws and limits do and do not apply...” (Krauss 2000:13). With the participant’s object released from its immediate situation they could begin to think more imaginatively about its meaning. At the start of the workshop, we would discuss the *Speak English to Me* project generally, I attempted to explain the purpose of the workshop to the participant and I presented them with a sample of the kind of animation that may later be shown in a public context so that they could get a “feel” for the animation process. We would achieve the transformation of the original object by generating, together, the key frames for an animated sequence (Figure 71). Based on their input in the workshops, I would then animate their object on the Perspex surface through stop motion animation in my studio returning and return to each participant, in stages, as this process unfolded. In preparation for these workshops, I developed a workshop plan (Figure 69) and provided a range of materials generated around our conversations to each participant (photographs, writing, sketches etc). This facilitated our joint construction of a rough storyboard. Participants were presented with scrolls of acetate upon which the first frame of the animation (the home drawing) was printed on the left hand side, leaving the remaining surface for brainstorming and the drawing of key frames for a rough storyboard. Participants were also invited to write or directly draw on the strip (Figure 42), although most declined, preferring that I write and draw their speech.

it into the soundtrack for the final animated sequence. It was here that their speech became more reductive, arrested and clichéd. Perhaps the participants became diffident because their words and voice were being recorded verbatim rather than interpreted as was the case in the drawing phase of the workshop.



Figure 72, 73: Brenden Gray, Gifts to participants based on animation workshops, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

The workshops culminated in an informal dinner to which all of the participants that I had worked, and their guests with were invited. Our collaboration was consolidated into a small gift I produced for the participant which I delivered to their home a few days after the workshop. This included a photograph of themselves and guests with elements from the acetate brainstorming sketches incorporated into it. Seven of the twenty one participants who completed the all the phases of project with me attended these workshops with their friends and family which meant that in total approximately 20 Yeoville residents were involved in animation workshops. The informal dinners allowed me to test the efficacy of bringing together strangers into conversation, which generated at times both discomfort and animated interchange. The fact that the dinners continued well into the night as a celebration of the workshop suggested that it may be possible to later bring these ‘strangers’ together to speak and make in a public context and to respond to the animated film to which they had collectively contributed.

Storyboards: decoding and encoding speech texts.

Once the number of participants in the project had reached a critical point and enough material had been amassed around each dialogical encounter in October 2008 I began to produce more detailed and ‘finished’ storyboards for each participant which were more aesthetic statements than functional visual statements. The central idea here was to design texts that where ‘active’ in that they would allow participants to “activate or operate the text” (Smith 1998:64). The more finished storyboard was presented to each participant as as a gift which generally prompted more sharing and discussion. The process of consolidating and refining the rough storyboard into a more aesthetic statement was a complex undertaking for me because I was required to interpret, on a number of levels, my engagement with a participant up to this point.

I began by producing an A4 text layout into which I placed a reproduction of their home drawing. This was done so that the surrounding text could impinge on the home drawing image (Figures 74-79). The text generated from my experience of speaking with each participant was dense, meticulous and detailed. I felt it necessary to do justice to the speech of my interlocutors by giving a full account of their participation rather than distilling it into a summary. The surrounding text was then analysed intensively and significant terms highlighted (bolded, italicised etc) in order to arrive at a loosely structured ecology of signs from which a thematic pattern of some kind may emerge. Once I was satisfied that the strands of thematic were emerging from my reading of the text in relation to the placed drawing, the A4 sheet was digitally printed and over this a clear sheet of acetate was placed. Upon this surface I made marks, wrote, collaged, and in a more analytical way develop the key frames/scenes/iconographic framework for a proposed animation sequence.

Session plan for animation workshop **Speak English to Me.**

9h00	Klaud
10h30	Benjamin
12h00	Maxwell
13h30	Eugenia
15h00	Joe
16h30	Dinner and photos

Welcome (10 mins)

Give history of the project. Xenophobic story as origin of project- Mingo and speak English to me. Meeting people in the street and capturing home languages spoken in Yeoville- discussions about foreigners living in Yeoville. Conversation about language and biography of person who speaks that language. Ask to show object from home that represents language or biography. Drawing made and ask for introduction to the next person. 17 drawings produced so far- aiming to make 40 drawings in total. Drawings become basis for animations that will be used to launch language/arts center in Yeoville and combat potential xenophobia in the area at end October 2008. Diversity is an opportunity in the area. Participant assists artist in producing drawing, animation, and as group propose where installation of drawings will go. In return participant receives photograph of family and friends as well as drypoint of home object. Launch of project at the end of October 2008.

Comment and discussion on project from participant (10 mins)

What do you see coming out of the project? What do you want the project to do? What do you want to say through the project? What do you think multicultural areas like Yeoville need from the arts? What are pressing issues that are evident now in an area like Yeoville that a project such as this tackle? (sound recording)

Animation process (5 min)

Explain to participants keyframe and passing frame concept as well as transformation, movement. Show animated rough and get comment.

Ideation (20 min)

Give participant print out of notes from original conversation. What kind of story do you want to tell? Let's look at the drawing I made and in particular the object. What other images from your life immediately come to mind when you look at it? Write these down (on acetate in coloured koki). Are there any events that have taken place in your own life that you think are worth sharing with others? Write these down. Are there any images of things you have seen in Yeoville that disturb or amaze you that could be used in the animation. How can we stitch these ideas into a story that is worth sharing with the broader Yeoville community or about an important issue in your own life? Give participants time to confer with one another.

Drawing key frames (30 min)

Start drawing images on loose sheets of acetate on the drawing table. While this is happening the images can begin to be numbered. Once a storyboard is agreed on, the sequence is taped to the large acetate sheet.

Voice recording (10 min)

Ask the participants to either tell the story in an abbreviated form or develop some kind of message that the animation should convey to the broader community. Story must be told in own home language. Give them time to prepare this (it must be a 30 sec piece) and then record it.

Invitation to dinner (5 min)

Participants invited to return at 16h30 for photograph in front/behind completed acetate drawing. Prints will be made at the dinner for them to take away.

Preparation
Visit St Aidan's to speak to pastor fees and photograph space
Contract acetate sheet - attach dowel rod
Ask Nicole to borrow canvas - attach dowel rod
Set up files on computer
Prepare animation
Charge camera battery
Check microphone on computer
Koki in bag - check if working
Redraw Benjamin's object
Buy better microphone
Make microphone attachment

Materials
Camera, tripod, remote
Extension cord
Computer and beq screen
Microphone
USB extension
Acetate sheet
Canvas sheet
Koki in bag
Pencils and coloured paper for participants.
Tape, scissors
Worksheet to write story
Juice and cups
Envelopes for photo prints
5 sheets A5 glossy photopaper
Invitations for new participants
Double sided tape



Figure 70: Paul, Brenden Gray, 'Bangle', Home Language Object drawing, Speak English To Me, 2008.



Figure 71: Brenden Gray, Storyboard Grafton Road (For Paul), Speak English To Me, 2008.

Figure 69: Session plan for animation workshop for *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

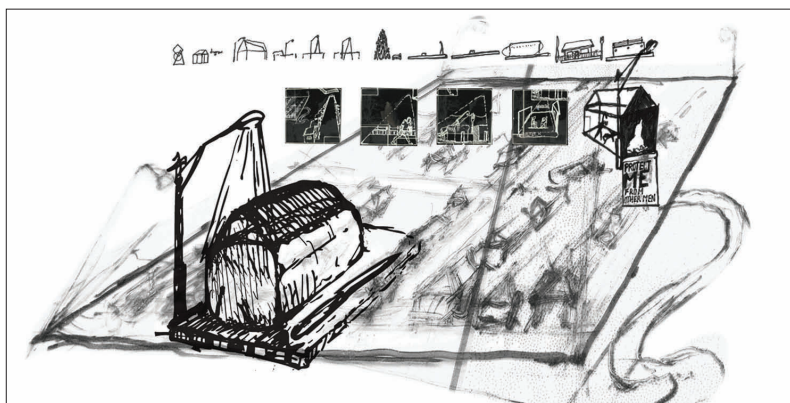
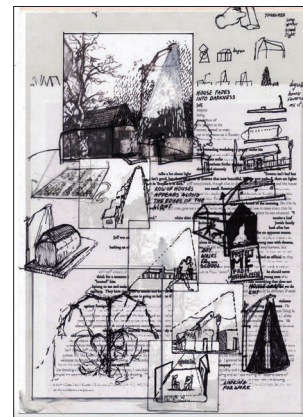
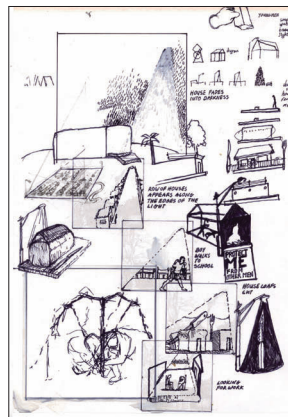
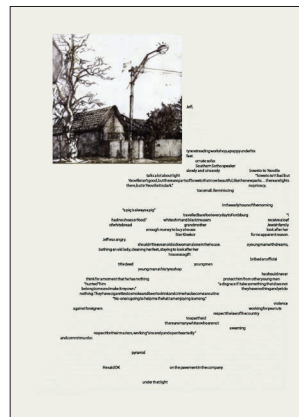


Figure 74- 78: Brenden Gray, Example of process of generating storyboards for, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

I drew scenes with various materials upon clear acetate below which the text and home language object of the participant was obscured, revealed and emphasised. This approach allowed me to lift the acetate sheet off the textual and visual information below and see my aesthetic response to the participant's engagement apart. In this way, I moved back and forth between seeing a joined visual statement and a separated one. The drawing situation was one of simultaneity because the history of speech was both cojoined to my activity of my own drawing but at the same time separate. The act of making my marks over the words of another, working the particular and the general meant that I could find points of crisis in their narrative, in our conversations, and begin to operate in cognitive space I was more familiar with as an artist; bringing my aesthetic disposition to bear upon narrativity. Because of this making strategy I could work in a number of aesthetic modalities from the illustrative to the disruptive, from the figurative to the abstract both intervening in the speech of the participant and also disturbing it and further, allowing it to do the same to my practice of drawing.

I had been asking myself for a long time how it may be possible to introduce an element of agonism into my relationship with a participant through image-making and felt that drawing in this manner offered this. Because I was working on the ground of our mutual understandings (established in drawing the home language object) it was now possible to work 'with', 'against', and 'on' their thoughts, as if that were the material of the art work under construction. The drawing took place in response to the speech text beneath it, intruding into its texture, fracturing, suturing and displacing it in my activity of drawing which now took place in private. This approach allowed the voice of the participant, and my interpretation of their speech acts to intrude into my familiar practice of making marks, and images. I felt a strong need for the drawing at this stage of the project, to be responsive rather than illustrative. The the drawing process oscillated between fidelity and transgression. It was that the act of drawing was not one of representation but rather a synthetic process of bringing my own skills and habitus to bear on their speech act and our dialogical situation. In this way, the drawing activity became a kind of ambulation or dance taking place in relation to the speech of the participant and my own, image and text. I paid close attention to small details, intonations, patterns, slippages and contradictions that I remembered emerging from our conversations attempting to secrete from this an aesthetic statement. The two surfaces that made up the drawing (underlying paper and acetate above it) could be separated but were also ultimately answerable to each other. The fact that it was being made as a totem between three sites (my studio, the participant's familiar home environment, the public domain) as an object to sit between these places meant that I could introduce tensions into our readings of the neighbourhood. The storyboard was thus designed to become a locus for a more meaningful dialogue over how we both saw the world rather than merely a generative/sharing device. Armed with these texts, I would be able to show the participant an interpretation of their speech-in-conversation, modify it in situ and begin the process of animating the original drawing for a public projection.

In November 2009, the rough A4 acetate drawings were scanned at a high resolution and prepared for a second stage or reworking, which would now take place digitally. Here it would be possible to introduce more elements (photographic, vector based) into the finished storyboards. I could structure the layout for the purposes of legibility, isolate and emphasise particular elements etc and most importantly prepare the storyboards so that each participant felt that they could intervene (interfere/ interrupt/ dislocate/ disassemble/ rearrange) in it in negotiation with me. Each digital storyboard demanded that I respond to the specific narrative of the participant, our dialogical situation, the places in which the conversations had taken place. These became the semiotic resources varied from participant to participant. In some cases, the material generated by an encounter was scant and I

found myself responding to something as simple as the weather at the time of a conversation in relation to certain comments made about a drawing made at the roadside. In other cases the dialogical situation I responded to was much richer and denser so I could bring together a variety of resources in the construction of the storyboard, synthesising arguments between myself and a participant, condense their elaborately told autobiographies. I felt in this process, a strong need to ‘do justice’ to the voice of the participant in developing the final digital storyboard. This integrity was revealed in my attention to the molecular details of my memory of our conversations. Even though some participants had left the project, or disappeared, I felt it absolutely necessary to give a full account of our interactions through drawing. Thus I resisted the temptation to reduce the participants’ narratives to a ‘common’ experience of life in Yeoville. The sheer heterogeneity and embodiedness of their diverse narratives prevented me from imposing a totalising category over these conversation materials. Once the final digital storyboards were designed they were printed at various scales (to suit the context in which they would be viewed) on bond paper, laminated with acetate, and the laborious process of returning to each participant to show them their finalised storyboard prints began.

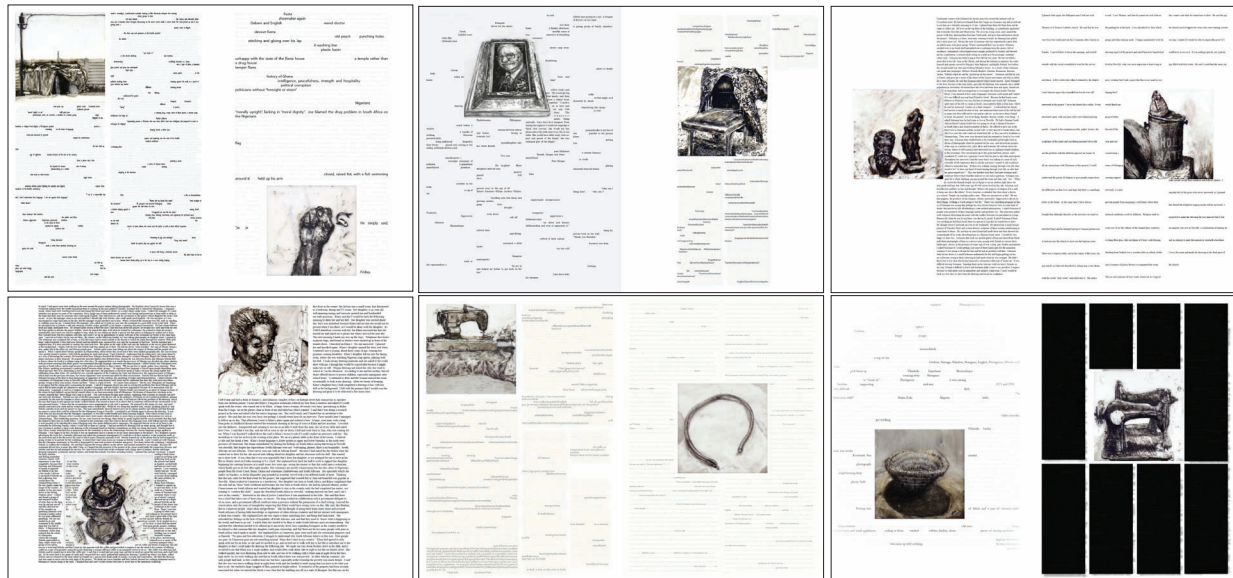


Figure 79: Brenden Gray, Responding to textual narrative and home language objects of participants, examples of working process *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

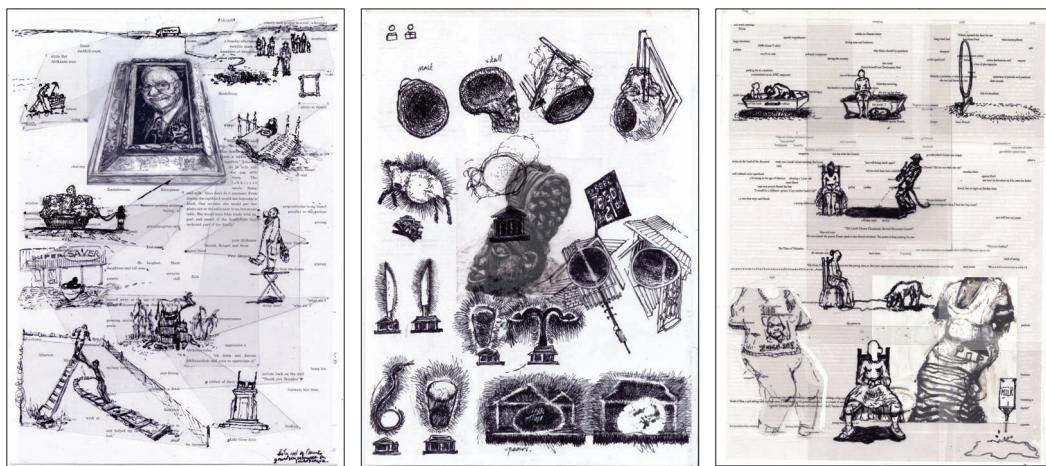


Figure 80: Brenden Gray, Examples of rough storyboards generated for participants in *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

The meetings conducted with participants over November and December 2008 gave me many of the insights I was searching for in the project specifically into the kinds and qualities of dialogue drawing could elicit in informal places. It was when the final storyboard prints were presented to the participants that more substantial and situated dialogue emerged, in comparison to the formative stages of the project. Perhaps this is because the showing of the storyboard brought together, in an informal place, an extensive series of conversations. The participants were aware that this meeting was a consolidative one and that it took place, as a consummative event, in their own homes, places of work etc.

Returning to each participant was an emotionally charged and exhausting experience for me because the stakes seemed so high. I did not set out to obtain verification from a participant to ‘go ahead’ with the production of an animated film in the sense that it would voice their concerns or challenges for a broader public. Rather, I revisited the participant to deepen my understanding of our jointly constructed narrative. It was important to return to the participant in order to see if I had done justice to our increasingly aesthetic relationship by producing a document that a group of strangers could later respond to in an open-ended way. As I will argue later, it is precisely this open-endedness that provided the insights of the research project but it was also this that was ultimately responsible for its failures. The final conversation between the participants of the project, catalysed by the materials generated by the project could be under no circumstances be a staged, or rehearsed performative event. Rather, I was aiming for a radical open-endedness, where strangers would at least incline toward each other and at best engage in meaningful dialogue. A non-response to the storyboards would show the project to be a total failure. If the majority of participants failed to show interest in attending the final event, at this critical stage in the project, it would be devastating to me because I had invested so much emotional and intellectual energy in the making of these ‘special gifts’. At many points in the project I felt that the risks I was taking were just far too high. Although the knowledge produced by the project *Speak English To Me* may be of academic interest as an art-making project it needed to succeed aesthetically and on the level of participation.

It was hoped that in encountering these final storyboards the participant would identify with what I had made not because it was reduced, summarised or distilled statement about their experience (a singular, ‘issue-based’ visual statement) or one that had smoothed over the differences, but rather that they could identify with, because it complexified and thickened their narration by being transformed through an intimate aesthetic process. Rather than looking for an automatic identificatory response, I was interested in “de-automatising non-aesthetic identifications” (Menke 1998: 33). In other words, the presence of this storyboard print in their everyday life would need to relate to it and perturb it. If the storyboard, as an aesthetic representation and situated text, prompted meaningful discussion between myself and a participant then they may feel compelled to bring their social and cultural capital to a final group conversation for *Speak English to Me* and I may then have felt confident enough to weave their narratives into a broader statement about the Yeoville neighbourhood. I was looking for high order, synthetic responses in this stage of the project. The responses to these aesthetic statements needed to be purposeful rather than rote. A mere simple nod of approval, disapproval or silence would simply not suffice. If this stage in the project succeeded, it may be possible to bring these strangers together into a *radical* conversation about Yeoville with the final animation sequence playing a critical role in catalysing and framing. Although I had explained this to each participant and I was very excited about the prospect of a public projection, the chances of eliciting a non-response at this stage were very high because the storyboard may have demanded too much from the participant.

I had built into the structure of each storyboard print both moments for automatic identification (familiar things drawn from our conversations) and moments of perturbation. Other supplementary, displacing, contradictory, perturbing and ‘unsaid’ elements had been I pulled into the text. I had visualised things that a participant would not have necessarily been able to merely appreciate, or assimilate in a straightforward way. For example, in case, I introduced footage of violence on the high streets on Yeoville into a nostalgic narrative lamenting the passing of the good old days of white Yeoville. In another I evoked the theme of mortality and old age in relation to a participant’s beloved garden which for him was a symbol of intercultural/intergenerational generosity. I deliberately, and at times even cruelly introduced an otherness into what was otherwise a familiar system of signs. I felt a need at once to celebrate the lifeworld of the participant but, ironically, also to give it the respect it deserved by committing a semantic violence against it, pointing out inconsistencies, exclusions, repressions, displacements and strangeness. I thought that there had to be a betrayal built into the fabric of every participant’s text in order for an engaging dialogue to be borne from it.

The final storyboard prints were field-like in their design possessing the uniformity of a logical sequence (suture-storyboard) but also the openness/ambiguity of an artwork (fracture-construction/composition). For this reason, these prints were more designed than drawn, making gaps, fissures, ruptures and cracks in reading apparent, and readily available for a participant to ‘fill’ and break by in this stage of the project. As a default measure, relatively legible, journalistic, social issues were also marginally embedded into each storyboard print (the potential for pastors to exploit their congregations, wealthy men trading sexual favours with young girls for expensive gifts) which the participant could ‘latch’ onto if it so happened that they found nothing else to respond to in the storyboard print. My initial reaction was to insert a literal signifier into each storyboard in the form of a title but dispensed with this idea because I felt that it would deny the aesthetic character of the storyboard. What interested me in designing the storyboards was how the reader may have grappled toward meaning by making it in their reading process rather than feeling that they were expected to decipher the text before them or to judge it by a set of aesthetic criteria. The point was to construct an intimate dialogical situation where the participant felt the need to ‘read’ rather than to consume the text as a viewer, spectator, or beholder. The last thing I wanted to do was give the participant the feeling that they should react in a predictable or expected manner to the work of an artist/researcher, but rather explore a gift presented to them by a resident or friend.

I identified a number of risks at this stage in the project. How I would have to handle the encounter between the participant and the storyboard print was crucial because their habitus, place, our shared history was at stake in the handling of the visual language. Furthermore, how I framed the introduction to the storyboard into the space of the participant, verbally, would define the nature of their response which meant that the way I presented it was important. Primarily, it was our shared history of dialogue that I found to frame the response to the final storyboard which provide the context for the discussion. Another danger that I had identified was that participants could assume that the function of the storyboard was to merely illustrate their point of view, amplify their voice and issues, and to literally represent what was important to them despite the fact that throughout the project I stressed, in my conversations with participants, that my work was relational. So this encounter had to be very carefully considered in terms of framing.

I would arrive at the place of the participant, their flat, the market, a meeting place on the street, church foyer and explained to them the purpose of the discussion. It was to consolidate the production of the final animated sequence. I told each participant that their sequence would be projected on a wall in a public space for approximately one minute juxtaposed beside another participant’s sequence. Captions derived from our conversations would appear between and below the double

frame projection. Once this was explained, I asked the participant for an open-ended response to the work in order to elicit unmediated speech. As they spoke, I related the thinking behind my making processes. Throughout the duration of the ensuing conversation I drew, again recording their speech, making connections, isolating elements on the laminate placed over the print. As will become evident later, some conversations were more fecund than others, the reasons for which I will explore in more depth in Chapter Five. These annotated documents were then returned to the studio as reference for the production of the animated sequence *Wall Literatures 21* which was shown at the Wits Substation Gallery on 14 February 2009.



Figure 81: Brenden Gray, Key frames in animation sequence, *Wall Literature 21, Speak English To Me*, Wits Substation Gallery, February, 2009.

The struggle to animate.

Having met all of the twenty four participants, I began to work on an animated sequence Wall Literature 21 over December 2008 and January 2009 (Figure 81). In the very short period of two months I would have to animate each and every home/home language drawing (approximately 42 minutes of animation), and find a way of integrating these complex narratives into single, double frame sequential form. I had made the decision early on to juxtapose all these narratives simultaneously to create a polyphonic effect so that an audience would be able to establish connections between them, but after testing a variety of approaches this proved to be technically impossible. Instead, I created a double projection, with a series of morphologies running parallel and directly beneath both dialogue drawn from the speech of participants and my journal would appear as captions. This would make it difficult for a viewer to assign a statement to a given image or visual transformation making it impossible to derive from the whole work a simplistic theme or subject.

Because I have not been trained formally as an animator and given my desire to focus on the mutation of the object over its narrativisation (cuts, character, plot etc) the final sequence represented less a 'film' than a series of object morphologies (stacking, exploding, disintegrating, reconstitution). The storyboards became a useful reference point in the animation process which progressed in an organic and unplanned manner. After many attempts to make seamless, formal transitions between one participant's sequence and the next and to synchronise this with a Blues soundtrack made for me by one of the Rastafarian participants I gave up and opted instead to adopt a loosely improvisational approach for the animated sequence. Each animation opened with a still frame of the original home/home language object which was subsequently set in motion and reconfigured. Later, in the editing process stronger links were made between the soundtrack, subtitles and the objects in motion in the double projection.

If the responses to the final storyboard prints was proliferative and generative, I understood the animation process to be an intensely private and hermetic affair. Given the density of the participants' responses to the storyboards I again felt the need to do justice to the radical particularity of each. I was interested in the automatism inherent to the medium of animation; how through the seriality of stop motion "the work created is "autonomous", liberated from its maker" (Krauss 2000: 12- 13). The animation process made it difficult for me to simply follow the instructions and suggestions of a given participant as set out in the storyboard. Rather, the sequence developed as an interplay between the logic of motion established in a given sequence, the finalised collaboratively produced storyboard and the participant's response to it. The work would not simply reproduce the views of the participant and so sometimes aroused hostility. As one participant remarked in astonishment, when seeing the rough animated sequence: "...this is not my idea. Our conversation has brought you to this point". I did not feel compelled in the animated sequence to react so much as respond creatively to a complex and durational dialogical situation. As what was to be expected, each sequence would be guided by its own set of organic demands rather than progressing procedurally in relation to an external referent.

What became apparent in the process of playing back completed sequences in mid-production was that it was important for me to establish an equivalence or equality of value between the sequences through timing, rhythm, easing in and out, making it difficult for a given viewer to recognise shifts from one participant to the next and yet at the same time I wanted to respond to each dialogised text in an intensely intimate. So a certain tension existed in the working process between embodying and particularising the words of the participant and mixing it up with another. The result was an extremely dense short film that many participants remarked had to be viewed a number of times to make meaningful connections. If the animated image felt somewhat cold, impersonal and non-aurat-

ic (an image just kept moving as if set in motion by a program with apparent disregard to marking out hierarchies between the narratives/morphologies of participants), the act of making marks and making on-the-spot decisions about how an object may transform was exactly intimate. The piece *Wall Literature 21* (see DVD appendix A) contained 21 animations that attempted to engage all of the participants in the project. Once it was complete they were invited to view and discuss it in relation to the broader neighbourhood of Yeoville.

Neighbourhood talk

Democracy is not the body of the people. It is the abstract assemblage of ordinary people who have no individual title to govern.... Those without any title for governing...(Rancière 2000:19)

The exhibition *Speak English To Me*, held at the Wits Substation Gallery (Figure 82-83) attempted in its design and in terms of the works produced in the course of the project to set more collaborative conversations in motion. The exhibition was set up to establish relationships between participants and catalyse a possibly radical argument/conversation about the neighbourhood of Yeoville. What made the event special, for me, on a very basic level was that it managed to bring strangers together into conversation. I had worked with the participants one-on-one and now, through the exhibition I could facilitate their meeting in a public space. I hoped that the more static art works would act as catalysts through which the participants could become familiar with one another. The *Wall Literatures 21* sequence would consummate the event, and perhaps give individual participants a sense of the richness and power of their biographies, interpreted through the creative vocabulary of an artist. I hoped that my interpretations of their speech would encourage the participants to speak with confidence about the issues they faced in Yeoville. It was also important for me that the exhibition conversation culminated in something tangible. I wanted the three hour exhibition conversation to issue a statement, another project, a set of proposals, or a perspective at least that was useful to the participants in some way.

Prior to the exhibition, I generated a range of methodologies by which this conversation between strangers could be facilitated. A question that preoccupied me while I was developing this was: what form would an animated film take in order to catalyse conversation? Would it need to be physically interactive (so that I could manipulate elements as participants spoke), constructive (made with the participants), cinematic (with the participants as spectators who discuss the animation once it was completed) and if the latter, should its aesthetic be overtly constructed (discontinuous, formally unstable) or more composed (integrated, formally continuous)?

The decision to locate the final event at the University of The Witwatersrand was a difficult one to make. Initially I wanted to hold the event in Yeoville itself (thinking throughout that to publish the event in the informal domain; on a street corner, internet café, spaza shop could be most appropriate). However, in conversation with the project participants, I felt that they would have preferred to have their conversations documented and their work shown in a more formal public context. Participants told me that by situating the work in a university gallery more value would be accorded to their contributions to the project. If the participants in the project had taken the radical step of working with an artist in their informal spaces when I asked them where they wanted the work published they were conservative. Many were of the opinion that by not hosting the event in Yeoville they would be able to gain greater critical distances on the neighborhood and at the same time bring the issues facing to the attention of a broader public.

Once the venue had been discussed with each participant they were all invited to the 3 hour workshop/conversation. This would precede the opening of the exhibition proper at which time the

results of their discussion would be published for general visitors. It is hard for me to relate how difficult it was at times to believe it when a participant said they would attend an event, meet me in a particular place and they didn't. Sometimes one participant would show great enthusiasm in one aspect of the project and then suddenly drop off only to take it up again later. I was continually dogged by broken promises, missed appointments so I became worried that attendance in the final workshop/conversation would be poor. For this reason, planning the exhibition was an incredibly straining experience for me.

The workshop plan for the final exhibition was divided into three parts. In the first activity I asked the participants to introduce themselves to each other through the medium of the home language/home object drawing storyboard. These hung on the walls of the space and I hoped that through them participants would introduce to each other the key neighbourhood themes, feelings, and concepts that had come up in our conversations. In other words, I wanted the strangers in the space to become familiar with each other by speaking to the storyboards and home/home language objects displayed on the walls of the gallery. The whole group of participants would then return to a large table arranged in the center of the gallery, laminated with a map of the area over which a set of key findings would be discussed. Participants would be invited to write, make marks, and draw over the map but primarily asked to speak over the map. I would play the role of facilitating this discussion and when a critical point was collectively reached, we would break to see the *Wall Literature 21* in the projection room. I was hoping that from this third phase of the workshop/conversation a key image/project proposal/notion concept would emerge. This would then become the basis for a second more ambitious neighborhood project in 2010 involving these participants and perhaps more. In reality, the exhibition conversation did not follow this process, for a number of reasons, and raised a set of difficult questions about my own practice which I attempt to address in the next section of this report.



Figure 82: Brenden Gray, Exhibition space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits Substation Gallery, February, 2009.



Figure 83: Brenden Gray, Exhibition space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits Substation Gallery, February, 2009.



Chapter Four: Making Findings And Making Do.

He derives the “mad” notion that all intelligence is equal and that this equality is a presupposition that requires demonstration and not a goal that needs to be attained; and finally, he derives the notion that the ideals of progress and progressive movement are, in and of themselves, principles of inequality by proposing equality as a social end and entrusting certain “educational experts” with the task of reducing the effects of a clash between an “equality to come” with existing inequality means, in short, to institute inequality as a principle whose reproduction is infinite (Rancière 2000: 122).

Only that which can be retrieved is examined. Only what can be transported can be treated. Speech cannot be separated from its circumstances (De Certeau 1984: 20).

The artist has “nothing to say about the process of his creative activity: the process of creation is altogether in the product created, and the artist has nothing left to do but refer us to the work he has produced. In our own analysis, we shall in fact look for it nowhere else (Bakhtin 1990: 4).

Rancière’s vertiginous and maddening invitation is startling and yet I wonder what kind of artistic labour is involved in just beginning to instantiate this relation of equality! How can his philosophy be put to work, this “desire to partake of equality” realised or materialise artistically in the everyday when there is “no common measure”, when there are so “many ways equals may be reckoned equals” (Rancière 2000: 64). What can I do when not armed with an educational goal? I can only speak to what I know as sayable, thinkable, seeable in a modest retelling of my aesthetic conversations with strangers. So how then to institute this pedagogical relation in my writing of making findings of telling the reader certain truths? What shall be transported and treated, retrieved and examined and for whom and by whom? In this chapter I am interested in how, as an artist, I am expected to write and why I have a need to write in the normative academic sense at all, when I have made the decision in my life to inscribe in an ‘other’ way, by making images, drawing and speaking. If the constructivist forms of writing, are somewhat aesthetic and literary; relativistic modalities of reflexivity that challenge the normative frameworks of academic writing and research (Guba 1990: 15-30;) then how do I construct knowledge through textuality? How does one ‘study’ the everyday? In his introduction to the *Everyday Life Reader*, Highmore (2002: 3) claims that theorising the everyday throws measurement into crisis:

everyday life invites a kind of theorising that throws our most cherished *theoretical values* and practices into crisis...What if “theory” was to be found elsewhere, in the pages of a novel, in a suggestive passage of description in an autobiography, or in the street games of children? What if theory (the kind that is designated as such) was beneficial for attending to the everyday, not via its systematic interrogations, but through its poetics, its ability to render the familiar strange? This is not to suggest that every day life theory is anti-theoretical, far from it, but that in attending to the everyday theory is never going to be a purely critical or deconstructive project. At the heart of the theoretical practices collected here is the desire for *constructive* and *inventive* thought, for a **form of attention** that struggles to articulate an intractable object (daily life) in the full knowledge that the everyday is always going to exceed the ability to register it [added emphasis].

If the everyday is, in the Lefebvrian sense, what theory cannot apprehend or what is left behind when theory has completed its speculative business then how do I pronounce my findings in relation to this everyday texture? What can I make of the relative intractability of everyday life? How do I achieve a sense of my aesthetic and theoretical experience of the everyday “as without a truth proper to itself” (Blanchot 2008: 34) through prescribed and normative forms of academic writing? Moreover, how do I *do* justice to a situated and embodied everyday experience through writing? The obvious way in which I can side step the writing of this chapter is to argue that the exhibition produced by *Speak English To Me*, is in fact, *the* body of research where “findings-as-meaning

-making” have been “encoded” into the materialities of the work themselves and published in the arrangement of this material in the social space of the gallery. To write up ‘findings’ in goes against the grain of what I have argued in Chapter two, for a practice of reading in research, that is more modest in its relationality. I perceive this necessity of writing findings as a “reflexive” opportunity to explore a form of inscription that I can employ not so much to make findings but ‘make do’, tactically, in the space of making findings. In this chapter I employ Rancière’s (2007:46) “sentence-image” to understand the notion of ‘findings’. I see writing this chapter as a clash between two orders of the sensible and, in a writerly sense, I use a technique of visual-textual braiding, (a form of pastiche) to construct my ‘findings’; one that “mingles together in writing various aspects of thinking- of perception and conscious thought, of description and analysis, of what is seen and what is imagined...it gives us a concrete way to think about how we might converse more than one level of thinking at a time” (Ely et al 1997: 106).

There is, I would argue, a sense in which justice can only be done to this project by attending to the “full knowledge” that the experiential will always exceed my ability to “register it” because “truth by definition does not roam the streets” (Rancière 2003: 169). To do justice to this project would mean to rethink the writerly modalities by which the everyday is encountered and constructed. There is, as I have argued earlier, something similar at stake in this limitation of writing and language in relation to the intractable everyday in what Mitchell cites as the relation between the image and reading and De Certeau (1984) between the body and writing and finally Rancière (2004) between the aesthetic and the political. In order to be “attentive” to the need for a “constructive” and “inventive” everyday theorisation, that works in the space of crisis on, beside, in between, the everyday, the ground upon which my project played and worked, I offer up a new, tentative kind of research text that braids these concerns into an account of ‘what just happened’ rather than attempting to explicate what took place.

I am tempted in this section of the report to give a sociological account of what I encountered and to subscribe to the tendency to take the project for a walk on the “leash of opinion” (Rancière. 2003: 169) and to tell the artist who may be reading this paper that the principles which I found in the contingencies of the everyday are somehow applicable to their creative situations; that my particular doxas may be *extrapolated* into their contexts of practice. Instead, I want to tell you a story because this is what I have found and this is what I have made in response to theorizing the everyday. Like any good teacher, I think that the act of finding and discovery is always a situated aesthetic act and is therefore unrepeatable, unique, as if taking place as if for the first time; so a story should suffice in registering the heterogeneity that I have encountered. I want to tell you that I cannot make ‘findings’ and that this feels like a failure on my part. I do not believe in ‘findings’. If I cannot perform an academic ritual of making findings then so be it, or rather let’s explore the crisis of findings. I have no use for truth if it is not bounded by and in place. Let’s roam the streets of what I have made as if for the first time, in a more fraught manner, bringing a variety of forms into play: the literary, the academic, the aesthetic and the vernacular. Let’s assume that truth does not “roam the streets”, that perhaps somewhere between truth making and just walking we can feel something fuller. Perhaps it is my interest in meaning-making rather than a belief in truth that will take the writing forward and compel my reader to follow.

Given my biases regarding findings, this section of the report uses the artefactual and textual material generated in the course of the project as the ground upon which findings are made and constructed. I focus essentially on two registers; the participant’s translated voice and experience of revisiting my own voice, experience and insight as it is manifest in the material made in the

‘presentness’ of the project. In this sense, the body of writing presented here will resemble a textual construction that is somewhat chronological, somewhat thematic, scattered and relatively incoherent. This will make it more like a cut-up novel with missing pieces, gaps, detours, incongruencies than a standard academic report. Because much of the meta-thinking involved in the project is already to a large extent highlighted in the previous section, here I focus on potent moments and experiences that I saw taking place in my practice of walking, speaking, reading, art making. Vignettes, fragments, anecdotes, layers gathered ‘out there’, in the everyday, are interlaced with my own discursive authorial voice. I highlight in this narrative the response of the participant to the aesthetic representations that we made, my own reflections on these responses juxtaposing these loosely with photographs, art works and thought experiments. I wish to construct an assemblage of passages and make findings by facilitating adjacencies so there will be few markers of academic linearity and sequentiality to be ‘found’ here.

Throughout the life of the project I generated a variety of supplementary aesthetic-writerly materials, on the fly as it were, which I imagined as a kind of detritus or by-product left behind from a project that focused on the unrepeatability of dialogical situations. During the project writing played many roles, amongst them, capturing my reflections and projections. I understood writing as a recursive and processual activity and actional form of knowledge that was only useful insofar as it informed the creative process. Thus, inevitably writing would be retrospectively useful, left behind in discarded fragments. I look back on the writing produced by the project and think of it as a trail of letters written to myself, words and sentences that could later be retrieved to rearticulate my ambulatory experience. I kept a ‘walking novel’ throughout the project which was a text which I developed in order to document my experience of walking and making within the context of the everyday. This document is written upon to produce the tentative ‘findings’ for this section of the report. In the later stages of the project I sought to submit this rather implacable, hefty and intractable waste document (‘my novel’) as the research report as if a mere compilation of stories, vignettes and anecdotes would suffice in providing the reader and examiner with my findings. I imagined this text being delivered as a parcel to them. I envisaged myself dropping it into their hands so that they could feel its weight as its primary property. Thingly writing. In revisiting that ‘waste document’, I imagine myself as similar to Rancière’s proletarian philosopher who learns to read by examining the text on “food wrappers and scraps of paper” (Rancière 2000: 8). I will learn to write again on the scraps of a project that in many senses failed. I now revisit the surface of this ‘walking novel’/field notes¹ that I seek now to polyphonize, ‘to operate’ upon and dialogise by bringing more of the unofficial materials into its narrative structure. In doing so, I seek not so much to make findings as to produce an open-ended construct that may allow myself and my imaginary, ideal reader to make their own meanings/findings. In this way I will ‘design’ a text; a layout composed of the many voices encountered in the project, of the fragments from the project, and the detritus that it left. These become a set of relational coordinates that the reader can braid together and perhaps realize something of the equality of which I have been tentatively articulating.

The reading of this chapter can be guided by a number of seminal dialogical events that took place in the project which may assist the reader in organizing the materials soon to be presented:

- The initial encounter between myself and a stranger.
- The conversation and storytelling between myself and a participant.
- The participant’s response to my request to show him a “home language object” which he could draw.

8. Note that the names of the participants in the body of Chapter Four have been changed for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality.

- The ritual and situational making and showing of that drawing and the attendant responses.
- The collaborative setting of the home language objects drawing in motion.
- My showing of the storyboard to the participant and ensuing conversation.
- My own and the participants/strangers response to the exhibition materials.

These events and situations are not organized chronologically but are rather scattered under more thematic headings, where I attempt to make sense of the economy of walking, speaking and drawing. At times the text will take on a predictable movement and also broken by detours and obstructed.

Connective attentiveness and walking: dancing in chaos.

Walking and visibility.

Throughout the project I considered walking (and the attendant process of writing, speaking, drawing, image making) less as a visual research methodology than as an errant and active metaphor for how the everyday could be approached in aesthetic terms. Rather than speaking of employing a research ‘method’ (a set of systematic procedures through which verifiable knowledge may be attained/derived etc), I would prefer to explore how ambulatory *metaphors* (inadequate but necessary models for tentatively apprehending the probably hidden) could act as research lenses. These produce not so much ‘knowledge’ as tenuous understandings of place and space and the events that occurred in the life of the project. In the metaphor lies the recognition that it is not possible for me to know with certainty what took place in this project.

I wanted the materials generated in *Speak English To Me* to become textually ‘thick’ and the transactional processes which emerged to become rich, rigorous and recursive. The ‘texture’ of the walking process therefore became an important visual metaphor for the project and one that I used to understand and ‘measure’ it. I use the textural metaphor because the project unlike, say, colour or form, texture lends itself to relationality, field, regime and centrally, entanglements. As Sarah Nuttall (2008: 195) suggests in speaking of Johannesburg, “city-ness in Johannesburg, as it emerges... is an intricate entanglement of éclat and comberness, lightness and darkness, comprehension and bewilderment, polis and necropolis, desegregation and segregation”. Texture, beyond being useful to apprehend social space, is also a powerful metaphor for aesthetic work because it links the visual-grapheme and the inscriptional linguistic sign. From this interplay of textures and articulations of form and structure (regimes) may emerge or be found. So in, some ways, the materials generated by the project became not so much designs indexing communal surfaces (intentional, and procedural) as textual surfaces articulating states of encounter in a more or less organic, informal and rhizomatic way registering an interplay between the logics of experience. Various kinds and levels of textures and textualities (understood here as narrative modalities) informed my “work-play” as the project unfolded which became present in each encounter, in my own thinking and in the making process itself. In developing these textural categories I draw loosely on Charles Taylor (in Somers 1994: 617-620).

- **Ontological narratives:** “becoming” can be imagined as both a heterogeneous texture and a narrativity; “that are used to defined who we are... and knowing what to do”. The makeshift narratives told to “endow social actors with identities”. Making do mark-making, inscribing identity in and through the space of the habitus.
- **Public narratives :** “organisational”, “institutional” myths and formations.
- **Meta-narrative:** generalized stories that flatten, homogenise and denarrativise the ontological and the particular.
- **Conceptual narrative:** “analytic vocabularies” used to explain identity.

I imagine that these narrative textures intermingled in the construction of a given street situation or street aesthetic representation. So for example, by moving through the streets and speaking with strangers I inscribed my own narrative upon both the public urban social fabric of Yeoville. My own material movement and utterances could be understood as a form of writing and drawing on the urban landscape. In responding aesthetically to a participant’s speech it could also be said that I drew and wrote upon their private narratives and intervened in the texture of their daily life. Making with a group of participants in a workshop/exhibition situation would mean generating metatextures and conceptual narratives together about more private ontological narratives. I saw myself, in the life of the project, primarily as a drawing practitioner (and secondarily as a researcher, artist, writer) getting caught up in these various street textures/narrativities. In this way, a certain multimodal attentiveness (to my environment, to the speech of the other, the dialogical situation) was vital to the way in which the project would be ‘led’. Rather than seeing myself as only intervening in a context of need each I saw each encounter as dialogue between these various textures and narratives. Walking in texture, and creating through texture became my ‘method’ par excellence. As Somer’s notes a relational approach to narrativity tends to complexify how we (researchers, artists) read social action. The work generated was perhaps aesthetically textural/textual because I sought from the outset to make within a fraught space:

Ialso thought that this research opportunity allowed me to also enter into conversation with people around their own home languages, hoping to elicit information about how they came to live in Yeoville and how it felt perhaps having two homes. I was preoccupied with the idea of learning more about others, about listening, rather than assuming that I had something to offer them. I wanted to be quiet upfront about my limitations- “I am a young white guy, I can only speak English, I do not have the breadth of experience that so many people in this area have”. I approached the whole endeavour from that perspective. The rationale behind just walking and talking to people informally, was to highlight my strangeness and make it productive, in terms of the quality of the encounter, by making my ignorance obvious and explicit. At the same time I could highlight my interlocutor’s strangeness by asking them to consider the issue of xenophobia.

(Field notes, January 2008).

Walking, trickery, identity.

Walking also became an experiential and practical way of making things visible in the informal places in which I was working. It also became, significantly, the means by which I could prevent myself from applying an apriori scheme (meta narrative or conceptual composition) upon the context in which I was working, leaving me vulnerable to being led by the project itself and the

participants it gathered. Given that Yeoville is a place defined by walking, a constantly mobile and migratory community (rather than a gated suburban space, or highly coded public/commercial space) it was important to walk in order to make myself visible as an agent playing *on the same tactical plane* as my interlocutors. Because Yeoville culture (what is popularly being termed as ‘Little Africa’) may be characterized as one that is mobile and makeshift its identity, as it is seen by residents, exceeds the sociological stereotypes and essentialisms that are thrown around the inhabitants of the inner city. Residents in Yeoville see identity less as an essential category than a resource/mutable representation that can be manipulated in order to gain a foothold in various territories, to create new opportunities, to exploit a situation, to trick others, and bring profitable social games into play. I was struck by how a given participant or interlocutor would see their identity as a makeshift tactical resource, a form of visibility that could be designed to optimize returns, which often meant that I could not, from the outset, ‘read’ a stranger. Strangers would pose, trick, masquerade, perform for me.

Creating a working relationship with strangers meant that I had to play the same game and capitalize on the way I introduced myself to them in order to get a foothold. At times it became difficult for me to trust a potential participant because as Simone Maliq points out, in the “African inner city”, “there is the need to prepare for an endless process of trickery... government officials trick citizens.... Parents trick their children... children trick their parents” etc (Simone 2003: 424). Because the Yeoville community is to a large extent one of tactical opportunism and displacement I would need to both play that game and at the same time find ways in which I could engage with a participant on a more authentic, existential register (here I mean beyond playing a game of recognition and misrecognition). As I will argue later, I found that a commitment to intimacy was an emergent property of durational conversation. Intimacy created the ground upon which more meaningful aesthetic representations and experiences could be developed collaboratively. However, in order to do this I would need to recognize that, for myself and my potential interlocutors, in Yeoville, a “constant state of preparedness” (Simone 2003: 424) would be the norm.

Games: the survival of the aesthete.

In discussing Bourdieu’s ideas on educational reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron. 2000) Rancière asserts that:

... one can never force non-being to be. Never can the arbitrary be necessary. And the language of the necessary can never proclaim the arbitrary. Pedagogic action justifies pedagogic authority which legitimates it in turn- an unvirtuous circle authorising pedagogic work without failure (Rancière. 2003: 177).

In embarking on the project, I was keenly aware of a propensity to assert my ‘educational expertise’ in a context of “accelerated, extended, and intensified intersections of bodies, landscapes, objects and technologies”. I was also aware, that although this social dynamic defers “calcification of institutional ensembles or fixed territories of belonging”, it does not “mean that an experience of regularity and of sustained collaboration among heterogeneous actors is foreclosed...” (Simone 2003: 408). In other words, speaking as an artist-educator-researcher with Yeoville residents meant that I had to play a performative game of “dissimulation” working between the formal and cohesive sphere (emblemized here as myself, the representative of legitimate knowledge) and the informal and contingent (the neighbourhood everyday) sphere. I could not operate as an ‘aesthetic evangelist’ or radical educator seeking the emancipation of the poor through the dispensation and dialogisation of aesthetic experiences and representations but rather I needed to function as an un-

leasher of sorts, taking the evidence of a relation of intimacy and allowing it to “roam the streets to dissimulate its own secret” (Rancière. 2003:170). Here we see in a first meeting with a participant our conversation becomes a semiotic game of in which the stakes are recognition.



Sitting on the stairs to the temple, he [Samuel] intimated that he was Rasta Blue, which left me in a difficult situation- who was he, Rasta Blue or not Rasta Blue? He refused to name himself. It turned out that his real name was in fact, Samuel, and I discovered later, when the head priests arrived, (one of which was Rasta Blue) that Samuel had been posing as him.

And another similar situation where I recognize a stranger as being legible in one way (my way- the way I want things to proceed). My stereotype of her is confounded later by her re-presentation. When I realize it, is too late, I have been conned. She will exploit me and the representation that we have both made of me.

Charlotte introduced us and Mother Patricia greeted me warmly as ‘my boy’. It was clear to me that she could not see properly, because she never addressed me by looking directly into my eyes. Mother Patricia was a tiny bird-like woman. She had delicate hands which she rested on a second hand desk, the left hand always wringing a piece of tissue or toilet paper. Her eyes were hidden behind a pair of large, round darkened glasses, with one lens shattered. The entire room was in semi-darkness, light filtering feebly in through heavy curtains facing her back. The office was small, filled with second hand, cheap furniture, the floor covered in loose parke tiling. On the cabinet opposite her desk was pasted faded photographs of people unknown to me, some of places I recognised, such as the street outside the building. The photographs were stuck to the surface with bits of label stickers and covered the cabinet. Everything about the space seemed at once heavy and provisional. It was clear that Mother Patricia directed her ‘operations’ from this room.



[...] Her surname was not in fact Patricia. She said that she had assumed that name in exile, and that the problems with the title deed were connected to this. At no point in any of my conversations with her did she detail her husband’s background, or the circumstances surrounding his death. Sitting in her office, in the dark one evening, she told me how she had been moving arms across the border to Botswana, and began to weep about something unmentionable, mentioning a relationship between her changed name and this event. She had almost been stopped at a blockade but managed to get the arms over the border. The possibility of exhibiting my work at her premises seemed dim, and I began to have my suspicions about Mother Patricia and the credibility of her stories.

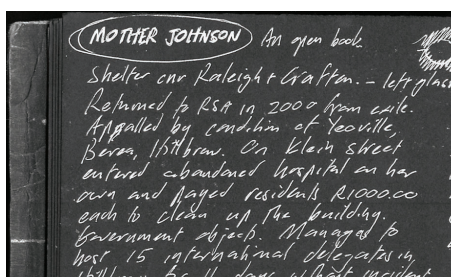


Figure 80: Brenden Gray, Mother Patricia, Lady Elvera (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Inviting the participants to build rhizomatic social networks with me, based on their existing allegiances, friendships, loyalties, knowledge demanded that I often spontaneously take advantage of opportunities presented in my immediate environment by 'poaching' in order to keep the project moving. This approach would demand reading each dialogical situation as a text in its own right that could be somehow be exploited:

On another visit I was busy perusing the photographs on Mother Patricia's cabinet and asked her the man posing in the front garden of her flat was. Corrie, one of Mother Patricia's assistants said that this was a friend of theirs, Conrad, and that the coloured child at his feet was his grandson. It then occurred to me that Corrie was Afrikaans, and I said to her that I had not had a conversation with an Afrikaans person in the project and if she was perhaps interested. Her answer was absolute. No. So I asked if she could perhaps introduce me to Conrad. Did he live in Yeoville? Yes. She gave me his telephone number and promised that she would contact him the next day to say that I would be inviting him into the project.

In this sense, *Speak English to Me* was a survivalist project where the aesthetic representation and legitimate culture (as it was embodied in my identity) struggled to keep its head above water. The aesthetic project it depended upon the self-interest of others in order to sustain itself over a period of a year, which would explain its periodic failures, my loss of faith in it and the frequent confusion and bewilderment of its participants. Without a certain willingness on the part of participants to lead me to others, through the neighbourhood, to relate their stories, engage in open-ended conversation and a need to respond to collaboratively produced aesthetic statements that project would simply have not have survived. So, the project itself resembled the survivalist culture which to a large extent defines Yeoville and the inner city. Further, given that I favoured 'emergence' and 'event' over goal-directed action no aspect of the project could be predicted with any degree of certainty. Each encounter (whether it be between myself and the words of a participant in the drawing process, or a meeting between participants) lent the project a necessary improvisatory quality. The extract below gives a sense of the unpredictability and failure inherent at the start of the project; how it became impossible for me to draw on schematic stereotypes to predict the responses and levels of engagement of a given participant:

The first person I met through cold canvassing who showed interest in the project was Felix, a Mba-ganti speaker and shoe repairer whom I had met on the corner of Bedford and Bezuidenhout. A few informal businesses were operating from that corner, a Zulu woman who spent the day sitting in a phone box/tuckshop constructed from sheet metal painted red bearing the red Cell-C logo. She sold airtime to people passing by. By the barrier two men spent their day selling sweets and listening to an old transistor radio perched on the perimeter wall and nestled to the right of the red steel cage sat the shoe repairers under a makeshift tent. I spoke to Felix under the tent, and agreed to have a conversation with me on a Tuesday morning that week in the same spot. When I arrived he was not there, replaced by another shoe-repairer called Edmond. I phoned him on the spot and he suggested a new appointment date. He volunteered the services of a Twi speaker who was sitting there at the time to act as a substitute. This guy said he would be interested in an interview but, no, that I should rather speak to his brother Azumah, who worked with him at the stall, and who would be there the following day.

(Madness. I approach a scene, make an absurd demand and a small system is made on the street corner. The impossible becomes immediately viable, because it is just is, it is there, it has to be dealt with because it exists. There is no reason why I cannot make such demands. 'Will you have a conversation with me?' An outrageous question!)

I planned to meet Azumah the following day and conducted an interview. I sat on a pink children's stool while he told me about Twi, and the history of Ghana. He was reluctant to offer me any information about how he had arrived in South Africa, his attitude toward Yeoville or his personal history. I asked him if he could select an object that I could draw. As I expected he said that he didn't have anything worth drawing. I imagined him living in a subdivided flat on Bedford Street in one room, with

a bag of clothes, tinned goods, some tools and documentation, and to me that was interesting subject matter. But why should I convince Azumah to show me this? This would indicate that his poverty was of interest to me. Trained as an artist who appreciates and exoticises such imagery I was excited about the prospect of making a drawing which represented his living circumstances, but at the time, sitting before a participant I resisted the impulse. He said that many immigrants are robbed as they enter into the country because they are vulnerable to criminals at the border, and in this way lose their clothes, papers and objects from 'home'. I thought it was a dead loss- there was no way I could convince him to show me something of significance and I had no way to frame it for him or even myself for that matter. Distraught, I asked him to think about it - I could even draw something he found particularly significant in the environment, a building, a tree, a stone and I would return two days later.

(I ask for a thought picture, that if by showing me this one thing, I have gained access to a universe of being. That was invasive? A tear, rip in the fabric of the everyday. We should find a way of undertaking this invasion together. A tree, a stone, becomes a wonder when it is shown with deliberation. Otherwise it is just literally is. The excitement of being shown a stone, by the mere fact that it was shown!)

When I returned Azumah revealed that he had gone to great lengths to find an image on the internet related to his culture, but had no money to print it out for me. I didn't want to let him down by saying that I refused to draw two dimensional imagery and nationalistic stereotypes. He then scratched the image of an animal into the sand next to his shoe maker's tent, the one he wanted to show me from the internet. I thought that I could draw his drawing in the sand, but felt it somehow patronizing and pretentious. I found more than one occasion, refugees identify proudly with their ethnic or national symbols. I asked the same question again: 'what object do you have at home that is special to you that remind you of your home language'. Home was immediately equated as 'Ghana'. Exasperated and at the point of giving up I asked him "if your home, or let's say your flat, had to be broken into and all your possessions stolen, if your flat had to burn down today, the loss of what object would bring tears to your eyes?'. He said his bag, because everything that is valuable to him is inside of it, it is special. I asked him to confirm that this was indeed his choice, and he said yes, the bag is more important to him than its contents. I then realised that what he had been attempting to draw in the sand was a porcupine and told him that I had porcupine quills at home. Perhaps I should join the quills to the bag as his drawing. He was very excited about this image and we arranged that the following Tuesday we would meet at 4pm. When I phoned minutes before to confirm he cancelled. I made another appointment which he cancelled. I then returned to the corner and Azumah was gone, replaced by another shoe repairer who did not know him. I asked the lady in the phone booth where Azumah was and she said that he was gone. I tried his phone. Nothing. Azumah had disappeared.

(Comedy. Tragedy. We reach the point of making something special even if it only in our heads. I wonder if we both carried the images in our heads before it was all ended? And like so many other times in the project nothing is left behind but the images in our heads.)

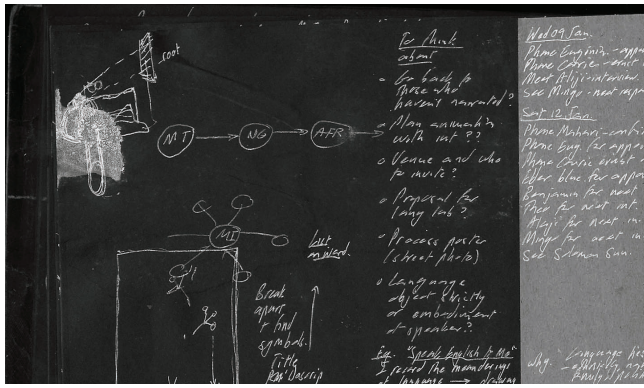
A few weeks later I returned to the corner and met a new shoe repairer, Mike, a speaker of Nzima also from Ghana, thinking that if Azumah was interested in working with me, Mike would. I introduced the project and asked if he would be interested in talking to me. Once again I was offered a plastic stool and the conversation commenced. Mike's English was so poor that all he could offer me was again, a basic history of Ghana. My questions could elicit nothing of substance and I thanked Mike for the interview and left, returning a few days later to find the corner now completely abandoned by all the traders. In amongst the bits of twisted metal, twine, sweet packets, and cigarette butts, in the mud I found a faded copy of the invitation I had given to Felix and realised that working with 'people on the street', as Colin Richards had once put it in a seminar was almost impossible. I would later make the same mistake in asking Nansi, a Zimbabwean woman on Rockey Street to join the project.



On a Sunday morning I walk up Delarey Street. I see a young white woman pushing a pram walking beside what I assume is her mother. I approach them with my questionnaire because I have yet to enter into an engagement with someone whose home language is English. I could ask Karl, but that would be too easy. I want to experience what it is like working with strangers. Both seem interested when I show them the invitation. I go through the survey with them, and ask if either would be interested in being "interviewed" about their experience of Yeoville, joking that although my project is called "Speak English To Me" I have not yet interviewed someone whose home language is English. The older woman, Lizette, agrees and tells me that she works as an English teacher at Observatory Girls Primary School. We make an arrangement to meet on a Thursday afternoon. She lives on the property. I phone her the day before to confirm the appointment and she does. I arrive at the gate at the agreed time, 3pm. It is hot. Children are playing on the jungle gyms in the yard. I call. A young black woman comes out to help me, suspicious. I ask her for Lizette, we have an appointment. She goes into the building and tells me that Lizette is busy. I give up. I will not contact her again. **An image left in my head only.**

This passage demonstrates how difficult it was for me to predict from the outset why a given stranger would agree to participate in a project such as this by using blunt sociological instruments such as race, class, gender. The project would need to work on a case-by-case basis taking the unrepeatability of the dialogical/narrative encounter as utterly axiomatic. Hence viscosity, texture and textuality became the key metaphoric lenses by which I could be attentive to the development of the project. I could not proceed from the notion that, based on the appearance of a stranger, their habitus, their accent, bodily hexis I could extrapolate a stable identity upon which to operate aesthetically or rehearse an aesthetic operation. It became almost impossible to know why a participant had agreed to involve themselves in what appeared to me as an absurd artistic and cultural endeavor. I suspect that the willingness of participants was to partake in the "'mad' notion that all intelligence is equal and that this equality is a presupposition that requires demonstration and not a goal that needs to be attained" (Ranciere as cited by Ross 1991: 58). They valued participation for its own sake, an idea of autonomy (what Kester may refer to as a "dialogical determinism") (Kester 2004:182) which would trouble me throughout the whole project because of its aimlessness. For the strangers I had met, they decided to enter the project because it was not 'projective' (conducted in the name of social justice, political representation etc) but because it was descriptive. Strangers wanted to speak for speaking's sake and have this aesthetically interpreted.

Very soon I realized that if I was going to work productively in informal contexts I had to enter into a 'dance with chaos' and in so doing maintain a practice of ambulatory attentiveness on a number of levels; in terms of the conversational processes of 'worldmaking-wordmaking' between myself and the participant' in terms of the environments in which we spoke; my own thought processes as they unfolded in terms of drawing, writing and image making. Drawing and writing processually and responsively, on an ongoing basis, is what kept the project alive in my mind and in that of the participant. Drawing and writing was a place in which to make sense of what became an otherwise disorienting experience of being led chaotically through the neighbourhood and speaking with a total strangers. The project *was* messy, and this messiness was registered and contained through drawing and writing. The project was not projective or linear. It did not move progressively in segmental chunks or phases wherein sets of participants moved progressively from one stage to another. Micro-relationships developed chaotically, in an overlapping, simultaneous and nodal fashion. Each developing relationship was different and unfolded with its own qualities of rhythm and interruption. At any given time participants were at different 'stages' in the project. When some collaborations were nearing completion others were just beginning. I needed a place in which to monitor this dance of complexity and chaos, suture and fracture. The 'walking novel' and my journal became a potent place in which I could survive and at the same time remain attentive to the complexity of the project. Illustrated below are examples of the kinds of notes and sketches I made in order to remain attentive to the developments in the project:



The chaomotic play of recognition and misrecognition taking place throughout the project was perhaps intrinsic because there existed no obvious, immediate apriori frames by which to apprehend a city thing (by form undifferentiated thing, phenomenon, nuemon, actor, person, object) and the strangeness of an artist working on the street, which has so few precedents. So the project would need to be guided centrally by texture as its operative metaphor. The street as a visual and rhythmic phenomenon reflected in many ways the flow of the first conversation with a stranger: the unconnected, the mechanical flow of organic materials. I felt that this rhythm could only be understood by being immersed in it, where my body working and playing in social space and its filtering capacity became a research instrument in its own right. This improvisatory practice was especially apparent in the initial, ‘grounding’ phases of the project where the participant and myself needed to negotiate the terms of engagement before we could proceed into a more intimate and authentic aesthetic relationship. The first transaction was really about creating loosely articulated textures from the our initial miasma of utterances and experiences. Certain visibilities and legibilities, shared cognitive-social textural grounds needed to be made visible (not understood) upon which a more productive, structured and articulate conversation between two agents in an ill-defined communicative context could proceed. The first encounter was therefore always a struggle because we were both required to construct (and often to impose) a certain provisional legibility on each other and the situation in which we faced each other.

Tom originally was going to introduce me to another Hausa speaker, Ali Bhabha. Before we converged on Alahgi, we visited Ali Bhabha who expressed no interest in participating in the project. Seeing that we moved onto Alahgi and thinking that he could gain something from the project he tried to take me away from speaking with the other shoe repairers almost bullying me into an interview.

Kadar introduced me to a Nigerian man speaking Igbo, named Michael Uche. We sat down on one of Ali Bhabha's stools at the corner where the shoe repairers work. I told him about the project. He immediately asked me how much I would pay him to participate in the project. This was the first time that I would encounter these questions. I was fully aware at the start of the project, that someone would ask this question. It struck me as odd, that in none of my previous interactions this question or a similar one centering on the question of capital I stood to gain in relation to my participants was not asked. Michael was quite adamant that because I would receive a master's degree as a result of my engagements with him, he was entitled to be paid. ‘I won't pay anyone in this project’, I argued, ‘because I am trying to offer a service to the people I am working with. I am producing a drawing for them, in exchange for a conversation. I am also doing research that may perhaps also benefit the broader community so I see no reason why I should pay you’. I said that if he could not accept these conditions he should not participate in the project. To this, Michael got up and left, saying as he did so that he would think about it. I phoned him and asked if he was still interested. He was, and we agreed to meet on Sunday afternoon at two. I kept our appointment and was met by empty stalls, in which some had been hung the DRC flag. Apparently there was a soccer game on. On the spot I decided not to work with Michael.



Strange introductions: disidentification, displacement, disincorporation, disorientation.

We live in a place that is not our own...it is after all, our house, our neighbourhood, our office, our fields, our hills, our sky over our heads. But there comes a moment when strangeness creeps in. Perceiving the world is “dense”, sensing to what degree a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, and with what intensity nature or a landscape can negate us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of those trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothes them; henceforth, they are more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across the millennia. For a second we cease to understand it, because for centuries we have understood it solely for the images and design that we had attributed to it beforehand; because, henceforth, we lack the power to make use of that artifice, that density and strangeness of the world is absurd... It is when the world evades us because it becomes itself again. That stage scenery masked by habit becomes again what it was. It withdraws at a distance now from us; that density and that strangeness of the world is absurd (Camus, *The Stranger*).

The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized in the phenomena of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, she is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who is also far, is actually near. For, to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction (Simmel in Allen. 2000: 57).

Foreignness to the world is an element of art: whoever perceives it other than foreign fails to perceive it at all (Adorno 1997: 221).

If the project sought to explore how a post-autonomous art could operate on the streets, how a collaborative aesthetic could function in informal places, then it would mean that I would need to, on the most basic, pragmatic level, elicit the interest of a stranger or foreigner. This meant thinking about how a movement from a relation of strangeness to one of intimacy could be arrived at. Without this it would be impossible to explore my thesis and an object to examine for this report. In this sense the project was not fully ‘participative’ in terms of how it is understood in participatory action based research. It was difficult enough to establish an intimate aesthetic relationship and in no sense were participants and myself “co-researchers” (Heron 2006: 179). In investigating the aesthetic effects of images made on the street there was no liberatory ideology underpinning my efforts. The project could succeed or fail in terms of how I introduced myself to a given stranger. A stranger’s interest to join the project and subsequent engagement with it was largely dependent on how they apprehended my identity in the first place. If I did not succeed in eliciting their interest, I would have no one to work with and no material could be generated. If a stranger signed up to the project I wanted them to have done so because they felt personally interested in exploring an aesthetic relation. However there was no way of telling why a participant signed up. So when in Yeoville, I did what Yeovillites do. I resorted to opportunism, alibis, and tactical diversions to secure the participation of strangers (regardless of their motivations). This became an ethical problem that haunted me throughout the project which I see now as a necessary move I needed to play in order to ‘collect data’, ‘make findings’ and operate like a researcher. In order to conduct research at all I had to ‘make do’. I would need to construct a certain kind of visibility in order to secure the participation of the strangers I had met:

I felt it necessary to introduce myself properly to these strangers...but how: would I be ‘Brenden the researcher, working on his MAFA at Wits University’ or ‘the resident, hey I live on Muller street’, or ‘I am an artist interested in language dynamics in Yeoville’. From the other person’s perspective, as I approached, in the moment before speaking, I may have been just first a white man, second a white man holding a pack of surveys and a pencil, and third a potential threat. I decided to use the appropriate title after gauging the social position and disposition of the person I was approaching. Business owners, or shop keepers got ‘the researcher’, hawkers, ‘the resident researcher’, and community leaders, ‘I am completing my Masters degree’.

If I had to ‘make a face’ for each encounter I found that strangers were naturally willing to make one for me too. However, once a conversation was catalysed this initial making of faces became the subject of negotiation. Some participants would not trust me until they felt either that my identity had been effectively pinned down or when our relationship had developed a productive autonomy of its own. My first meeting with Njabulo is a good example of this:



Njabulo a Zulu speaking man, retired MK vet and ANC supporter who owns property in the inner city. He lives in his house on Hunter Street. We met outside the “Rasta House” and then again in his lounge to discuss Shaka Zulu and Jacob Zuma’s ascendancy to leadership.

He asks me what this ‘white boy’ is doing here. ‘Looking for dagga!’ He lets out a flurry of laughter. I ask him his name and he says ‘Njabulo’. Was this his first or last name? He refuses to say. I ask him what his first language is and he answers: ‘Zulu- can’t you see a Zulu man when you see one?’ I tell him about my project and he commands me to walk, and I elaborate as he heads for his house. I want him to clarify who he is and in response he badgers me:

Njabulo: Are you an American?

Brenden: No, my parents were born in South Africa.

Njabulo: Then British?

Brenden: No, my grandparents came from Germany and Ireland.

Njabulo: Then you are not a South African- you are German, ha, ha, ha!

As we walk I argue with Njabulo about how national identity should be defined. I am surprised when he arrives at his gate, that he invites me inside, because he had been so cryptic and evasive about his own identity as we were walking. It seems as though I have passed some kind of test. I ask him if it were at all possible, seeing that we were already talking, whether it would be possible to interview him and invite him into the project as a participant. He doesn’t say yes or no, just lets me into his property, so I take out my notebook...

Securing the interest of a participant meant that I often had to engage in a struggle with them in which the representation of my body and identity was at stake. In some cases, a stranger would talk quite naturally to me but once they had settled on the fact that I could be named as an ‘operator’ of sorts: as some kind of delegate or representative (researcher, student, and artist) a certain constrained, pseudo-interview would generally take place. It then became a question of undoing a presupposition attached to my body by convincing the participant that my ‘research’ interests lay beyond my whiteness, a facile ethnography, generating research findings, community development; that, in fact, I did not half of the time what I was trying to achieve. It was almost impossible at the outside of the project to explain to the participant that I was primarily interested in entering into an aesthetic relationship with them. My identity would emerge in the course of the more prolonged conversation as a provisional construct that we designed together. I would see my identity shift in the participant’s mind from being ‘the salesman researcher’, ‘the white anthropologist’, ‘curious researcher’, lecturer, student, artist, resident... friend. I saw myself become a machine operated upon by the forces of the street, or an instrument played by the strangers I had met.

He [Njabulo] seemed uninterested in what I was asking [to make a drawing of a significant, personal artefact], brushed the invitation to the project aside and launched into a history of the Zulu nation, showing me an old cloth-bound textbook book with illustrations of material artefacts, maps and

figures, giving particular emphasis to the virtues of Shaka Zulu whom he revealed to me half way into the book. It seemed that he assumed that because I was white, or 'German', I was completely ignorant of this history, and that as a researcher, I had come for his expert historical commentary. I was waiting for the moment where he would ask me to draw an impi dance or a map of Zululand, which he then proceeded to do. How would I convince Njabulo, clearly proud of his cultural heritage that I did not want to reproduce an image from a history textbook? How would I explain the purpose of this kind of project, which at that point had no defined or articulated purpose? So I relented and drew the impi dance in the textbook on the coffee table, angered that I had been made to reproduce an illustration. While I was drawing the conversation continued and Njabulo realised that I had a fairly good grasp on South African contemporary politics, and a working knowledge of South African struggle history. This change in perspective gave me an opportunity to ask if I could draw something else on top of the image I was busy drawing- something more personal above this generic symbol of Zulu-ness.

Thus my identity came to be *negotiated* in the process of conversation. I had to wait for a participant to foreclose a piece of potent knowledge upon which we could build a meaningful, aesthetic relationship. I suppose that my presence in their space as a willing, vulnerable and open interlocutor doing something spectacularly strange in their home (verging on the absurd) created the conditions in which a participant felt safe enough to collaborate. In order to engage in meaningful conversation about our lived experiences, as residents of Yeoville it was necessary for the participant and myself to dispense with stereotypes about each other. This point was reached essentially through the *sharing of stories*.

The relationship between myself and a stranger could be seen as a dance or game of identification, disidentification which meant that throughout this process I needed to be attentive to the social and physical distance (Simmel's paradox of the stranger operational in every encounter) a participant wished to instantiate between themselves and me. I had to be sensitive to the 'spacings' the participant favoured in a given transaction. So as not to be intrusive, I would take this distance (whether it be alienated, respectful, suspicious, funny etc) as a given material fact of the project. Distancing was a problem to be worked upon, modulated and negotiated in order to enter into a productive relation with the participant. I realized early on in the project that it would be especially difficult for me to gain the trust of women because I may have been perceived as a threat in a neighbourhood of rampant opportunism.

- **Brita** is a Venda school teacher who lives with her 19 year old daughter in a shared house on.... I met her as she was speaking to the builders on her veranda, and spoke with herself and her daughter in their backyard.

Both Brita and her daughter became somewhat suspicious of me, upon asking that question, because it may mean letting me into the property or even the house. Hesitantly they put forward some suggestions, but Brita was set on a bodice she had brought from home. I asked if I could draw it even if it meant I would do it on the street, or in the garden and then I was let in. I was ushered to a side lane, in which a pile of rubble had been dumped, paint cans, and a new taxi was standing. I sat on the concrete steps that presumably led to the kitchen and waited for Brita. She went into a backroom that she was probably living in while the house was being renovated, and returned with the item of clothing. She said that she wore it at ceremonies at home, and loved the interweaving strands that are used to tighten the garment around her waist as well as the sun motif on the back. She pegged it on a washing line overhanging the pile of rubble and I began the drawing...



Figure 84: Brenden Gray, Brita, *Washing Line* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Brita leaves me to draw in her backyard so that she can watch Sunday afternoon WWF wrestling and positions her body so that she keep an eye on me. Later she feels comfortable with my presence and returns to me home a few weeks later now interested in the project:

...she came out looked at my drawing, smiled and I thanked her. I never did return to her house to have a conversation, but later would have a very engaging session with Brita and her daughter at the animation workshop I held at my house.

Paradoxically, I found that the departure point for a more productive conversation was our shared sense of being illegible to one another ('who are you, what do you want from me? I know that I don't know you like you don't know me'). Ironically, this indicated that we shared being strangers which later instituted a safer relation of distant intimacy. A certain relative visibility was gradually constructed, relationally, from small kernels of mutual understanding, contact points, sympathies as our conversations deepened. A certain coherence emerged as a conversation unfolded and enfolded upon itself. There was no sense in which identification with one another (between myself and a participant, and between participants) became the basis for an ongoing relationship. As Deleuze (in Raunig 2007: 135) asks, "What if the differences, in constant exchange, refuse to be subordinated to the rule of identity and representation? What if all identities were only simulated, generated through a deeper game... "the game of difference and repetition". One would assume, for example, that the basis for any productive working relationship is a certain degree of identification between participants. However, if anything, I found that it was our radical differences that were responsible for inciting meaningful dialogue and which kept the relationship dynamic, intimate and intact. Kadar in an animation workshop, in which our conversation centered on the theme of difference, states the problem succinctly: 'God makes difference deliberately so we can't expect life to be simple'.

Storytelling and conversation

As for the poor, they do not play. Indeed their habitus discloses to them only the semblance of a game where the anticipated future is not what is possible but simply the impossible: a "social environment" with its "closed doors" "dead ends", and "limited prospects" where the "art of assessing likelihoods" cannot euphemize the virtue of necessity. Only those who are chosen have the possibility of choosing. (Rancière 2003: 183).

Because each and every relationship in the project was constructed from the inside as it were, as if for the first time, gradually eroding the schemas imposed on it, the transactions I maintained with the participants exhibited a kind of chaotic autonomy that could not be measured by either party, but rather merely 'attended to'. In some cases, our relationships exhibited the texture of friendship rather than being a simple and mechanical contract or relation of cultural goodwill between artist and participant. If Bourdieu's habitus is a way of rationally predicting the behavior of a "lowly ranking" agent in the discursive space of the sociological then in other unfamiliar places it could forecast nothing of value. My defamiliarisation of the participant's home, the street as an informal communicative context of clash (a place of strangeness) meant that the concept of habitus was hardly useful. (I felt it necessary at this time to give up my addiction to Bourdieu).

The habitus crumbled as a guiding principle for me. Within the context of the encounter of strangeness, there was no defined game, and no rules by which to play a game so how could a participant or myself could assess whether we had a "feel for it"? Rancière (2003: 187) argues, in his critique of Bourdieu, that the nature of the game playing depends not on the rank or a position of the

player but on the kinds of knowledges they bring to the game. What overturns Bourdieu's relentless oppressor-oppressed game logic is the figure of the thief who "dissimulates legitimate cultural property" (Rancière 2003:186). By working/playing aesthetically in the space of the "lowly ranked" I attempted to fraudulently construct a non-zero game space so that many aesthetics could be put to play. This fraudulent behavior could be imagined, similarly, in the De Certeauian (1984: 28) sense as a practice of 'gift giving'. By illegitimately stealing a piece of territory, a 'wrong place' was secured in which the participant and myself could 'give' freely and fraudulently outside the logic of capital. Here the aesthetic processes of the artist met the narrative of the participant, emerging as a clash between their sentence (speech, narrative) and my image-making practice (drawing, relational).

Joining narrative to identity reintroduces times, space and analytical relationality- each of which is excluded from the categorical and essentialist approach to identity. While a social identity or categorical approach presumes internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act uniformly and predictably, the narrative identity approach embeds the actor within relationships and stories that shift over time and space. It thus precludes categorical stability in action. These temporally and spatially shifting configurations form the relational coordinates of ontological, public, and cultural narratives. Within these temporal and multilayered narratives identities are formed; hence narrative identity is processual and relational (Somers. 1994: 621).

It concerned me, throughout the project, that I could not distinguish, in my transactions with participants *between conversation and storytelling*. These modalities were used interchangeably by myself and participants throughout the life of the project. It worried me that the emerging emphasis on storytelling would make the aesthetic statements I made too representative, illustrative, individualistic and narrative rather than dialogical, collective and relational. To a large extent the project was descriptive; a testament to my listening and translation of the stories of others. It seemed that, deeper into the project, I was indeed drawing a portrait of a Yeoville (or representing manifold situations), rather than intervening in its social fabric. A constant tension existed, in my mind, between an art of situations in which a certain tangible outcome could emerge and an art of representation for its own sake. It seemed unavoidable. I felt that the participants needed and wanted their stories to be told and more significantly heard, imagined and imaged by a disinterested listener and translated into aesthetic statements by a stranger, almost for its own sake (never mind a public). I grappled constantly with the idea that I did not have the right to resist the participant's impulse to make meaning through narrative. Telling a story to a stranger, it occurred to me, was the manner in which a participant constructed and experienced their aesthetic, their own way of drawing in mental space.

I found, in many cases, that storytelling became the ground/fabric upon which a more critical relational/dialectical relationship could be made jointly, in which disruption, difference and instability would come to be valued by both parties. I hoped that from this narrative texture, at some later stage (when the idea for storyboards and animation was arrived at), the participant's capacities could be set in motion, singularities reached. In other words, I felt that through the aesthetic representation of a story a movement toward action and projection would emerge which is a point the project failed to reach.

It therefore became imperative to me, if the habitus was the overriding determinant of a participant's appreciation and evaluation of an aesthetic representation, that it could only be undone if a new ground for its construction was first made. The participant's telling a story to an attentive and foreign listener produced a dialogical situation in which the habitus could be undone. Storytelling, I found, is a form of resistance against the discursive closure of the habitus because narrative identity

is constructed in a multivalent and multilayered way, as a movement rather than a scheme. Thus storytelling needed to be facilitated and for this reason the project, given its time constraints, tended to valorize narrative representation in its process. This is not to say that struggles between myself and a participant around which modality of sharing would come to be most valued did not emerge. Covert struggles often took place over whether the conversation or the story would gain precedence in defining the nature of our relationship.

In the passage I gave Conrad, one of the earlier participants in the project, a great deal of time to tell his story. I knew that without this ground we would not be able to identify themes, points of reference and tension by which to produce the drawing and storyboard to share with the broader Yeoville community. Here I narrate how Conrad's story telling quickly facilitated the production of a drawing in his flat:

- **Conrad** is an elderly Afrikaans speaking man, living on Natal Street with his daughter and grandson, working as a packer at the SuperSaver on Rokeby Street. I met him in his flat at Jackhill court.

Conrad I would guess was about sixty years of age. I was expecting to see a much younger man judging by the photograph I saw pasted to Mother Patricia's wardrobe door. The flat extended quite far back into a living room area where I could hear people chatting. Rather than take me there, we made a right angle turn into his bedroom which overlooked the street. The double bed hardly fitted into the space, and I had to squeeze between it and the wardrobe to sit on a couch before a window. There was a narrow space for me to sit, because to my right was a bundle of clothing and a set of three large Victorian porcelain dolls, in perfect condition, in various stages of being undressed. They lay heaped in their frocks, their glazed eyes staring at the ceiling, all blonde all blue-eyed. I immediately thought that these dolls would be great subjects for a drawing. They seemed so incongruous and anachronistic in an area such as Yeoville, a nostalgic statement of isolation, perhaps indicative of a generation immobilised by change. Conrad's grandson, a 5 year old coloured boy lept into the room, jumped over my lap, grabbed one of the dolls and asked me questions. He spent most of the time in the room over the course of the conversation.

I felt like an intruder in the room. Conrad was clearly uncomfortable and tried to break the ice by offering me a cup of tea which I accepted. He returned to the room and in the meantime I took out my notepad and drawing materials. He perched on the side of the bed, and I slumped into the couch. Conrad had been living in Yeoville for five years. He had worked at the Yeoville Foodtown for some time as a packer, but now he was handling deliveries at Supersaver about a block down Rokeby Street. He was born in Alberton and then when he was an older child moved to Mpumalanga. It was difficult to get Conrad to elaborate on what he was saying, so I made the mistake of asking, upfront the one question I really wanted answered: how he felt as an Afrikaner living in a Pan African community? The narrative that proceeded that afternoon surprised me in its length and intensity. Rather than a direct question making him wary, he gave me an intimate portrayal of his family history...

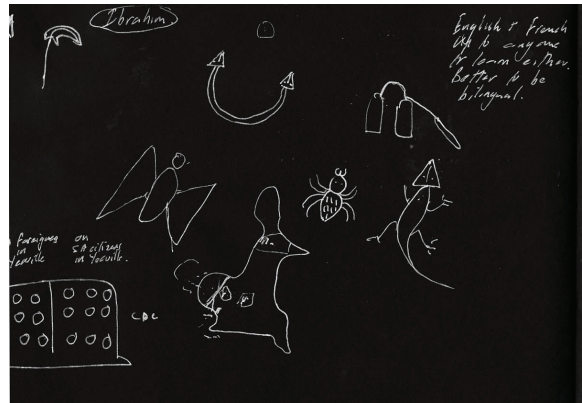
...He said that he felt accepted by the Yeoville community especially through his work at the supermarkets on Rokeby Street. He said that he often helps other African men with translation when dealing with Afrikaans and English customers. He confirmed what I had discovered earlier in my walks- that Afrikaans was amongst one of the languages people living in Yeoville were most interested in learning, adding that he was proud of his heritage as an Afrikaner. Conrad noted that he had picked up Fanagalo in the 1970's by working as a driver for the mines. I asked him if there was any form of intolerance toward language in his work experience. He said he felt that Zimbabweans were intolerant of Ethiopians, but that it was just a feeling he had. When he first moved into Yeoville, there was crime and hijackings, with tension between whites and blacks, with the latter 'trying to overrule you', but now he recently he said he feels safe walking in the area and the CBD. He said that his granddaughter only has black friends in the community that they play and do everything together. I asked him how many children and grandchildren he had. Two sons, 35 and 32 and a daughter of 30, who lives with him. He has a 5 year old grandson and 13 year old granddaughter. He laughed. Short daughters and tall sons. Both of his sons live in Johannesburg and work as security guards. I asked him if his father was still alive. Conrad then launched into a story about his family's history, leading up to where he found himself now. His father passed away at the age of 86, his name: Conrad Johannes Wil-

As I will discuss later, the storyboards that I made for each participant effectively undid and reassembled the narrative structure of the participant's contribution by placing it within an aesthetic field. The storyboard generated from this story intended to show Conrad his own speech interpreted and presented as adjacent to and layered beneath a constellation of drawn images which would form the basis for a further conversation. Although I represented his story sympathetically it also addressed, critically, some of the racial assumptions embedded in his narrative. I could not see myself at this tender early stage in the project interrupting the narrative of a participant with a totalising academic critique! I never did see Conrad again and in some ways these artworks that did not reach their destinations bear witness the failure ridden, disconnected nature of the project. Images such as those below appeared to me, during the project, as the detritus from which a monument could be later made. The question that my experience of Conrad raised was how does an artist make such intimate and expressive stories available to a community when it often demanded that public artists must produce generalizations and essentialisms in their work?

Storytelling and translating the stories of others is perhaps a way out of this conundrum because through storytelling speakers make sense of the world and generate a productive relation between it and themselves. When we tell our stories to others we are weaving feelings and sense into satisfying aesthetic wholes. Storytelling, similar to conversation, is a kind well-defined practice of world making and conjuring that is recursive and dialectical in its own unique way. It reflects history but also informs future action which in turn becomes the material for further storytelling. The end of storytelling is death. Psychoanalysts tell us that when the symbolic order of narrativity falls away or is interrupted, when the suture of autopoietic self-world construction is brought to a halt (fractured) we face the trauma of the Real, which only a return language or a symbolic order can mend. How is this different to a conversation, where, rather than the gradual and accumulated threading of sense, there is an exchange of sense; the to and froing of doing and undoing; the fracture and suture that scintillates over the surface of death and trauma, giving us glimpses of the real, which are only to be threaded over again and again through storytelling, in endless aesthetic configurations? If the project was my story then it had its own ruptures that threatened to undo the meaning that I was attempting to make on the streets of Yeoville:

I saw Naseef, the art dealer from the Cameroon on a Thursday morning in the park opposite my house at 9am. We sat on a circular bench under tree placed at its center. The whole conversation made me reflect on the situation that was taking place at the shebeen outside my house and how I should resolve it. I have always tried to solve problems with my neighbours through direct conversation. When the shebeen was running at 127 Muller Street, next door to my house I would put on my slippers at 2pm in the morning and go to Patricia next door to ask if they could turn the volume down, as opposed to calling the police which I also often did. I got to know Patricia well, the manager of the place, her children, and would negotiate with her about the noise. My second child was born at 4am in the morning to the sound of township techno, while the mid wives cut her umbilical cord. They closed down, because I put the Liquor officer for at the Yeoville SAPS in contact with the owner of the house (who bought it as a repossessed house) after they had been raided numerous times and people arrested, before the illegal shebeen was shut down. The new shebeen was a different situation. I knew the owner, after meeting him, just after he had moved into Barney Simon's old house, in May last year, when Frannie has been attacked by a group of three armed men who ambushed her outside her house.

He said that in Yeoville 'I feel like I am at home' primarily because he spends much of his time with his countrymen who also live in the area. The problem he said is that South Africans solve their conflicts by calling the police. There is a lack of sharing and because of this these 'bad things are happening'. He would elaborate on his idea of justice later. Bamoun is a kingdom in 'the corner' of Cameroon with its own chief who has representation wherever members of the tribe live. Right now, he mentioned, Bamoun people living in Yeoville are attempting to organise a representative of the chiefdom. For Naseef, justice is a matter of 'trying to understand yourself' rather than resolving conflict by calling the police and wasting time and money in court.



Life is better when you are sharing. I then asked Naseef about his experience of xenophobia in South Africa. He said that in his own country this was not a problem, because his government encouraged the development of small business, whereas in South Africa poor people had little means of improving their condition, and that government 'did not take care of small business'. For him, 'xenophobia damages the economy'. Naseef then asked if he could draw some symbols that illustrated his ideas on justice. The first was a double headed snake that could attack an enemy and encircle them. Then a bell hung around the neck to announce peace, and the most interesting of all, the two spears which are used to mediate a conflict between two parties. The first spear ends in a point, and the second in a curved blade. If either party selects the former they want to solve the conflict through war, and if the latter through negotiation. The choice of spear functions as a message to the other party as to their attitude toward the situation. Naseef had drawn all of these symbols in my notebook. I told Naseef about my problems with my neighbour and how I was struggling what choice to make regarding the story he had told me. I asked if he had any object, which revealed something about his personal history which I could draw. He said that he could obtain none of the symbols which I had drawn, but mentioned his most treasured possession, a 'happiness mask', which he promised to give me the next day, to draw, which I did.



Figure 86: Brenden Gray, Naseef, *Happiness Mask* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008,

Intimate strangers and hating neighbours. The police emerged with a man in handcuffs who they threw in the back of the van. They saw me and said they would return in 15 minutes. In the meantime, a crowd of about 25 people poured out onto the street, and a red mini bus reversed quickly down the drive. They couldn't get into the taxi immediately because a young man in a leather jacket was trying to assault a woman that wanted to board the taxi. He pulled her hair and clothes, swore, while the others pushed him away. All the while I was peering over the gate witnessing this commotion. Everyone left and the street was quiet for a few seconds. I went to the gate to begin sliding the panels back into place, and when I looked up I saw the owner of the shebeen about a metre from me, on the other side of the gate. He looked livid. He was breathing heavily and his eyes were murderous. 'Did you call the cops, you white racist motherfucker?' I said 'yes, someone from your shebeen broke my gate...' The next moment I was reeling back. He had punched me square in the face through my gate. I stood up, feeling the blood pouring down my face. He then said, 'You don't even know me you motherfucker. How can you call the police? I am going to fucking kill you'. I didn't say a word. He walked quickly back to his property and from the front yard, yelled "I am going to kill that motherfucker" over and over again. I called the police.

He continued to threaten to kill me said, 'you couldn't even clean your face. You think you clever hey? I am going to kill you motherfucker!'. The police threw him in the back of the van and I accompanied the owner to the police station, to open up a case of intimidation and assault against him.

The police let him out to take finger prints and he stopped, and made a small lecture, 'you are a family man. You should understand these things. Act like a real man motherfucker. The only thing the black man understands is alcohol, so I sell it to him. Why don't you move back to Rosebank where you belong? I will leave. Just ask me to leave and I will leave. I will fucking kill you and your family. You don't even know me'. All I said in response to his entire tirade was 'I wanted to know you Mpho'. He then repeated his threat and was escorted out. I had phoned a community leader in the area to escort me home because I was afraid that the owner's partner would attempt to attack me if I had to walk there. He had just arrived. We had an argument with him on the patio outside the police station. He asked me 'how can you call the police when we are trying to do our business?'. He argued that what happened on the street outside the shebeen was not their concern. When I asked him whose it was, he fell silent. I asked again. He was silent. I said, 'the police?' I wanted him to understand that when people are being attacked on the street the police are the ones to deal with it. I then finished the argument by saying, 'That is why I called the police. What am I supposed to do? I can't approach drunk people and ask them to behave!'. Maurice then added that drunk customers on the street outside the shebeen were their problem, because, under the Liquor Act, they are not allowed to sell alcohol to intoxicated customers. His response was 'we need to make profit. We will sell to them'. He then said that we needed to talk straight away about what happened and I refused saying that I would only meet with him under the right circumstances. We left the police station. Meanwhile, my father had arrived and my family packed to go to my parent's house. For a week I would not bring them back fearing reprisals.

It was in this state of mind that I had to prepare for the following set of animation workshops, of which I could only conduct one because I could not return to my studio. I had no desire to walk on the streets of Yeoville again, and did not want to meet with any of the participants in the project. I wanted to give up on the project, sell the house, leave the neighbourhood and never return again. The next Friday, I drove home to make the meal for the participants and attempt to write the narrative for the project. I made a paneer palak, a curry enough to feed twenty people.

I arrived at St Aidans late. It didn't matter because Desta, Alfonso, Brilliant and Mzila did not pitch. Desta said he was sick; Alfonso was in a meeting, Brilliant said it was impossible and Mzila wanted to work. I was angry but still so disturbed by the attack that I didn't care. The whole project was beginning to look like a massive waste of time and a monument to failure that I would have to account for.

Speak English to Me could itself be conceptualized as an artist's story playing out in a real time in a neighbourhood, in the streets of the city. At some points it occurred to me that the project was, despite my own intentions, a monologue murmured to myself as the project unfolded. Roaming the streets became, in effect, my elusive story written on its surface; a search for meaning and coherence; an attempt to answer my own question about the authenticity of art and aesthetics in other places. Whether a transaction with a participant was distant and evanescent, modest, friendly or in the case cited above, traumatic and piercing, I drew on each and every one and attempting to interweave every one. So, although Naseef had never met the shebeen owner, in my mind they were related. The experience of a successful Cameroonian art dealer bore a relation to a young man struggling with his masculinity. The storyboard generated here represented a pitched dialogue between my house and that of the shebeen owner mediated by Naseef's tribal iconography. The project, in this sense, was really driven by my need to simply speak with others. In doing so, I may understand the world and recognize only this urge as fundamental and absolute. Given this perspective, I felt that no matter how insubstantial, meaningless and alienated my encounters with some of the strangers I met were, I would need to attend to them because there was "no obvious measure" by which I could value one encounter over another.

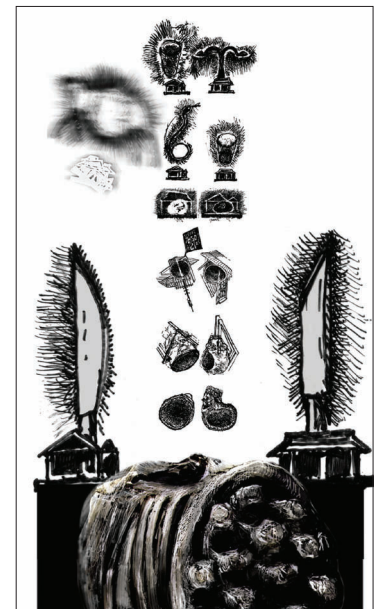


Figure 87: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Muller street (For Naseef)*, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Interest rates. I cannot go into the details of every person I met who showed interest, Haggai, a Bemba speaker who I met by accident many times, but who let me down consistently when it came to keeping an appointment. Tschepiso a young, entrepreneurial Tswana woman who had set up an internet café on Rockey Street who made many promises but never made a single appointment. Coolboy, the Ndebele speaking park photographer, who never met me at the arranged time in the park, Rasta Blue who would only meet me in secret and then missed our meeting because he was arrested, tried and thrown in jail for an eight year sentence. Timketu, a Tigris speaker I met through Desta, who said he would phone me back but never did. Godfrey a Northern Sotho speaker I met on Hopkins street who I agreed to meet at the recreation center and never arrived. Dick Kamara, sharp dresser, a Creole speaker from Sierra Leone who promised that we would meet and then disappeared. Nansi, a Tskikinjo speaker who said that she could not speak to me because then she would not be able to check to see when the metro cops may be coming down the road to confiscate her goods. Superintendent Motaung who never bothered to reply to my invitation despite many phone calls.

There was therefore a desire throughout the project to attend to every dialogical encounter regardless of how thin or thick, dense or scanty I found a given encounter or conversation to be. I felt it necessary to give an account to every perceived failure of communication by *making a work of it*. Given this, the project was dogged by a continual sense of Kafkaesque absurdity, and I feel now that my tenacity was not so much the result of a certain vanity to make or find profundity but more about a desire to give equal value to everything I had found no matter how mundane or commonplace. I felt that the impossible and the discarded have inherent aesthetic value which need to be thoroughly investigated and that aesthetic representations and situations could indeed be made from found scrap and nothing. Because I was not adept at reading the everyday, nor often being able to understand what I designate later as the “showing and telling” of the participants I engaged with on a more sustained basis, I felt it necessary to elicit *the many textures* on the street as a way of ‘sounding out’ *each and every situation*. It was as if by doing this, I could engender a connective-poetic relation in the neighbourhood as a whole. Nothing could be left out of that equation. I hoped that by gathering *all* of these experiences and collaborations together (as one may draw breath), including the failures and crises, into an aesthetic whole, through the consummative exhibition of the materials generated during the project and in the animated projection, something more political and tangible may emerge. And yet despite this sensuous and analytical obsession for the minutiae of every situation a certain goal oriented thinking consistently overshadowed what was actually taking place before my eyes. Excessive proliferation made me both attentive and obscured my vision. Because of this double bind of blinding proliferation and goal-oriented thinking I often thought of abandoning the whole endeavor in the face of its absurdity:

Giving up. After that I wanted to give up the whole damn thing. The premise of the entire project seemed absurd. What was the point of meeting thirty strangers, having a conversation with each of them about their personal history and personal experience of Yeoville, making a drawing of an object special to them, animating it and bringing them all together for a more extended conversation. The idea of waiting for something to emerge seemed fruitless. Nothing was emerging. Just frustration, boredom and anger. Failure seemed to be emerging as the key theme of the project. And yet it was punctuated with moments of joy, in the possibilities inherent in speaking to people I didn’t know and who didn’t know me. I realised that all that was left of the project, was a documentation of the failure to achieve anything tangible, and that which was not tangible could not be described or explained. Perhaps by writing I could make sense of what I was doing.

I attempted a form of art making and writing that exhibited fidelity toward and gave an account for all of my experiences. I tried not to judge any encounter by pre-existing standards. For example, we see below a failed interlocutory experience where from the outset there were no signs of a sustained interest or engagement on the part of the stranger I had met. Yet I attended to the situation

through the making of a storyboard. The exercise of eliciting participation, even if I knew that it was fruitless, was a way of exploring the “principle of equality”. Even the most minor encounter became a generative opportunity for me:

Clouds and fucking superstars I walked on the East side of Bezuidenhout, and in the first few minutes thought that the whole endeavor was pointless. Then I saw a group of youngsters standing outside a two story block of flats, and approached them to explain the project. At first I conducted my questionnaire with them, and upon discovering that Shelley spoke Tswana asked if she wanted to become a participant in the project, explaining the process. She seemed shy and reluctant to join, so I said I would produce an artwork for her immediately, if we could just have an initial discussion about how she perceived her language. With her friend present she did this. I then asked her if there was anything in her immediate environment that reminded her of her home language. She could give no answer, so I began to suggest things around us, a chain, a tree, the sky. ‘The sky, yes, the sky’. So I sat on the verge drawing the clouds I saw over the hill near Bezuidenhout valley. The configuration kept shifting, as clouds are prone to do, so I struggled. A young man emerged from the building, argued with Shelley and her friend, they gestured to me and he came to sit with me. He was clearly drunk, even though it was only eleven o’ clock. The conversation was disturbing. He said as a young man, his only source of inspiration was ‘fucking girls’, ‘getting drunk’, and that he wanted to be a ‘superstar’. He spent most of the time while I was drawing; trying to work out ways that he could enlist my services to make him “more famous”, including asking me to draw a portrait for one of the girls in the flat. Shelley kept calling to him to leave me alone. I began to draw faster and left as quickly as I could showing Shelley my drawing, taking her contact details and walking briskly to De Le Ray street. It became impossible to contact her again.

I sat down on a verge of grass on a quieter street to take a break. Two young boys in shorts, while pushing their BMX saw my drawing, and exclaimed ‘artist!’ and continued their conversation about graffiti.

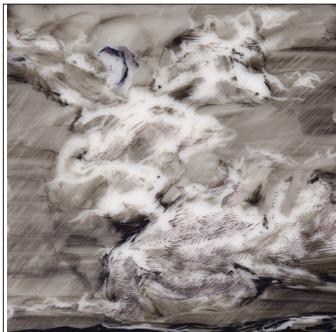


Figure 88: Brenden Gray, Shelley, ‘Draw the Sky’ / *Fucking Superstars* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.



Figure 89: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Dunbar Street (For Shelley)*, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

This sterile encounter generated a meditation on what it must feel to grow up as a poor young woman in this area and in response to it I developed a storyboard about youth, sexual violence, and promiscuity in the neighbourhood. This was made for Shelley, who existed for me as a ghost participant in the project— I knew I would never see her again. The fact was that I *had* met her and because she had invested in the smallest way in the project it was important for me to respond even if Shelley remained a fictional addressee. David, another participant in the project, who at first showed great interest, later became disinterested in the project because he was leaving South Africa. He refused to participate fully in the construction of an artwork and yet lack of response, agitation, and reluctance became a source of image generation that would later pay dividends:

He arrived at my gate with a newspaper and a notepad and I led him to the studio. He seemed uncomfortable and slightly agitated. I knew that Wednesday was his day off, when he looked for other employment. The newspaper on his lap was filled with marks and circles in the jobs section. Before we began he described his frustration with working as a shopkeeper, and asked if I knew of any job opportunities. Being in the field that I am in I could not help him, and there was little I could do to divert the conversation to the animation sequence. I asked David about his wedding. For some time he had been boasting about getting married and I had agreed to design the wedding invitation for him. The conversation was then steered toward the workshop. I suggested that we perhaps focus on his frustrations in working at the shop and made a thumbnail sketch of the counter, or rather the cage in which he sat from eight until eight at night. 'What if the sequence shows you in the shop, dreaming of other realities?' I then drew a wedding scene, asked if David was interested in this concept of dreaming and whether he could add any scenes to it. He could not. I then drew his attention to the drawing I had made for him and asked if it had to transform, or move what could it do that related in some way to his life. He couldn't give me a response. So I mentioned how he insisted that the drawing should be made in color seeing that the dress was so colorful. Nothing. It seemed that unlike the situation with other participants, with David, drawing was not the medium which would catalyse ideas. Writing appeared more useful but I could generate no concrete images from this. When I asked David what the greatest problem facing Yeoville was he said 'fast money is killing this environment', that there 'is no time for anybody'. I put forward my view that there are far too many people who are not engaged in creative labour and asked what he thought of this. The idea was too abstract and elicited nothing. No line of thought or coherent framing concept was generated in the workshop, but rather bits and pieces punctured with David's pragmatism. I could find no way of taking mundane statements about his troubles and translate these into a sequence. The workshop ended quickly and David continued to talk about frustrations with his work. He then asked if he could use my computer to check his e-mails and showed me a picture of his wife at another woman's wedding. The image was so pixilated and underexposed that the woman was faceless, smudges of white the bouquets of flowers against their pink dresses. David wanted me to work with this image for his invitation, and I said I couldn't but would design the invitation anyway. I considered following this theme in the animation sequence later. I would spend the rest of August designing the invitation sending proofs through to David via e-mail. He was finally delighted with the design, sent images of it through to his friends and printed it for his wedding.



Figure 90: Brenden Gray, David Onare, 'Wedding' (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

It was clear from our final conversation that David was not interested in pursuing the project because, in his mind, he was set on leaving the neighbourhood. And yet, again we see the failure of generativity and creativity in this situation becoming the starting point for the development of a storyboard and animated sequence that David would never see. His newspaper, an object of distrac-

tion (circling job opportunities) passivity and disinterest becomes the primary symbolic element in the print and through it I am able to explore the relationship between money and love, labour and love. (Later I design a wedding invitation for him). I am able, by paying attention to the failures of conversation and storytelling in our workshop to develop something that I hope is meaningful to a broader community and to David.

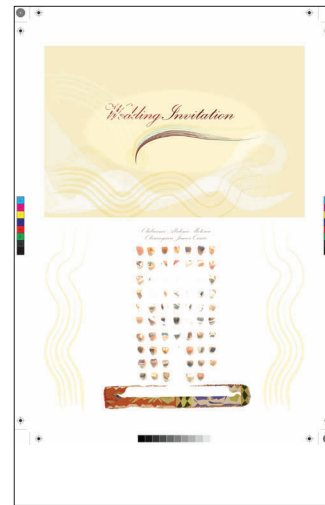


Figure 91: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Cavendish Street (For David Onare)*, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Home, exile and the lives of images and objects: home language drawings.

In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, between the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity (Camus: 187).

As the material deconstruction of existing territorial frameworks leaves more Africans without coherent local and national arenas, a certain “worlding” has been enforced in terms of where they see themselves operating. Much of this “worlding” is a state of being “cast out” into the world. The capacity to maintain recognizable and usable forms of collective solidarity and collaboration becomes difficult...when children across most African cities are asked about what they will do with their lives; the answer usually entails a life trajectory carried out far away from the place they consider home (Simone 2003: 18).

The drawing of home/language object definitely set the ground for a more intimate relationship of sharing, storytelling and conversation between myself and a participant. This is perhaps because by asking the participant to *show* me some ‘thing’; an object significant and intimate to them, but also one that registered a theme or point of contention that emerged in our conversation a *moment of crisis or fracture* was introduced into continuity of informal conversation and joint storytelling. Usually when the conversation had reached a pitch of sharing or had entered a state of even flow, I would interrupt our ‘world making’ by making a strange request, introducing a punctum into the fabric of our relationship: by asking the participant to be active in a way that was not verbal or narrative but rather *visual*. If the conversation and storytelling could be imagined as semi-autonomous, autopoietic speech performances, which can only take place, because those genres of speech have

their own specific modalities and rhythms they have to be constantly negotiated and renegotiated albeit on an unconscious, improvisatory level. The introduction of a new modality of sharing; a commitment to the visual and performative *as singularity* constituted a crisis that, if resolved, was *endured together* thus setting the ground for a new kind of relation between myself and a participant. The suture of the sentence in storytelling and conversation (the speech and gesture of the participant, the speech and writing of the artist performed together) became fractured by my request for the participant to make something *singular, sensuous and tactile and visible*. The showing of the ‘home language’ object as a performance in aestheticisation created a work of art of an ordinary thing which created crisis because, I would suggest, “the work of art suspends identity without cancelling it, broaches and breaches it simultaneously, refusing at once to underwrite antagonism or supply false consolation” (Eagleton 1990: 347).

My request (mediated through ‘the project machine’) placed a certain responsibility on the participant to represent themselves to me by identifying with an object in their environment that indexed, symbolized or represented their story or in a more sophisticated or which registered critical points in our conversation. For me, the request also became crisis because I would need to be the bearer of the burden (a demand/request- the only stubborn programmacy of the project) and show sympathy in making this incisive request. Further I would have to explain why ‘the project’ needed this demonstration at all, which I simply could never succeed in doing.

I suspect that this request was difficult for both myself and the participant because it went against the grain our previous investment in storytelling and conversation; a form of visibility that represents becoming and process rather than being and state. My demand that the participant perform a radical act, to show their being as it were, to move from the passive to the active also became a burden for them. I knew that somehow, despite the crisis this request/demand provoked, the joint carrying of this singular burden (an unworking of sorts) a new relationship (perhaps one that went beyond sharing) could emerge. In the earlier stages of the project I could not understand what made it so difficult for the participant to show me an object and assumed that it was in the way that *I* was making the request where the problem lay. I therefore struggled to formulate what I was asking for, a frustration which is evidenced here in my journal as a parodic rehearsal of sorts:

I want the object to say something about who you are now in this place and time. It can speak of your home, your situation, your family, culture identity. Please make it something special, something you will remember, protect and cherish. It is a home object or a language object or a self object, something that speaks of you at to which you can speak. The object is like a companion, something that follows you and rests with you. Imagine the object as a gift you could give to others, something that could be passed from one pair of hands to another. I am going to spend a lot of time with this object over the next few months so you need to think carefully about the choice you make.

Talking to somebody is relatively easy, but asking them to show you an object intimately connected with their personal history, demands intensive negotiation. With varying degrees of success I would ask the participants the key question, which I framed in three ways: show me an object that represents your home/native/mother language; show me a special object which represents in some way your personal history, do you own an object that speaks of your present life situation. Given that many of my respondents could not understand the abstraction of the question, posed in English; it often took some time to explain the significance of object I was requesting to see. I was surprised to see that many of the participants managed to give me objects that they, themselves found significant, but could never quite understand how this was the case. So the participant, after a period of negotiation would show me the object. This often involved a refusal on my part. Some participants would show me cultural symbols, or images on screen, photocopies, or verbal descriptions which I would refuse to draw.

I wanted something three-dimensional, tactile and corporeal, something with weight, texture, smell, presence, which I could look at within my personal field and draw. This necessitated that the participant had to often search for an object, be given time to think about what they wanted me to draw which really, for me allowed another level of encounter between myself and them.

I could never, in fact, myself formulate a logical reason for the participant to commit to this showing. I saw this indeterminacy as productive in that it could lay the ground for an open and strange relationship based on difference. Once my request was made struggle usually ensued over the meaning and legitimacy of the object and the terms by which it could be 'invited to speak'. In the struggle to choose an appropriate object I was able to communicate to the participant my values as an artist; that I valued ambivalence, not knowing, potency, intimacy, the critical-poetic. The participant was also presented with an opportunity to argue for their criterion in the selection of the object which could be identification, nationalism, nostalgia, memory, sentimentalism. I wanted the object, in more general, terms to 'act' as a third party, or become a living surface upon which our conversation and engagement could proceed (engendering an 'infinite practice of reading'). The object should be a conduit through which an open-ended aesthetic relationship was made. At the same time, I needed the participant to select an object that I could respond to and transform in the animation process. The object needed to be interesting to me if I was going to invest my energy in it and at the same time meaningful to the participant if they were to continue speaking to/of/around it. I resisted selecting the object together because I felt it necessary in terms of my research problem to observe how the participant dealt with this problem and yet despite this the object was after all often arrived at together—collaboratively.

The choice of object constituted a struggle between legitimate culture and the habitus of the participant. What would prevail? If anything, I wanted the negotiation between artist and participant to lead to the point where we could both perhaps understand that our identities could be negotiated. I was not, in fact, a white ethnographer emptying my interlocutors heads of cultural information but an artist-resident interested what the effects of bringing the people living and working in Yeoville into an aesthetic relationship (however we defined that) may be. The home language object became a locus for a struggle of legitimacy. Would I be able to accept certain exhibited forms as having aesthetic value on the same terms as the participant? Would the participant be able to entertain my definition of an aesthetic form/representation? Would the object emerging from this crisis of measurement become set in motion by both the artist and participant and later become meaningful to a broader audience? I will attend to these questions later, and comment briefly now on how these struggles over the selection of a simple 'home language object' played out on the streets of Yeoville.

In the passage below, Njabulo, the third participant to join the project (who was initially highly suspicious of me and amused by my whole endeavour) was able to show me a 'home language object'. This prompted a more open-ended quality in our subsequent conversations. After a sustained argument over whether a simple and summary drawing of an Impi dance in a textbook would be suitable for drawing, Njabulo and I reached agreement in the selection of a new object; a Stetson Hat:

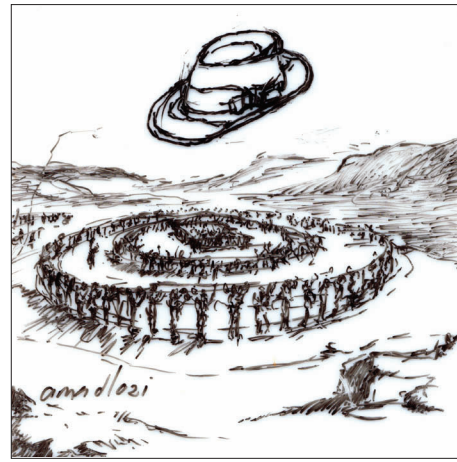
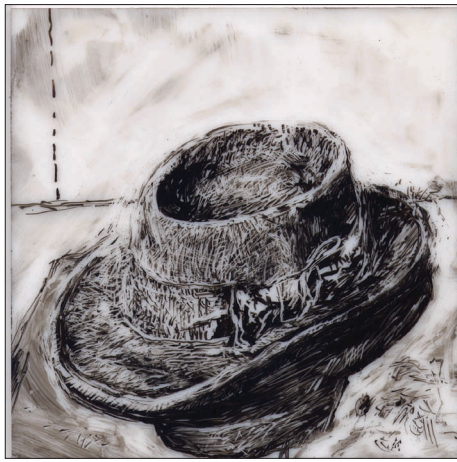


Figure 92: Brenden Gray, Njabulo, *Stetson Hat!* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Njabulo's Stetson Hat, *A Long Walk To Freedom* and Noam Chomsky. I said that I wanted to draw an object hovering over the impi dance that was a symbol for Njabulo's own identity as a Zulu man. Was there anything that he owned that he treasured, something from the days when he was a young man, something he has kept for a long time that he could find for me to see? Njabulo exclaimed 'Stetson hat!', and disappeared into his bedroom to find it. He presented me with the dark brown hat and began to describe his experience of Johannesburg as a young, working man in the seventies and eighties....

... I returned to Njabulo to draw his Stetson hat. It was late on a Sunday afternoon. He welcomed me into his sitting room, which was dimly lit by the sunlight cutting through a slit behind me. He gave me that hat which I placed on a cardboard box on a dark wood, coffee table. The hat was well kept, unworn and stiff made of brown felt, around which was wrapped a silk ribbon into which was inserted a multicoloured feather. I looked at the hat, turning it around in the bad light, and he told me about the circumstances in which it was bought and used... as I drew the hat Njabulo told me about the feelings of betrayal MK vets had toward the Mbeki government. He expounded on the virtues of a Zuma government and I expressed my concerns about the dangers of placing value in personalities rather than policies, and told him about my hopes for a constitutional democracy.

Then a secret and a pledge not to share the information with another. Njabulo told me that he quit his job in Johannesburg in the 80's to become an MK and [...]. I asked him if I could return the following Sunday to draw the hat and learn more about his personal history and views on Yeoville. Despite his earlier cynicism he enthusiastically accepted.

We could agree on the Stetson hat as a subject for drawing because Njabulo felt that imbued in the object was his own history (ontological and public/meta-narrative). By choosing this object he was able to revisit his past and, further, use the object to mediate between his former self and who he was presently. His choice was only reached after sustained listening on my part. Seeing Njabulo search for the object in his house, find it, return to me and turn the hat in the light falling through the blinds so I could see it clearly, I felt that his hat had great potential to satisfy both my aesthetic needs and his own. It could communicate the values of the apartheid era and it was also an object with a rich history in terms of image-making.

In the passage below, Tom and I argue around what object he wants to show me which is dramatized in a sketch I made as we held the conversation. The selection of the home language object constituted a crisis for Tom because it exposed his habitus. He would have preferred that I draw a national symbol rather than a personal object because he did not want me to witness his economic situation:

- **Tom** is a Dabani speaking, Ghananian wood doctor who works as a shoe-repairer under the apricot tree at the Rasta House. We met

there and spoke under the tree as he worked.

Tom's peach tree. Tom sits beside under an old peach tree punching holes in leather, stitching and gluing over his lap, behind tubular steel, melamine table upon which repaired, broken shoes and worn tools are kept. A washing line extends from the peach tree to the broken balustrade, underneath which sits a large plastic basin which suggests that Tom's life really revolves around the Rasta house. I invited him into the project and asked if we could speak further the following Saturday, where I would make a drawing under the peach tree while he was repairing shoes.

For Tom, Nigerians were not to be trusted, - they are not 'morally upright', they lacking 'moral dignity'. Tom blamed the drug problem in South Africa on the Nigerians. As a result of that, at that stage in the project I toyed with the idea of inviting the participants to introduce into the project individual speakers, or members of cultural groups they were suspicious of. Like Samuel, Tom also struggled to identify an object which I could draw to represent the conversation, his biography, or language. He wanted to represent the strength of Ghana and particularly Dabani, but because Tom owned so little he struggled to find an object for me to draw. He offered to accompany me to an internet café to source the Ghanaian flag which I dissuaded him from doing arguing that I needed to draw an object that was tangible, occupied space, and concrete. The response to this demand was that many of the participants in the project thought I was an anthropologist or ethnographer demanding a coherent symbol of their traditional culture or homeland. Some said that I would have to wait for them to go home and fetch the object before I could draw it. I experienced major difficulties throughout the project in explaining and capturing in English, the kind of object I was looking for. I asked Tom to think about it. When I returned a few days later we continued our conversation and Tom, after some goading on my part, asked me to draw his closed, raised fist, with a fish swimming around it. He held up his arm for me for a good part of an hour, while pedestrians walked down Bezuidenhout Street, swinging their heads to see the spectacle.

Tom refused to have his shoe-repairing tools, his table, or the peach tree overhanging his workstation to be drawn perhaps because he believed that he was more than the situation he was presently forced to endure. But I wanted to draw it. The marks and scratches on the table, the taped and wired up tools were indicative of his labour which, by virtue of my training as an artist, was aesthetically interesting to me. I therefore felt a keen urge to exoticise his situation. My suggestion to draw these items failed because Tom wanted to be represented with dignity and power so presented his fist as a symbolic representation of his own defiance against economic situation.



Figure 93: Brenden Gray, Tom , *Fist and Fish* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.



Figure 94: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Hunter Street (For Tom)* , *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

My drawing of the object in the presence of the participant, and my showing of it in their space, prompted further unanticipated ‘showings and sharings’ which for me, became a model for “being in common” (Nancy 1991: 387). The ritual of drawing and showing provided the ground upon which the project could generatively and critically proceed. In the example cited below Njabulo abandoned his original reservations about the project and became interested in using more objects in his immediate environment to relate stories to me. He agrees to commit to the project by introducing me to the next participant, Stefano:

- **Stefano** is an elderly Greek man who has been living in the same house on Hunter street, with his wife, domestic worker and adopted granddaughter for 40 years, where he works as an herbalist, healer, and masseur. I met him in his living room and we spoke about carpentry and the universal condition of man.

Njabulo often reminded me of how much younger I was than him, pointing out my lack of experience in matters political and South African. In many of my later interactions with Njabulo I felt that he did not listen to my point of view, always using the opportunity of our meeting to vent his opinions on the state of the nation. We began to speak about Nelson Mandela and the history of the ANC. He then left the room to fetch his copy of *The Long Walk to Freedom* which he placed on the coffee table beside his hat. I asked if I would borrow it and promised to lend him a book of mine in return, perhaps a short piece by Noam Chomsky. I completed the drawing and showed it to him. He smiled and offered no comment on it, as if I had done my work, he had done his bit, and time to finish up. After we walked into his front garden he pointed to an old Peugeot which had been languishing there for some time. He then told me an extraordinary story about how he had almost been caught at a roadblock, transporting a cache of arms across the border, and how he managed to convince the police that he was merely travelling back from a holiday. Njabulo mentioned in one of our earlier conversations that he knew of a Greek man, living on Hunter street for 30 years who worked as a healer, making medicines from his stock of herbs he grew from his home and shipped in from Greece.

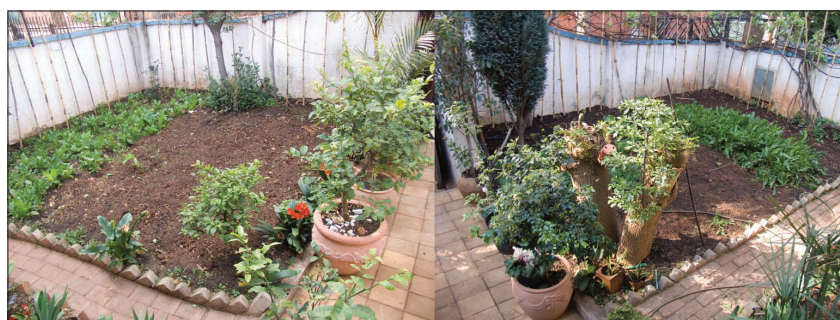
Stefanos showed me a variety of objects that I refused to draw because I felt at the time that he was using the project to promote his own reputation as a healer. It is clear from the scenario below that without a conversational context having been established it became impossible for either myself or the participant to arrive at a productive selection of a home language object. Later Stefanos selected his garden as an ‘subject’ (we agree that an object will not do). We agree because the garden satisfies both my aesthetic criteria and his narrative criteria but also because our relationship, to use Kester’s (2005:82 -83) terms, had become centered on durationality and embeddedness in context:

...Njabulo gave me an elaborate introduction, speaking of the achievements of Stefano, the important people he had met, healed, his certificates. Njabulo explained my project, casting me, somewhat as a white ethnographer, and Stefanos invited me to begin.



Stefanos told me stories from his youth and told me about the Greek island where he grew up. He learnt his skills as an herbal healer from his grandfather who taught him about the medicinal values of the plants on the island. When I asked him what object he would like me to draw, something representing his language, or his own personal history he pointed out a few things, a certificate for carpentry, a Man of the Year award, a photograph of himself posing with the Queen of Swaziland in honour of his healing skills, and a cheap oil painting of the island on which he grew up. I was dissatisfied with each choice, because I wanted to draw a three-dimensional object, rather than a flat graphic one. I told Stefanos this, and found that although his spoken English was very good, he struggled to understand mine, or rather was very selective about what he would listen to. I had the distinct impression that he pretended not to understand English when the person speaking it bothered him.

I telephoned Stefanos to ask if I could come on Sunday. He said yes. When I got to his house he said he could only spend thirty minutes with me. I tried to get straight to the point and asked if I could draw something in his home that represented his home language or personal history. He said repeatedly that he did not understand. I didn't want to choose for him, so I gave up and hoped through further conversation that we might arrive at something. We didn't. Stefanos retold his earlier stories and, provided me with anecdotes into how he had been charitable to black people during the apartheid years, complained about his son in law who had been abusing his daughter.



Showing a participant my journal notes became an important signal that I used to reassure the participant that I was being attentive to their speech and the meaning of their words. This often facilitated the selection and showing of the home language object. If my request for the participant to show me an object constituted an intrusion to their storytelling/our conversation it also troubled our relationship then the reading of the journal performed a suturing role. The participant could read it in many ways:

- as a prompt to engage in a formal interview (which recognized their speech as valuable because it was being preserved),
- a private journal I was keeping to develop my knowledge of their lifeworld,
- and an aesthetic surface upon which we made connections in our conversation (the note taking was accompanied often by sketches, layout experiments etc)
- and a record of a dialogical situation.

In the case of Stefanos (and others), I could use the texture of my annotations as a means by which to determine his and my own readiness to select the home/home language object. Writing became, in effect, a tool that measured the degree of spacing between myself and a given participant. The density and proliferativeness of the writing was an indication of our readiness to proceed to the next 'phase' in the project. As the conversation ensued, the status of this writerly object would shift. To some extent, the reading of extracts from my journal determined how sustained our aesthetic relationship would be. In the encounter cited below, our relationship begins by being marked by mutual alienation and later shifts to become more intimate and animated.

Pastor Alfonso is a Lingala speaking, DRC foreign national, living at his church, Grace Baptist Church in Hunter Street. He is active in many of the neighbourhood's community organisations particularly in integrating newly arrived foreigners into Yeoville. I met him through Jacques and spoke to him on a white sofa, on the veranda, outside the church hall and subsequently in his reception room where we spoke about the meaning of the word 'pastor'.



Alfonso asked me to sit in the front row, and rather than sitting beside me, he pulled a chair off the stage and sat a good two meters away facing me directly, inviting me to begin the interview. He thought about it for a while and then disappeared into the back of the church, and emerged with a jacket which he hung on the back of the chair upon which he was sitting. As with many of the participants in the project, who are community leaders in their own right, I have always felt vulnerable asking this question, as though a call to intimacy was ridiculous. Alfonso surprised me by presenting this jacket proudly, explaining that it was French in form but decorated with traditional imagery from his home village.

'It's good', he chimed, and 'you are good, that quickly'. His two boys pawed the drawing, trying to grab it away from me. I explained that the surface was delicate and said to Alfonso that I would get back to him on how the project was developing.

If the introduction of the home language object into the scene of conversation became a crisis of situational reading for the participant, it also disrupted my own sense of relation to the participant. See how Alfonso, as indicated in the passage above, draws away from me initially and after showing me the object and being shown a drawing of it the distance between us narrows. In our final meeting would this closing distance results in proliferative writing and speaking. Some participants were able to use the home language drawing as a potent site for the collaborative development of the a storyboard. Alfonso was one of the few participants who was able to see the finished drawing as a site for fracture. The home language drawing when seen by him released potentials and thickened in meaning because it did justice to his world view.



In order to justice to the qualitative moments of the thing, thought must thicken its own texture, grow gnarled and close-grained; but in doing so it becomes a kind of object in its own right, sheering off from the phenomenon it hoped to encircle (Eagleton 1990:341)

Sometimes participants would not be tentative in their showings at all, but ask objects to perform deeply significant communicative functions. This was often the case, when the initial conversation/storytelling exhibited a thick and sympathetic relational texture upon which such showings could be performed. I noticed that if our speech was dense in reciprocity and the participant took the opportunity to narrate reflectively when the home object was shown the

experience of making the storyboard would have a greater resonance for them. Drawing such heavily charged objects was difficult for me because I was aware that the introduction of this singularity into the space of narration could be a traumatic experience for the participant as evidenced below:

Figure 95: Brenden Gray, Alfonso, *Jacket and Chair*, (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

I was tired and I was not sure what to do next. My tea was cold and Conrad's grandson was restless constantly interfering with our discussion. Was Conrad feeling that I had interrogated him? I told him that the next step in the project involved him showing me some kind of object that was special to him, that was either special or referred to our conversation in some way. Like these dolls for instance. Conrad immediately got up and went to the wall over his bed, to remove a professional photograph of an elderly man posing in a suit, a bouquet of flowers on his lapel. The man was smiling out the frame as if addressing a gazing group of family members. Conrad announced that this was his father, who had passed away a few months ago. He would like me to draw this. I didn't know what to do. I was tired and needed to get home to bath the kids. Should I inquire about the photograph, why he has chosen it? I decided not to and said I would be glad to make the drawing. Now, as I have mentioned earlier, I was quite averse to drawing photographic material for the project. The frame, though, was so thick and ornate, the photo so deeply set into it that it had a satisfying dimensionality I thought could be captured. Laying the picture on his bed, because I had nowhere else to prop it against, I was forced into drawing it as an object. The form of the object viewed from this angle resembled a coffin, and the image seemed in the class, at that angle, as if distorted by death. I was worried. Conrad left the room. Would I offend him by objectifying this image, which to him was clearly so real? What did he expect? A flattering portrait? A facsimile? What would the point of that be? I decided to go ahead anyway and draw the frame as if it were receding and the photographic image as if it were perpendicular to my line of site or rather parallel to the picture plane. That way it could be an image and an object at once. It was getting late and drawing the ornate carving on the frame was proving to be very difficult. At the same time I had to achieve a certain likeness to Conrad's father. Because my drawing media were so crude, and I was hurried for time, the face kept looking squashed as if it were a caricature of sorts, glaring idiotically from the frame. At one point Conrad entered the room to check on my progress, looked at the face, made a vague snort and left the room. Throughout the drawing session his son kept trying to sit on my lap, asking 'what these pens do' and 'what am I doing here', and 'who am I'. At one point, when my nerves were frayed I asked him to sit down and be quiet. I went outside to smoke and phone Nicole. I will be late. I returned and decided that I would draw until I was making mistakes, then I would stop and leave. Which I did. I asked Conrad's grandson to call him. His reaction to the drawing was strange. He held up the drawing, and then the picture of his grandfather by its side, compared them, gave me my drawing, hung his picture back on the wall, and smiled. 'Thank you Brenden'. I wasn't sure how to take that. It felt like an end of sorts, as if our business was done and it was time for me to leave. I thanked Conrad and asked him if he could introduce me to a Zimbabwean woman he worked with that he had mentioned before. He promised he would speak to her, and said I could phone him in a few days. Nothing came of that.



Figure 96: Brenden Gray, Conrad, *Father in Guilded Frame* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Later in the project, when I was more experienced in facilitating the choosing and showing of the home language object, I was able to contextualize the selection of the home language object with greater confidence. This generated more celebratory ‘showings’ and the ‘telling’ of more intimate concerns related to the object. In the passage below, the home language object, rather than instantiating a crisis generates a site of sociability and further conversation which creates the ground upon which an aesthetic of intimacy is laid:

Lisha is an Igbo speaking Nigerian foreign national who owns a clothing shop and hairdresser on Raleigh Street. I met her as she was sewing in her shop and she told me about marriage in her home village.

Her husband had been married in South Africa at the magistrate’s court but had to return home, to their village for the real thing. An Igbo girl is not married until the groom has ‘knocked at the door’, meaning he has solicited the parents of the girl, and offered them a bride price that they are willing to accept. I asked if this was material or symbolic and she said that generally it was material, but the bride’s parents, depending on the boy’s character and financial situation may accept symbolic gifts. The parents then meet privately with the girl and confer with her until they have made their decision. In the old days, she said they could decide alone without the consultation of the girl. Lisha told me about their marriage ceremony, how she knelt before her husband to be, he drinks from a bowl, hands it to her and then she drinks to the clapping of the community. I asked more questions about Igbo culture and her husband interjected, stopping work on the decoder. He told me that in his culture every man carries a title. The conferring of a title is what defines a man and is usually bestowed by a successful man but usually the chief. The bestowal takes place at a ceremonial feast before the community. I asked both of them where they consider their home to be, and they were unanimous in saying that it was Mogota, the place from which they originated which they ‘would never abandon’, but that there was a unified Nigerian community living in Yeoville, holding ‘Okas’ (town meetings) regularly at a venue in the Johannesburg CBD, that centered on assisting Nigerians in need through support, ceremony and financial assistance.

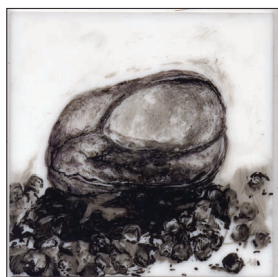


Figure 97: Brenden Gray, Lisha, *Kola Nut*
(Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

She bemoaned how in South Africa traditional values were being perverted with people marrying ‘to get papers’. She mentioned that she had problems getting a birth certificate for her first child that was born in South Africa, so I told her about the project’s interest in xenophobia and whether she had experienced it in Johannesburg. When she was pregnant with her child, she went to the Joburg Gen for maternity classes. She could understand nothing of the instructions the nurses were giving to the group, and asked if they could speak in English, which they refused to do, so yes, she had experienced it. Often she heard South Africans say that ‘you Nigerians must go, we are tired of you’. She said that government officials were especially guilty of practicing discrimination against foreigners, citing how a doctor at a clinic in Boksburg refused to treat her because she was Nigerian. Lisha said she noticed that in comparison to Nigerian women, South African women fall pregnant too early, that she notices on the street ‘young girls carrying babies’. For Nigerians, education is central and young women fight to get into university, but here, she said, there isn’t this kind of ‘dedicated attitude’. Despite their poverty, Lisha explained, many young South African women will not hawk goods on the street but rather sit at home and be lazy.

Inside a plastic bag were beads of various kinds, pepper corns, kola nuts, and photographs from their wedding. He took me through just about every person that was in attendance, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, aunts, and explained their attire. He then offered me a kola nut and explained the significance of offering it to a person that had entered his house. I had to recite a line he gave me before I bit into the kola nut. He said that the kola nut was at the center of life in his village, and indeed Igbo culture, used in welcoming rituals and marriage, an expensive gift to express your hospitality and openness toward others.

For the participant below, Mzila, it is our joint misunderstanding of what the home language object might have been that launched an absurd quest to find it. This provided the basis for a more intimate relationship. In effect, despite our mutual misrecognition (I felt that I would have done his narrative an injustice by not accepting an ethnic symbol which he felt I should given that I was a researcher collecting cultural artifacts) we came to know each another more intimately through the search for an obscure object.

Mzila fled Maputo during the civil war after his older brother was killed in an accident. He has been working at FlaDiogo Drycleaners as a tailor on Rockey Street for the past 10 years, and lives in an outhouse on Webb Street. His native tongue is Citshwa. I met him at the drycleaners and at his home where we spoke about loss and intimacy.



On a walk down Rockey Street, the month before I had met Mzila a man who repaired clothing at the FlaDiogo drycleaner, situated between Raymond and Bezuidenhout. I had been avoiding walking down Rockey/ Raleigh Street for some time, probably because it was so crowded, and everyone on the street was so preoccupied with business. To look out of place on that street to me was dangerous, because every person standing in the street is trying to solicit something.

He had made a place for himself in the foyer of the drycleaner squeezing his entire business in the space between the door and the wall in the shop, surrounded by heaps of clothing, scraps of material. He was clearly a popular service with a number of customers interrupting us as we spoke to collected repaired jeans, shirts etc. We made arrangements for me to meet him on Sunday, on the



south west side of Yeoville at his place on Saunders Street. I arrived at a well-kept white house, and Mzila opened the black gate to let me inside. We walked around to the back of the house, where he had a small room. The place was immaculately organised and because of this he had space for a small sitting area, a bed, and place for cleaning and washing. There was something feminine about this room, with its lace curtains and elaborate bed spreads. Mzila seemed nervous and offered me a cup of tea. When I took out my notebook he became very formal, thinking that I had come for a history lesson on his home language which he proceeded to give.

...I then asked what object he wanted me to draw, but did not understand the immediate importance of showing me something personal or perhaps autobiographical and instead told me about the Chinzala, a basket made in Mozambique and insisted that I must draw this. I made a drawing in my notepad and said that I would source it at the Rosebank market. I did not want to disappoint him, or trivialise his life and circumstances by drawing one of the interesting objects I saw in his room. I would spend the next two weeks trying to find this serving implement and fail.



[...] We went in, and Mzila introduced me to an old man who worked at the back, fixing shoes, bicycle tyres, and small appliances. From ceiling to floor was stacked bits of rubber, leather, shoes, and in one corner pieces of sewing machines that must have been at least one hundred years old. Mzila then launched into a prolonged description of the basket he had seen only yesterday at the shop display window. The old man said that he was rearranging the room, so it could be anywhere. We then searched the place, tipping over boxes, scratching through piles of shoes and packets but came up with nothing. The man promised to get back to Mzila if he found it as he was rearranging his things.

Figure 98: Brenden Gray, Mzila, *Chinzala* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Later the 'chinzala' became a vessel through which Mzila reflected on the loss of his brother and his displacement from his home in Mozambique. He asked me to transform the object into a tea cup in which a 'storm breaks out':

15/12/08
9h00- 10h30

Bewildered by the process. Poorly explained. Interrupted his work. Customers. Looks almost shocked by storyboard, confused. Offer to visit later at his home.

19h00- 20h30

Much more intimate. Begin contextualizing project and little understanding. Explain animation process and relate storyboard to conversation. Triggers great deal of interest, identifies AK47/lightning bolt in tea cup as central image. Relates story of brother's death and ties to political situation in Mozambique. Uncanny that I drew him prior to knowing dead in a boat. Word storm in "storm in a tea cup" translated into Zulu and Citswa. Title agreed on. Copious notes and drawings generated to clarify. What is expected of me problematic. Girlfriend with him, intimate home space, more comfortable, neighbor arrives, asks questions, useful to clarify. Clearly understands the aim of the exhibition and workshop. Original notes and acetate drawing very useful. Space, intimacy and time critical to generating understanding. Photograph very formal. Relaxed mood, offers me Fanta strawberry.



Figure 98: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Becker Street (For Mzila)* and his commentary, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

In one of the final meetings in the project, I took a different approach in requesting the participant to show a home language object. I attempted to weave my request into the narrative of the participant so that it did not come as a surprise but rather a natural extension of her story. However, even here, in asking for a showing, a certain anxiety was evidenced:

Mrs Singh, a Gujarati speaking, 3rd generation Indian shopkeeper, who has lived and worked in Yeoville with her family, for the past 35 years. I met her in her shop on Cavendish road where she smokes behind a caged counter and later spoke with her in her condominium in Bruma. She told me about her nostalgia for the old days of Rockey street and we discussed crime, and the new Yeoville Community.

I had been pestering Mrs. Singh, the owner of Buddies for about a month for an appointment. In my experience in the project, you never could tell if someone was delaying a meeting because they weren't interested or because they were busy. Sometimes my tenacity was a sign of interest which was later welcomed. Mrs. Singh agreed to meet me at her home in Bruma on a Wednesday morning, the address 'Beverley Hills' and it was in miniature. I drove up a steep driveway into a complex of flats modeled on the kind of mansions one would see there. Happiness, Mrs. Singh's assistant was in the driveway beside the company bakkie. [s]he said that she had spent 35 years in the area. I said, 'you said that you can speak Gujarati. What generation Indian are you? Were you born in South Africa?'. She said that she was and that she wasn't certain, but her grandparents may have immigrated to South Africa from Pakistan. She was immediately prompted by this to talk about her shop on Rockey street, which I could see held memories that were pivotal in regard to her family and perception of Yeoville.

She said that when they first moved into Yeoville, her children were still very young and they opened a shop on Rockey street, which was “a wonderful place”, that Yeoville was predominantly Jewish and residential, but that the street had an amazing night life. She explained how the shop would operate from 9 in the morning until 2 the following morning, especially on weekends. I knew the shop she was talking about, on the corner of Raymond and Rockey. I used to buy things there when I was a school boy, and watched as it became the haunt for drug dealers who would elicit trade from that exact corner. Recently the entire complex had been bought by Maurice Smithers and other “community minded” residents of Yeoville in the hope that if they could manage that building effectively it may have a spillover effect on the rest of the street. What was amazing about what followed was how Mrs.

Singh could recall exactly what her customers would routinely buy. She said that Rosemary, a woman who owned a collectibles shop on exclaimed that I knew her, that she ‘Reminiscences’. Mrs. Singh said she day and ask for one loaf of bread, milk. She mentioned that Joe Slovo, would come to her shop, which and chat to her husband. The café in Yeoville and did well because it the time. I asked her how long the



to move. Her family ran the shop from 1984 to 2000. They moved to Durban for two years to have a break, because things got bad in the area and considered ‘winding up the business’. She said that as the foreigners began to move into the area, crime increased and drugs began to be sold outside her family’s shop. “We could see what was coming”. Mrs. Singh mentioned that her husband had passed away and I expressed my condolences, because I had known him from the days at the Buddies on Cavendish street. I asked her about her sons, all of whom I know from visiting the chains in the area. All were now probably in their late twenties or early twenties. I asked if they were all working in the family business. She said their names were, Mohammed (the fast talking son on Cavendish), Billal, (the more sober, serious son who used to run the shop on the corner of my street) and Suhail who I did not know. When they returned from Durban, they closed the shop on Rockey street opened the first new shop on Cavendish and her husband opened two more shops so that her sons could start their own businesses given that two of them were not interested in studying further. She went back to the shop on Rockey street and lamented the good old days there, saying that it ‘would never improve, we would never go back, because of the stealing, alcohol and drugs’. I asked Mrs. Singh about her present feelings toward Yeoville and how she felt about the crime. I added that I had noticed two years ago that they had erected cages around the counters. She said that she was held up two years ago, late at night, by a group of eight men who robbed the twenty customers in the store and took all of the money on the premises. Luckily, she said, she was in the shop, and not her son Mohammed who would have refused to surrender (‘he works night shifts’). A family meeting was held and it was decided to beef up the security at all of the stores. She said that the stress of running the shop is what killed her husband who died from a heart attack, so now she was running the business on her own. Throughout the conversation Mrs. Singh said that she intended to wind up all of the stores and move to Durban where she had a house. I asked her what kind of relationship she had with her present customers seeing that the demographic in the area had changed so much. “Fantastic”, thirty percent of her regular customers were older residents of Yeoville and seventy new and foreign. Because of this her son, Mohammed had become multilingual. She said, however, that she was still affected by the robbery and wanted to sell up, but keep the house she still owns in Yeoville, on Rockey street and convert it into a mosque as a gift to the people

lot on what Mrs. Singh said during the end, said that she met Happiness when rands and gradually he become more trust my workers more than some she took him away from gambling this thanking her for her generosity. Singh wanted me to draw, I asked if from the days of the old shop, and she find seeing that the house where even few years ago. Happiness was de-



an album of photographs from those days and would be glad to share them with me. He promised to deliver it to the shop over the next few days. The conversation went well, and I told Mrs. Singh that I would make the drawing and consider setting the entire animation at the corner where the shop used to be. She said that it hurt her to see what that corner had become but was enthusiastic about the idea. I thanked her for the time she had given me, and Happiness escorted me to my car, saying how much he appreciated his ‘mama’ for everything she had done for him.

the street was her first customer. I had moved her shop to Melville, would come into her shop every a packet of cigarettes and a litre of Jay Naidoo, and Tokyo Sexwale was called the Rock n’ Roll Café was host to ‘exclusive people’ living was the only café on the street at shop operated and why she decided

in the area. Happiness reiterated a conversation, and Mrs. Singh at the he was seventeen years old to run er-important in the family business. “I members of my family.” Apparently and crime and Happiness confirmed Instead of asking directly what Mrs. she had any photographs or objects said yes, but it would be difficult to rything was stored was broken into a lighted to inform her that he had kept

Figure 99: Brenden Gray, Mrs Singh , *Family Photograph* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Mrs. Singh's selection of the object painfully reminded her of the days of familial happiness. It became an index of nostalgia (a ontological narrative overlays a more public one) and an object by which I could develop a commentary about how the high streets have changed over the past few decades. I did this by producing an animation where a photorealist drawing of Mrs. Singh's family photograph from the 80's was overlaid on footage of a fight breaking out at night on Rokeby street. This gently dissolved to reveal Stefanos's garden making a connection between Stefanos's openness to neighbourhood change and Mrs. Singh's nostalgia for the good old days of white Yeoville. When I returned a few months later to Mrs. Singh, with the storyboard that I developed for her, she immediately related to the iconography. Although she could not explain the reasons for her interest, she agreed to attend the final exhibition and organize the catering.

I conclude with this section by highlighting how the request to show me an object and my investment in it through drawing prompted further showings, sharings and explorations. Below Joshua begins to unearth a range of materials after I ask him to show me an object:



Joshua is an elderly business man and ex-Israeli army soldier who lives with his Congolese wife and two children, above his internet café on Cavendish road. I met Joshua through Michelle, the woman managing his business. We spent many evenings arguing over the dining room table in his kitchen about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and communism.

I had made contact with Joshua the Israeli man who owned the internet café on Cavendish Street. He had just returned from the Congo on a business trip and invited me to see him on a Saturday morning at 10 am. I phoned him from the front door and he came to collect me. He lives on the top floor of the building, in a penthouse apartment that overlooks Yeoville and Observatory. We sat in his living room, and I shared the project with him, showing him drawings I had made, and gave him information about the project.

The conversation up to this point had been intense, and I wondered if I could test a question I never had the guts to ask other participants. Throughout the interview I had the sense that I was talking to a man of such a breadth of life experience that to ask the question I wanted to ask would not offend or intimidate him. 'If there was a theme running through your life what would it be? Is there any kind of trend running through your life, an idea that has preoccupied you?' This was the first time that I had met Joshua and I could not believe that I had the audacity to ask such a question. Joshua was quiet for a while, thinking, pacing around the room and then said, 'Yes'. When he visited the Karnak temple city in Egypt to see an outdoor light show, the tour guide told him that 3000 years ago 80 000 slaves lived in this city. Joshua said he reflected carefully on this and thought, 'what is the purpose of religion if it is only to keep one above the others? Every town has a cathedral, but what about a doctor, or a school. People can worship under a tree. What are our motives in life? We are like puppets, the products of our religion, culture, nationality. Aggression is driven by these things. Nothing is worth going to war for'. There was something poignant in this, as if Joshua was saying that perhaps his own Zionist beliefs were in some kind of doubt, that maybe his life of defending a state needed interrogation. I asked Joshua if people were products of their language and he said probably yes. The interview ended with Joshua illustrating his point with the conflict between two presidents in Congo Brazzaville when he was living there, was driven by greed. I asked Joshua if there was anything he had from Israel that was special to him that he wanted me to draw. He thought about it and took me over to the bookshelf. He showed me a small bronze portrait of Theodor Herzl and a semi-abstract sculpture of three women intertwining in some kind of dance. He said that an artist friend had made these and then showed me a monograph of his work, describing him as a famous Israeli artist. I would be very happy to draw this. Joshua

then took out another photo album and showed me black and white photographs of him as a service man, posing with friends in various dusty landscapes, always in the presence of some sign of war; a jeep, gun, and broken monuments. I asked Joshua if I could perhaps use some of these landscapes for the animation sequence I was going to design for him and he had no problem with this. Joshua then led me down to a small bedroom underneath the flat and began pulling out his art collection, trying to find a drawing he had made when he was younger.



Figure 100: Brenden Gray, Joshua, *Head* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

In most cases, the selection of the home object reiterated major themes that took place in our earlier conversations/storytelling sessions. This suggests that the selections that the participants made were hardly incidental or unconsidered. They tended to invest in the decision making process intensely which revealed an aesthetic disposition to their environment. In this way, their selections absolutely refute the notion of a working class mired in a 'primitive' universe:

a working class world more sunk in nature than the "primitive" universe of the ethnologists since objects there have only the value of utility and foods only the function of filling oneself us- since one is reproduced here "as such" without rites of seduction, education or passage (Rancière 2003: 196).

We see a critical reiterativenss in the choices of many participants; among them Keaton, Sheri and Brilliant. Sheri's story dealt with a lack of hospitality in South Africa. To prove to me that she is hospitable she invited me to draw her daughter and her doll the image of which ironically registers a empathy for others (a lonely young girl attached to her doll):

She reiterated her feelings on the lack of hospitality of South Africans, and said that they need to 'know what is happening in the world, and learn to go out'. I asked what else needed to be done to make South Africans more accommodating. She said that free education needed to be offered up to university level, laws regarding foreigners in the country needed to be relaxed so that someone like her daughter could gain citizenship, and that there are far too many people with guns in South Africa which made it unsafe. She explained how in Cameroon, guns were used only for ceremonial purposes such as funerals. 'No guns and free education, I struggle to understand why South Africans behave in this way. Here people use guns. In Cameroon guns are not something normal. Guns don't exist in my country'. Sheri had agreed to only speak with me for an hour so she said we needed to go, and invited me to walk with her to her flat to introduce me to her daughter so that I could make the drawing the following day. We made our way down Rockey Street in the dark, and it occurred to me that Sheri was a single mother, and would often walk alone, late at night to her flat on Hunter Street. She walked quickly, her eyes flickering from side to side, nervous to be walking with a white man at night down the busy high street. As we were walking, she said that in South Africa there was real poverty. In other African countries, she said, people had land, so they could at least eat, but here, especially in the township the poverty was much deeper. I said that she was very brave walking alone at night from work and she brushed it aside saying that you have to do what you have to do. We reached a large complex of flats, painted in Brilliant yellow. It seemed as if the property had been recently renovated but when we entered the block it was clear that the building was still in a state of disrepair. Her flat was on the first floor in the corner. She led me into a small room that functioned as a bedroom, dining and TV room. Her daughter, a six year old, with amazing energy and curiosity greeted me and bombarded me with questions. Sheri said that I would be back the following morning to draw her and her doll. Her daughter was excited about this but I was disturbed because Sheri told me that she would not be present when I was there so I would be alone with her daughter. As I left, I shared my concern with her but Sheri reassured me that she trusted me and asked me to phone her when I arrived the next day.



Figure 101: Brenden Gray, Sheri , *Neh and Doll*, (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

The next morning I made my way up the steps. Telephone directories in plastic bags, and bound in elastics were stacked up in front of the tenant's doors. I knocked on Sheri's. No-one answered. I phoned her and knocked again. Sheri's daughter opened the door, and when I entered I saw a woman, about thirty years of age, wearing her pajamas cooking breakfast. Sheri's daughter led me into the dining room, where she was watching Nigerian soap operas, playing with her doll. I took out my drawing materials and she asked if she could draw with me. I thought this would be a good idea because it might make her sit still. I began drawing and asked her why she went to school at 2 in the afternoon. According to her and her mother, Sacred Heart offered classes to poorer children, especially immigrants after school hours. I continued to draw and the woman entered the room occasionally to look at my drawing. After two hours of keeping Sheri's daughter busy I had completed a drawing of her, with her doll in the background. I left with the promise that I would scan her drawing and print it to be delivered a few hours later.

See how Sheri trusted me to work alone in her flat with her daughter because she saw the drawing of the home language object as representing my symbolic investment in her situation. I was able to develop a relationship with her daughter by producing the work in her flat. The drawing that she made with me (a self portrait) became the starting point for the development of the storyboard which attempted to depict the alienation foreigner parents feel when living in South Africa.

Keaton's selection of the home language object signaled, for me, his aspirations as preacher and he showed, in the passage below a need to display the home language object directly against his own body.

He opened a scratched white door, and ushered me into the front room where there was nothing but a badly damaged couch. He asked me if I wanted a cool drink, and I said no. He insisted so I asked him for a bottle of spring water from Buddies. I sat there for five minutes. Another man emerged from a room, blocked off from the front room by a dull green curtain. He greeted me and I said that Keaton was out buying me a drink. He smiled and went to the kitchen. Following his movement with my eyes, I noticed that the wall was covered in thousands of cockroaches that it seemed were living quite harmoniously with the residents of the flat. Keaton returned out of breath and handed me my drink. He then vanished into another room and emerged wearing a knitted, yellow, green and red scarf into which the words 'vision power' has been embroidered. He was also wearing a beaded necklace attached to a crucifix. He said, 'this, this is what I want you to draw'. I told him that he would have to take it off unless he felt like sitting still for an hour and a half. He insisted. So for at least an hour Keaton sat immobilised, quiet, sweating as I drew these objects around his neck.



Figure 102: Brenden Gray, Keaton, *Power Scarf* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

My conversation with Desta centered on freedom of speech within contexts of political instability. To share this theme, he selected an Ethiopian coffee maker as the subject of the drawing. He saw the object as a remediative symbol because it represented the hospitality and sociability of 'his people'.

By chance, on the following Sunday as I was taking photographs on Hopkins street and I passed by a restaurant crammed full of men, so full that many had to stand outside in the drizzle to watch the soccer game through the window. With little hope I asked anybody if they had seen Desta and one helpful man, squeezed his way into the restaurant to find him. Desta emerged and I implored him, if it were possible to conduct the interview now. We spoke on the edge of the wall into the darkness as the soccer game flickered in the background.

I began with the tree that Desta had been asking me to draw. He told me about 'odaa warekha', the sign of Oromo, being a tree, under which the elders sit, and Oromo people pray. Desta spent some time telling me about the origins of Oromo and the people who speak it. When I asked about Oromo speakers in Johannesburg, about where they lived and if they were unified geographically, the conversation very quickly turned to politics, with Desta grinding his teeth and saying 'I hate tribalism', explaining that the ruling party was using ethnicity as a way of disuniting the country.

I asked Desta why Ethiopians were moving to South Africa, and he said because of the political instability in their country. 'We are not free to speak, gather, and have meetings. Their [the Amharic speaking government] is putting hatred between ethnic groups'. He explained how language is forced upon people depending upon which province they live, illustrating in how the Tigris province, the population is forced to speak in Tigris, because the ruling regime fear infiltration from other tribes. He said that he was a proud supporter of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, the opposition party in Ethiopia, which had won the previous elections, but whose supporters were arrested and jailed for their involvement. Desta told me that he had left Ethiopia because of the door to door harassment of supporters of the coalition, the squashing of strikes and demonstrations. I asked Desta if the community of Ethiopians living in Yeoville suffered from the same disunity back home and he confirmed that they did, with particular ethnic groups, living in their own houses, blocks and flats. 'There is a lack of trust... we cannot form intimacy.' But he said, Ethiopians are beginning to recognise that the ruling party is poisoning the people. I asked if language played any role in solving the problems that faced Ethiopia and he said it did because people are ashamed to speak another's language, and that Amharic has been stigmatised because of its association with the ruling party. 'Language is used as a weapon to discriminate, used to divide people'. Desta clearly saw himself as an agent of change in terms of the issues he had outlined, saying that he wanted others to see him associating with all Ethiopians. He dreams of democratic elections in his country, hopeful that 'these things will come to an end'. Our conversation became more intense, exploring what it means act morally and how one exercises freedom.

I managed to get hold of Desta on a number of occasions about making him a drawing, but always arrived at the same problem, he would direct me to a market in downtown Johannesburg where I would find plenty things from Ethiopia. He was clearly under the impression that I wanted to capture an image of the country. At last he agreed to meet me there, at the market, to buy me some coffee. After work on a Tuesday, I drove to the Joburg Mall on the corner of Pritchard and Market Street. I asked the parking attendant where it was and found a row of clothes shop on of which I entered and enquired within. They directed me up a flight of steps that cut the shop in two. I phoned Desta on the way up and got cut off. I asked they directed me to a restaurant in first floor. There I saw him gambling men, wearing a leather jacket and quite influential there and spent a saw me, sat bolt upright, told his me warmly. So he guided me to a a clean well decorated shop that and clothing fabric. It functioned as shop, restaurant, cloths shop and that the whole building was occupied by Ethiopians. A beautiful woman, clearly the manager of the place, and knowing Desta approached us and ushered us to a corner of the shop, where stools with cushions had been arranged with a group of low tables, around a pot of coffee and bowls of popcorn. She did not say a word and Desta said that I must try the popcorn with the coffee and proceeded to explain to me the ritual in his country of offering coffee as a sign of hospitality, using the poster depicting a woman offering coffee to an imagined viewer to do so. The coffee was delicious and Desta said he wanted me to draw the coffee pot. I said that it would take me some time and that he need not spend the next hour and a half with me. So he went back to his game of cards and I sat perched on a stool, undisturbed making his drawing. I packed up when I was done, called Desta and we returned to the shop where he bought me a special fruit drink made of mango, avocado and watermelon. He liked the drawing and was eager to move into the next stage of the project. We drank our juices together and then Desta showed me cooking equipment used in Ethiopia in various shops in the mall. I thanked him and said I would contact him later to invite him to the animation workshop.



Figure 103: Brenden Gray, Desta, *Coffee maker* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

The case cited below was perhaps one of the most interesting to me because the object became a site of intense personal significance to the participant. This was the one case where the object was given significantly more value through my process of drawing:

Brilliant's Staff. Like many of the foreign men I met during my project, his family, a son and a daughter and his wife, were at home in Malawi and he sent them money every month to sustain them. He said that he went home a few days a year to see them. And that was that. Interview finished. I asked Brilliant if he had an object that I could draw which represented his life in Malawi. He said that he needed to get back to work but that I should come back at five and he would speak with me.

When I returned, he took me into the guesthouse, offered me a chair at the table by the pool, tucked neatly away between the wall and the building and told me to wait. When he returned he was carrying a small staff, or knobkerrie and sat down with me at the table. He said that this was an object that his grandfather had passed on to his father, and now recently on to him. It was a representation of a title deed that indicated which farm in his home town was his by inheritance. This was his most precious possession. When he returned home no one would argue that his land was not his if he showed them this object. He then gave it to me and added that he wanted to see a dove perching on it. I told him that I would do that but because of this request I would only be able to complete half the drawing now. Brilliant left me to draw as the sun was setting. A friend of his sat at the table with me, not saying a word, only once or twice requesting to see the progress. I asked the man at the table to call Brilliant and when he came back he marveled at the drawing, saying like so many before, 'yes that is it' but adding 'it is beautiful'. I promised him that I would find a dove to draw over the next few days even if I had to visit a zoo, but that I would probably photograph it.



Figure 104: Brenden Gray, Brilliant, *Dove on Rod* (Home language object drawing) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

As I have argued earlier, the drawing of the home object provided the ground upon which myself and a participant could embark on a more extended investigation into how their experience could be represented aesthetically and also how their narrative could be incorporated into a broader image of Yeoville as a neighbourhood. Much of the project entailed cycles of making and 'carrying back', where the visual text/aesthetic representation was responded to by the participant and reworked by myself for further discussion and investigation. Here I discuss how participants responded to both the in situ *making* of the 'home language object drawing' and the final drawing itself. This drawing was made in the space of the participant, usually in their company, so that they could observe the drawing develop as they went about their daily business.

I found that, in many cases, participants responded to the drawings in the way they knew how and that in my observations I needed to be attentive to the modality of response or run the risk of not seeing one at all. In general the showing of the object elicited more intense participation than the showing of the drawing. Although many of the participants felt the need to congratulate me on the production of the drawing, to show some kind of appreciation, other less visible responsive signals existed. Rather than seeing the objects and texts I brought to them as art objects to be decoded or

deciphered (which is often the case in the art gallery) participants most often responded performatively to the images in the way that they knew how; by initiating more showing and sharing in their immediate environment. This suggested to me that in their own environments the discursive, abstract, and totalising readings associated with the aesthetic representations as it is shown in a gallery setting was completely absent. Again and again, I saw a participant responding in a bodily sense and contextually to an art work. The drawings triggered concrete movements in space. This is not to say that there were not occasions in which the presentation of the drawing elicited a discursive response but on the whole the responses of the participants were performative and action-oriented. The drawings, in other words, allowed a participant to *activate their habitus*. The home language drawings, presented in these informal contexts, were not seen as artworks in their own right but rather as catalysts for further action and speaking (which was certainly not the case when they were recontextualised in a gallery setting). If, as Danto has argued, context (in the fullest sense of the word) is the means by which we apprehend material as art, then the making and presentation of these drawings in the informal domain (in the space of the participant- their home, office, etc.) would elicit a special kind of response that was different to that of showing the drawing in a formal studio based setting, or workshop scenario.

Below, we see the participant's response to the drawing framed by the context of the dialogical situation itself. The durational and temporal nature of the relationship between myself and Stefanos would prompt not a verbal interpretation of the drawing I showed him but a celebratory activity seemingly disconnected, semiotically, from the drawing itself:

The next day I phoned Stefano. He is never there when you call but always returns it. I said I would like to see him to make a drawing of one of the herbs in his garden. For some reason, he was really excited about seeing me and invited me over on a Wednesday afternoon. When I arrived, Stefano told me that he had just come back from Greece and been awarded the highest honour for his work in medicine. He regaled me with stories about how he had met up with old friends in Greece who could not recognise him because he appeared to be so young. He would lie and say he was Stefanos's son, and that Stefanos had passed away and then after some time surprise them and say 'I am Stefano'. After such stories he would show me how he could get up from a chair without the assistance of his arms despite being in his mid seventies. Stefano showed me his certificate, and asked how the project was progressing and I told him how good it was that after securing the interest of 29 people he, one of the first participants had agreed to allow me to make a drawing. I ventured to ask if I could draw his garden, and in response he took me to the front to show me all of the variety of herbs and vegetables that were beginning to sprout, asking me to taste some and making recommendations as to how they should be cooked. I decided for the first time to take photographs of the subject matter, worrying that Stefano may change his mind. He seemed very proud of this and asked me to take photographs of his certificate, a photograph of himself holding a gold medal, and his domestic servant's daughter (whom he considered a granddaughter) with him whom I did. I praised his granddaughter's ability to speak at the age of two, Sotho, English and Greek, and suggested that the animated sequence show his garden growing around the two of them standing in the lane that cuts it in two. He liked this idea and told me that he is already teaching her about his medicinal practice. I said I would return every week to take a photograph of his garden growing.



Stefanos's garden becomes the site through which he could imagine a transformative narrative. If, by presenting the participant with an artwork in their own domestic setting, place of work they felt prompted to show and share, then, in more formalised communicative settings (i.e. workshops held in church rooms, my studio) participants tended to respond more discursively, setting their speech, rather than their environment, in motion, in relation to the image. The participants responding to images, in their homes, *gathered their environment into the image*. Their responses, here were far more expansive than in a workshop or gallery setting. With my facilitation they were able to distil and connect a set of key issues which could later inform my creative process. Once a participant had moved from storytelling, into conversation, and responded to the request to show me an object, I produced the drawing which most participants knew from the outset would be 'set in motion' by their responses, leading to the production of a storyboard. The storyboard workshops formed the basis for an animated projection, representing and intermingling all of the participants narratives/conversations that would be publicly viewed by the broader Yeoville community or all the participants in the project. The workshops formalised what had hereto been an informal process which elicited an entirely different quality of response:

We arrived at my front gate and I embarrassedly pointed to the shebeen across the road which was a constant source of irritation for me. I had set up the workshop in my studio and led Alaghi there. I asked Alaghi to give me an idea of his feelings toward Yeoville. As he spoke I recorded his comments on a long sheet of acetate. His belief was that Yeoville 'could grow' because of its multiculturalism but that crime was rampant in the area. He connected this to his own mission to preach people to 'change people for good' encouraging them to 'work together'. He then connected this to the xenophobia he had experienced, saying that we need to know 'why God has brought us here'. Like other foreigners I had spoken with, he believed that the multiculturalism in Yeoville was something to celebrate, that the idea 'that you are not my race' was the problem. 'No-one is an island of knowledge...if we learn from each other we will grow together'. I was struggling to connect this to images for a storyboard, although the themes that Alaghi had developed were so clear. As I began to make suggestions through drawing: a sewing machine typing out Arabic script, a map of tributaries on a his bhengma garment, a reflective heart, Kadar expressed some beautiful phrases: 'do away with the tribalism and borders in our hearts', 'God makes difference deliberately so we can't expect life to be simple', 'as a stranger I found myself in their midst'. We agreed that the animation sequence should focus on the idea of difference as an opportunity for learning, to know yourself. I suggested that the garment he had asked me to draw at the beginning of the project was to be dissolved into Arabic script and the typography, secrete into images; opening and closing and finally resolve itself into a verse from the Koran which he said he would provide at a later stage. Alaghi was explicit about the fact that I should not use any figurative imagery in his animation because of the prohibition to do so in Islam. He refused to have his picture taken for the workshop, and asked instead that I should take a photograph of a mosque, perhaps the new one in town, print it and present it to him the following week.

On the whole, the showing of the home language drawing in and of itself did not throw up any significant or profound responses (identification or appreciation was the primary response). When the participant was told that the object would be subject to further processes of animation, intervention and publication it became more resonant for them. In other words, when shown to the participant, the home language object drawing "remained silent about its legitimacy" (Rancière 2003: 188) it "induced the mute discourse of the object". If the showing of the drawing generally prompted silence, then the reconfiguration of that object into a different kind of text, a more designerly montage promised to elicit a completely different response. Unlike the participants' responses to the home language object drawings, their response to the storyboards was chattering, garrulous and generative. They were now able to perform on an image rather than merely respond to it.

Storyboards: speech and proliferation.

To conceive more broadly the modes of symbolic violence that lead each to do his 'own business', we need to turn away from the great reproductive machine and look at these small machines whose movements, free within the space of their own necessity, espouse and retrace the configuration of the social field. We need to consider the forms of habitus through which social agents enabled the incorporated past to serve the anticipation of possible futures. For the fatalist image of the machine we need to substitute that of the market where free choices contributed to setting the price of products, but also where subjects who delude themselves about their freedom to sell or buy anything at any price are soon acquainted with the limits of this freedom. Even better, one has to conceive of social practices within the category of a game, where the science of the moves transcends knowledge of rules (Ranciere 2003: 182).

Once a participant had moved from storytelling, into conversation, and responded to the request to show me an object, I would produce the drawing which most participants knew from the outset would later be set in motion by their responses. This led to the production of the printed storyboard which would form the basis for a broader animated projection, representing and intermingling all of the participants narratives/conversations. This, they were told would be publicly viewed by the broader Yeoville community and the participants in the project.

This process of returning to each participant to show them the storyboard and share this information was one of the most intense and exhilarating experiences of the project. During this two week period, the project seemed to enfold upon itself in a generative way. If the aesthetic is merely an institutional effect, then the experience of returning to the participant negated that idea completely. It seemed to me that the durationality built into each relationship between myself and a participant began to exhibit a kind of self-regulating, recursive autopoietic autonomy of its own.

I had a glimpse, in this stage of the project, of what I may be trying to achieve. My attempt to construct a community of strangers and images, however small however meager and meek a dream, it appeared, seemed in returning to the participants, worth achieving. This belief may have been a supreme naivety on my part and yet I pressed on. If I had managed to make a connection to people I would never have otherwise met or considered in my lifetime then it must have been possible for me to dream on a larger scale and imagine a larger conversation between a larger group of strangers. Even a grain of that possibility would have been enough to sustain me to complete the project. I wondered that if I could assemble these tiny grains of intimacy it may be possible to implement the microscopic, traversal revolutions imagined by Raunig. After discussing the storyboards with each participants I wondered how a revolution could be anything but aesthetic. I imagined whether revolution as a large scale cultural transformation, as it was imagined by Marx, is ever authentically possible. For me, this process of returning was exhilarating precisely because of the particularity of the responses evinced. The nature of the participants responses had transformed utterly and the quality of their participation was deeper. What I saw, in returning to participants were little miracles where more than simple social reproduction was possible.

Rancière argues how the sociologist of the aesthetic, Bourdieu, "keeps everyone in their place" through deferral, denunciation and dissimulation. Rancière hints how it may be possible to find smaller, less obvious moments of a radical interconnectedness that escape the totalising logic of cultural communism and the universalist language of critique. It is interesting that he locates his critique precisely at the moment where the proletariat engages directly with, appropriates and re-mediates an aesthetic representation for their own, smaller purposes. He comments on the absurdity of Bourdieu's presenting people with "questions of aesthetics" rather than aesthetic representations themselves which *Speak English To Me* attempted to do:

...fictitious questions of aesthetics... produce inevitably what is required by the sociologist: the suppression of intermediaries, of points of meeting and exchange between the people of reproduction and the elite of distinc-

tion. Everything happens as if the science of the sociologist-king had the same requirement as the city of the philosopher-king. There must be no mixing, no imitation...the subjects of this science... must be unable to “imitate” anything else than their own dye... artistic fraud must be excluded from it (Rancière 2003:189).

Rancière suggests, ironically, that despite Bourdieu’s argument to the contrary, the sociologist of the aesthetic himself instantiates a distance between the legitimate aesthetic and the life of the worker in order to preserve his distinction. Bourdieu’s “fictitious questions of aesthetics” are formulated through the questionnaire in order to prevent fraudulent “mixing” and “mingling” between the products of legitimate culture and the culture of the worker because to do so would be to free both from remaining in the right places (Rancière 2003: 188-194) in the social order. The concrete aesthetic representation, rather than the idea of it, plays an important role in this regard in displacing and throwing into question the social order. It is dangerous and “deceptive” precisely because in its structure and form (despite being owned or coded by a dominant class and contextualised for its consumption) it is inherently open to appropriation, remediation and the production of new configurations and meanings if this is achieved in new places:

No double meaning must “break down” the language of the dominated. No deceptive image must be allowed a mix-up through which reasons of distinction would come to mingle with those of *amor fati*. Nothing must supply a link between the “pretension” of the challengers and the “dispossession of the disposed. The evil is the community of appearances (Rancière 2003:197).

The storyboards, as open assemblages of identificatory symbols (broken, half made, provisional stories) registered mixings and minglings and allowed participants to intervene in them. They were designed to make meanings proliferate, to allow for sutures and mixing. The participant felt entitled to cut into its fabric and to reorganize it and I found that most took the invitation. However, at the same time I must admit, in reflecting on this experience of returning to the participants, that there were those who did not engage because they seemed ‘fated’ to do so. Some participants no practical or practical benefits being accrued by their engagement in an aesthetic statement.

Returning to each participant was exhilarating because I had managed to facilitate a small set of tiny miraculous revolutions and mixings, in participants’ homes, garages, lofts, restaurants, street corners, flats, gardens. I saluted myself at this point in the project for my modest voyage into the lives of ‘ordinary’ people. I had managed to invest in what other artists may have considered to be of little concern, situations that bore no promises of accolades, recognition, and further opportunities. I had betrayed my training and turned against “the institution as the guarantee of legitimacy and, above all, the ‘relevance’ of [my] own activity (Exposito 2009: 148). I was not the artist documenting the inner city for publication; catalogues, gallery audiences, teaching the privileged about the world out there but rather working in that world in the most intimate way possible. In the final phases of the project, I could see myself from a greater distance, spreading out the digital prints tailor-made for participants on their dining room sofas, church foyers, favourite restaurant tables, beds for their comment and fecund misinterpretations. I discovered, in this process, that the habitus is not a prison; it is a universe and I managed to celebrate its expansiveness, its radiance, and its struggles with the participant. As Nancy (1991: 4) writes: “an inconsequential atomism, individualism tends to forget that the atom is a world”. Every participant narrativised their life struggle in their responses to the storyboard and I attempted to do justice to this particularity by producing animated sequences that reflected this. I was not interested in analysis or findings but in presenting surfaces of potential and possibility, drawings and nothing more, not visions, nor answers nor insights. The storyboards were presented to the participants without explication or explanation. If anything, this process of ‘returning’ (a game of sorts) represented a possibility of a new kind of

practice. It was the only confirmation I needed from the project as a whole.

This art that detached itself from its old functions and judges but still has not closed itself up in its autonomy then offers itself as the aim and privileged support of strategies of reappropriation; the 'denegating' aesthetic gaze can now take, among the intellectuals of the proletariat, the full force of an 'other' gaze [d' un re-garde autre] upon the propriety of the other that becomes an 'other' gaze [qui deviant regard autre] upon the proletarian's dispossession. Such is the game in which the working-class pathos transforms itself into an aesthetic and militant passion for reappropriation (Ranciere 2003: 199).

Although I would say that I stirred up no 'militant passion' there was a sense, that for many participants, the storyboards did indeed represented something significant. They were not able to explain this, or provide evidence that the experience had transformed them but I could see in the proliferation of their gestures, facial expressions and especially in their verbal responses whether a given storyboard had done justice to our conversation and to their storytelling. So here, rather than explain that exhilaration, I present my process of return as an experience of raw presentness. Below, I give the reader a sense of a revitalized artistic process *on the move*. I resist the idea of commenting on each extended engagement with a participant because to do so would mean to bring a range of competences to bear (psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology) which I simply do not possess. Rather I see this compilation of visual and written materials below *as* the research findings themselves from which the reader can draw their own conclusions. You will see below the notes I made to myself after each return to a participant, juxtaposed with some of the annotated storyboards and key frames generated for the projection *Wall Literature 21* the latter of which will give the reader a sense of how the participants' responses were interpreted in the piece.

Storyboard conversations 14 December – 21 December

Tripod, camera.

Inkjet print of storyboard, with acetate.

Black, white and coloured kokis.

Original conversation notes.

Original storyboard collage.

New black notebook to record observations afterwards.

Prestick and tape.

Note: the research is now at a critical point. The storyboard becomes a research document in its own right that myself and the participant mark to negotiate a statement (through annotations, drawing, labelling, etc). The surface registers speech in their space. It is now, more than ever about ordinary people's responses to art images in new places. The idea is that I sit with a person that I had met months ago, informally at that time a total stranger. We have already established a relationship so now there may at first be a lot of catching up to do. I show them the print and ask that what I am after is a creative response, to my response to an intimate conversation we had a while back on the street. This is recorded on the print and consolidated in a simple animated sequence.



Mzila fled Maputo during the civil war after his older brother was killed in an accident. He has been working at Flamingo Drycleaners as a tailor on Rockey Street for the past 10 years, and lives in an outhouse on Webb Street. His native tongue is Citshwa. I met him at the drycleaners and at his home and we spoke about.

15/12/08 9h00- 10h30

Bewildered by the process. Poorly explained. Interrupted his work. Customers. Looks almost shocked by storyboard, confused. Offer to visit later at his home.

19h00- 20h30

Much more intimate. Begin contextualizing project and little understanding. Explain animation process and relate storyboard to conversation. Triggers great deal of interest, identifies AK47/lightning

bolt in tea cup as central image. Relates story of brother's death and ties to political situation in Mozambique. Uncanny that I drew him prior to knowing dead in a boat. Word storm in "storm in a tea cup" translated into Zulu and Citswa. Title agreed on. Copious notes and drawings generated to clarify. What is expected of me is problematic. Girlfriend with him, intimate home space, more comfortable, neighbor arrives, asks questions, useful to clarify. Clearly understands the aim of the exhibition and workshop. Original notes and acetate drawing very useful. Space, intimacy and time critical to generating understanding. Photograph very formal. Relaxed mood, offers me Fanta strawberry.

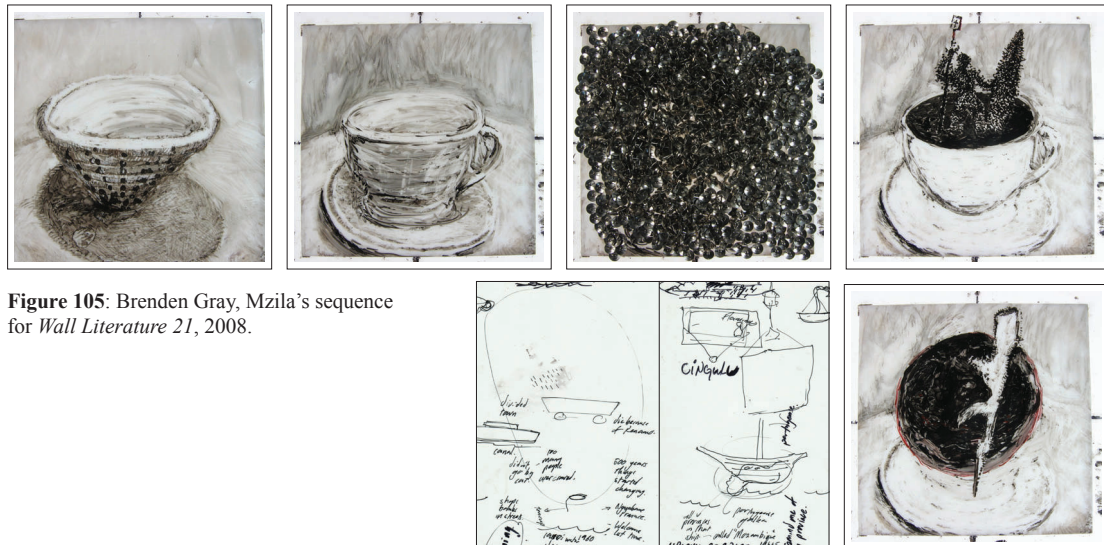


Figure 105: Brenden Gray, Mzila's sequence for *Wall Literature 21*, 2008.

Sherice, an Abele speaking, Congolese foreign national who owns a Congolese restaurant on Raleigh Street. She lives alone with her daughter Bibi, in a Brilliant yellow flat on Hunter Street. I met Sheri after ordering a beer at her restaurant, and spoke with herself and her daughter in the bedroom/dining room in her flat about guns, education and being a foreigner.

15/12/08 11h20 – 12h00

Arrives late. Wait. Woman chopping spinach next to me. Time with her daughter Neh, who discovers and remembers me, and asks to draw. Big hug. Show her my tripod. Excited to see the drawing. Mom arrives, 'don't have much time'. Move to the dining room/lounge/bedroom. Give invitation, explain, seems to understand. No real interest in the drawings, but her daughter asks me about each scene. Explain each small drawing in a hurry. Little interest. Tie back to daughter not having birth certificate. Sheri complains 'I am not a criminal but we are forced to commit fraud by this government'. Ask which drawing symbolizes her 'out of place-ness' most. Doll face clerk at home affairs counter, daughter offering ten kinds of meat. 'She is always outside, no one takes her gift'. Wants Home Affairs to send a representative to the exhibition. Signs consent form. Have to go. Photograph. Daughter undresses in front of me. Move to porch take photograph and show them. Ask about catering. Not enough time, distracted environment. Selection and expression main mode of communication, but believes passionately in the issue and suspect that she feels the drawings capture her plight.

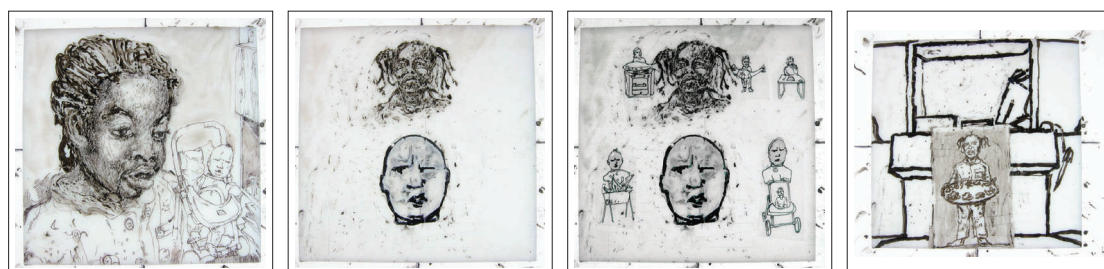


Figure 106: Brenden Gray, Sheri's sequence for *Wall Literature 21*, 2008.

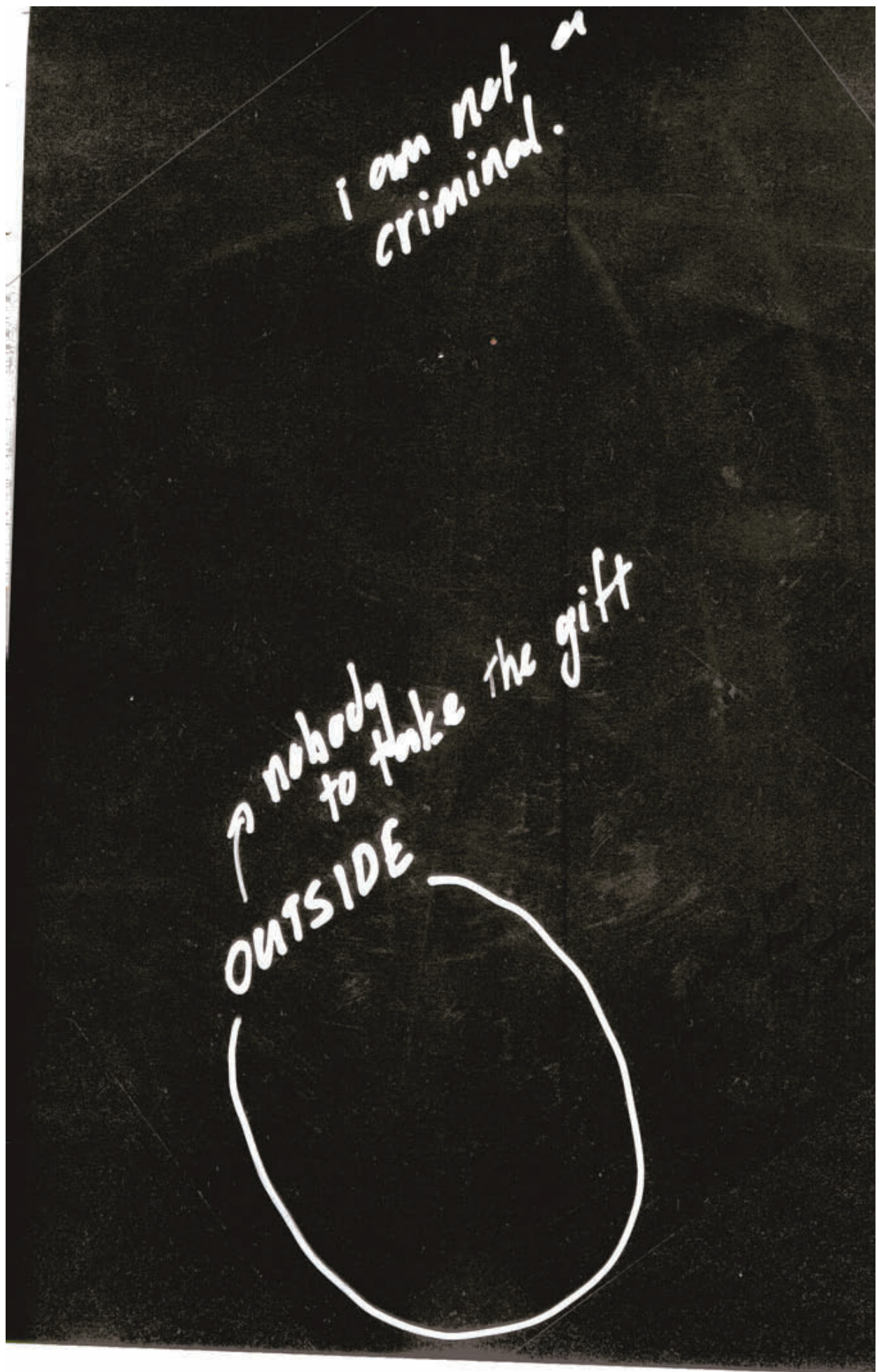


Figure 107: Brenden Gray, Sheri's commentary on story-board *Wall Literature 21*, 2008.

Mother Patricia is an elderly Jamaican woman who owns a building on the corner of Grafton and Raleigh. She manages a feeding scheme, orphanage and funds these activities by renting out flats in her building. We met in her dark office.

15/12/08 14h00- 15h00



Security guard doesn't trust me. Let in. Long story about money and tenants. Invites me to show print. Security guard reads invitation in full, aloud. Very excited about art works when presented but she cannot see them! 'Honored' and so forth. Aggie and security guard do not translate. There is a great deal of reactive enthusiasm but no engagement with the actual images. Explain basic rationale behind animation- tiny white drawings coalesce into portrait of Mother Patricia. Write down statements that show little engagement with the print itself. Talk about catering, children, the event etc. Very interested to participate in event. Situation makes authentic engagement impossible. Could have asked questions about specific things, but general atmosphere of enthusiasm prevented this from happening. Much glee and jubilation about the taking of the photograph.

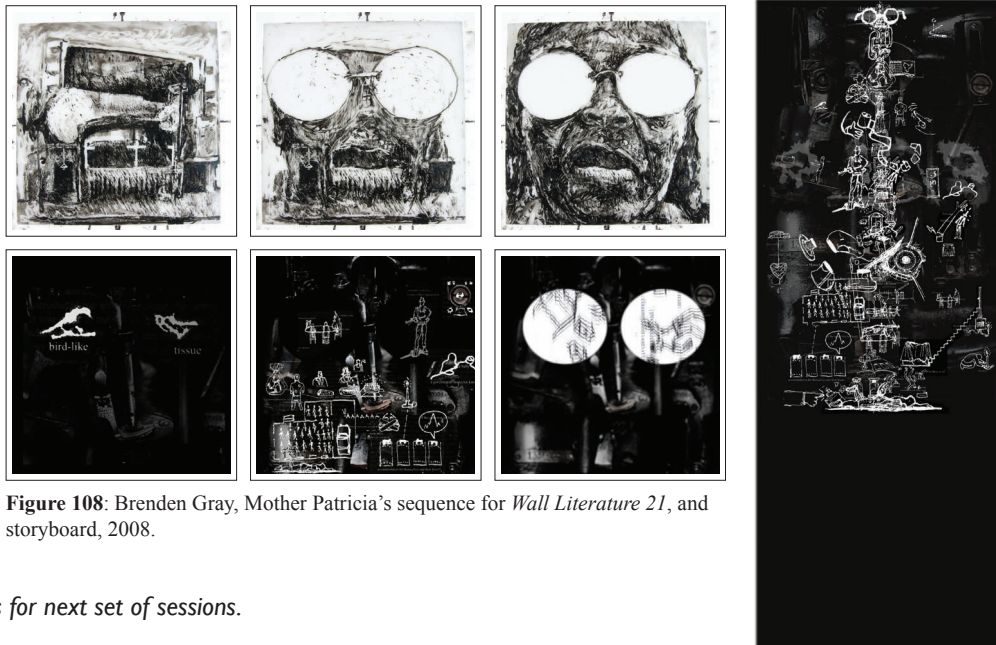


Figure 108: Brenden Gray, Mother Patricia's sequence for *Wall Literature 21*, and storyboard, 2008.

Notes for next set of sessions.

Photograph drawing in space/on surface indicative of scene of conversation. More time to explain storyboard in detail and connect to original conversation. Move into writing onto the print more readily.

Samuel is a Zimbabwean Rasta who earns his living selling dagga and handmade clothes and sandals in Yeoville. I met him at the Rasta house.

16/12/08 9h15- 10h30



Arrive early. Man interested in drawing just to beg money to buy a joint. Samuel phones and arrives clearly excited to see the storyboard. Led into the Rasta house (under construction). Samuel cleans a table by window, unravel drawing. No need to contextualize. He immediately asks me about each frame, but I am struck at how far I have deviated from his instructions at the animation workshop. The process goes well, but the engagement cannot be deepened because Rasta ideology infiltrates into the conversation. Immediately drawn to the light image of Christ and speaking lips against the Yeoville map. Speaks about balance between the flesh and the spirit for people of Yeoville abuse of drugs. Take photograph, invitation to exhibition. Then Samuel, on signing his name tells me about his Zimbabwean parents. Went well, considering.



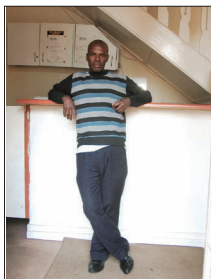
Figure 109: Brenden Gray, Samuel's sequence for *Wall Literature 21*, storyboard and his commentray, 2008.



Conrad is an elderly Afrikaans speaking man, living on Natal Street with his daughter and grandson, working as a packer at the SuperSaver on Rockey Street. I met him in his flat at Jackhill court

16/12/08

Jackhill court. Knock on that white enameled door. Again, again. No answer. The fisheye lens glaring at me reproaching my presence. So I photograph it to tame it. Slip an invitation under the door and hope for the best.



Brilliant is a Malawian, Citswa speaking foreign national. He is the manager of a guesthouse on.... He earns money in South Africa so that he can support his family in Malawi. I met him at the tuckshop that operates from the guesthouse, and spoke with him about loss next to the small swimming pool.

16/12/08 13h45- 14h45

I was going to give up on Brilliant. No phone number. Didn't seem interested in attending the workshop. After visiting him, clear that much more creative work seems to happen in people's own spaces/places. I pull up. Sitting on a black rock with a friend outside the guest house. Chastises me for not visiting. Way of making excuse for not committing earlier. Leads me into the kitchen. Show him the storyboard print. Without even explaining the animation process he immediately understands not only the idea of frames but content of the piece. He is delighted at each transition and it clearly touches something personal and sore because he speaks of the difficulties of living in South Africa while his family is in Malawi. The symbolism of the wandering figure and the bird/thonga. Whole process aided by me drawing onto the acetate tracing over, almost reiterating my thoughts on the shared space above the artwork. The final frame with the hanging bird disturbs him, and we agree that some kind of resolution needs to be made. Tells me of his ancestors, his grandfather and we agree that animation should end with bird reappearing on gravestone. Very keen to go to exhibition. Take photo. Leave. He says as I go that he will phone me if he wants to make some changes which suggests that he will think about this project when I am gone.

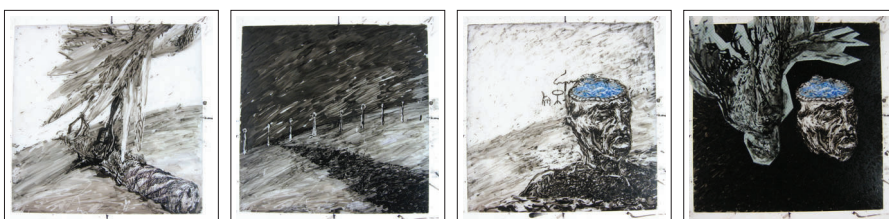


Figure 110: Brenden Gray, Brilliant's sequence for *Wall Literature 21*, storyboard and his commentray, 2008.



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16/12/10 BRIGHTON BEATON



Keaton, an MDC supporter, fled from Zimbabwe three years ago to begin his own ministry in Yeoville. I interrupted him while he was reading a copy of Zimbabwe News, on the derelict concrete building structure on Highlands ridge. I spoke with Keaton in his flat, in his new church premises on Becker Street, and under a tent. I listened to Keaton's spin about his material and spiritual abilities and aspirations as a preacher.

16/12/08 14h30

On the off chance I go past Keaton's make-shift church. Walk onto the property without permission. He is inside counseling a pretty young lady. The room that was once a shell has been transformed. White curtains, a carpet upon which the name of the mission is emblazoned. Jumps to his feet. Look, like you I am creative! I made this. Look at this place it is amazing, so much has happened. Thinking of Appadurai's capacity to aspire, the print of the preacher in the wind and how much he will like it. Set time for appointment. He walks me out speaking of how congregation has grown and the misery of his people in Zimbabwe. Says 'we must be patient... things happen for a reason' and I consider how apathetic religion makes people. Aspiration and apathy hardwired into it. Perhaps the topic for discussion tomorrow.

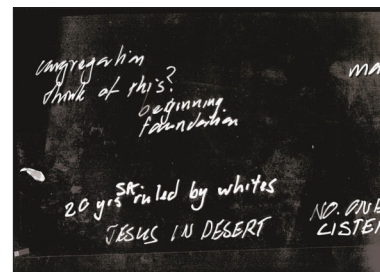
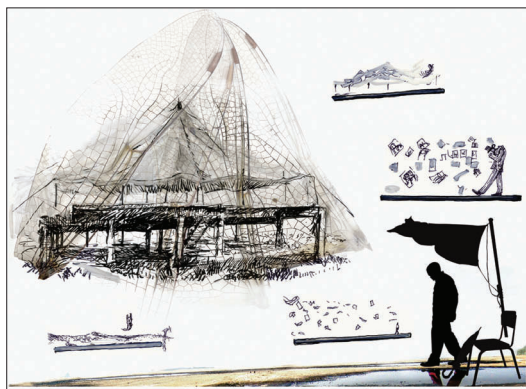


Figure 111: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Becker Street (For Keaton)* and his commentary, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

16/12/08 19h00- 19h45



Njabulo. A bit scared when I leave the house. Drug house. Lots of people on the street, feel like the eternal whitey outsider, think of Sheri's daughter. Feelings, they are important. Phone Njabulo. Bitches at me that I am late. Convenient, but lets me in anyway. Very friendly and there are people there. Introductions. Cannot establish a clear relationship between him and them, but he instigates their admiration constantly through age, experience and politics. I unravel the drawing on his coffee table, and immediately he reads the names of the ANC leaders, relating their histories. Things are rushed; I am interrupting again, rude. I suggest that the animation about this: imagine they lived in your house, walked out the front gate, and looked at the street. What would they think about what they saw? Relate to his 'pavement complaints'. Conversation moves to ANC and COPE. Keeps saying 'critical situation', 'critical situation' so I reach over to drawing, write it in masthead box in a thick black koki and suggest that each of the represented leaders say something about the state of the ANC today. Njabulo likes the idea very much. I suggest leaving the print with him to write on, which I will collect later. Yes, I will use this as an opportunity to think through my politics. I give him invitation, read aloud. All done. One last thing. I take a photograph, which feels invasive, and Njabulo feels exposed and mortal before his friends who he is trying to impress, but I do it anyway. The flash seems so aggressive, and for a man who likes moving, the statue game is not conducive. I leave, and worry that I won't get the print back. But risks are worth taking, I suppose.

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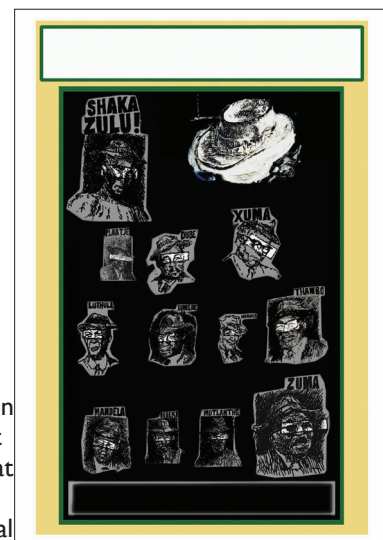


Figure 112: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Hunter Street (For Njabulo)* and his commentary, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Notes for next set of sessions. This is tiring me out as it did before. I am struggling to recollect. Again other people show interest in the drawing. The site or the scene of conversation is really becoming important and I need to document this visually for the remaining participants (perhaps as a set of artworks/research documents in their own right). That surface upon which the print is unraveled- plastic kitchen table, coffee table, the floor by the bed is poignant. Art in other places. 'Speak English to Me- Art In Other Places'. This must be captured even if I have to go back. The sense of intimacy and the social situation needs to be recorded and commented on. Idea to return to the site with the finished print/proof and exhibiting it there for OTHERS TO participate. Cheap black and whites on newsprint- selected frames. Rather than projection on a projected wall, that horrible illusion in the white cube, cheap prints hung in the vicinity of the conversation node. A kind of radius, ebbing. Must 'measure' how participants respond to others experience of the same process in the exhibition. Sympathy through shared creative process even though in different places. Structure for exhibition workshop- informal look around and conversation. Make a mental record. Return to the table, watch animation and the speak to the project one by one- how it felt, what it is like working with an artist in own place etc.



Kadar is a Ghananian imam and Hausa speaker who work as a tailor at the Yeoville Market on Hunter Street. I spoke with him in his stall about fundamentalisms.

17/12/08 9h00- 10h20

The print does not evoke much in the way of direct response but Kadar speaks a great deal of South African xenophobia and how South Africans in exile were treated during apartheid. Made some serious mistakes in the print rendering Arabic texts that were absurd- I just saw patterns where he saw words, so now he wants to caption the images with Arabic text which is encouraging. I will bring a Koran through later next week. He is very excited about speaking at the workshop at the exhibition. The images were so secondary- he enjoyed the transitions but it evoked very little. The flaming man at the foot of a mosque I consider to generate more response. Speaks of the ward councillor's dislike of publishing material in Yeoville in French. Goes away to a customer, and I take photographs of my print on the ground. He returns and says 'we have agreed here that anyone who wants to take photographs here must ask permission. We will take you to court'. Apologise. He sits for the photograph and once again I have that sense of invasiveness but also dignity as glares at the camera lens.

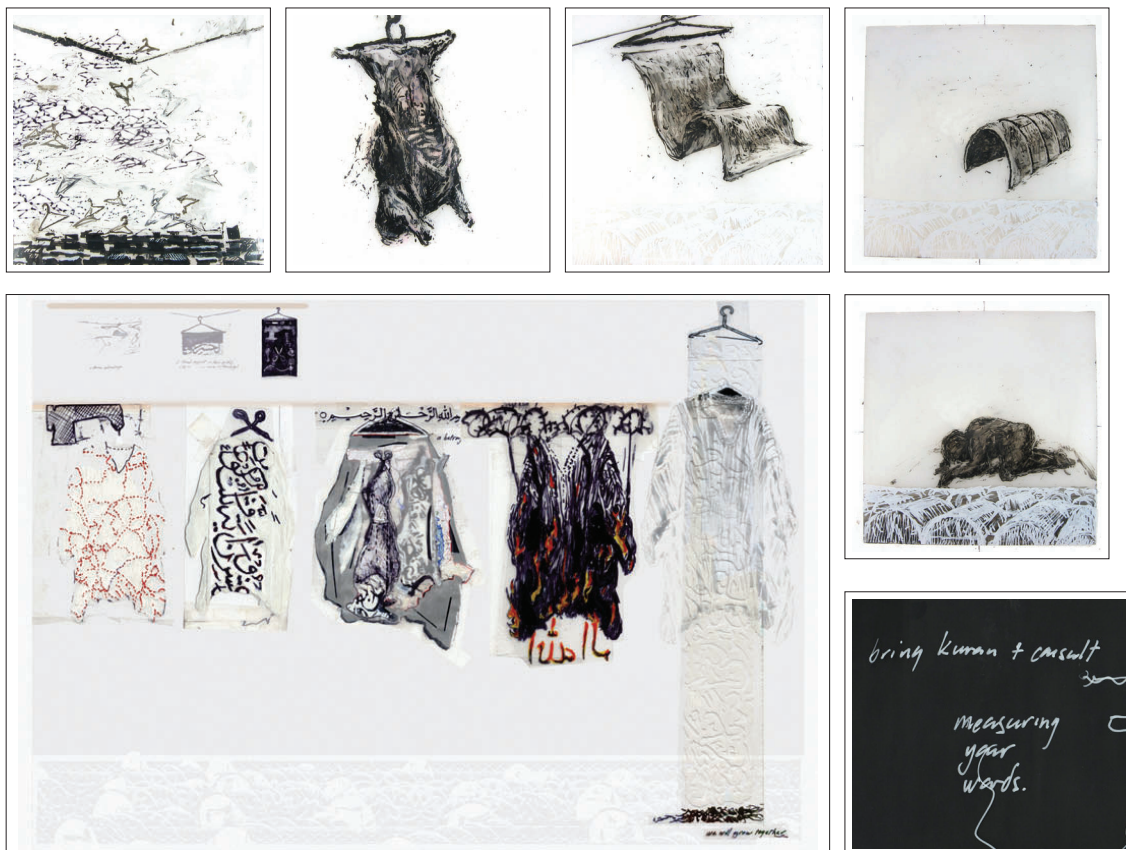


Figure 113: Brenden Gray, Kadar's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with storyboard and Alhagi's commentary, 2008.

Lisha is an Igbo speaking Nigerian foreign national who owns a clothing shop and hairdresser on Raleigh street. I met her as she was sewing in her shop and she told me about marriage in her home village.

17/12/08 13h00-13h30

Visited earlier. Was not there. A hairdresser, Angeles invites me in. Wait at a white plastic table watching Casper the Friendly Ghost on the TV above the hairdryers. Lisha comes in, looking very different, wealthy, dressed up, hair in braids. Like others who dropped me at the animation workshops she chastises me for not visiting earlier. Contextualise the project again; show her the print/storyboard. She follows my explanation carefully, and I am quite assertive about women's rights and dignity, explaining each frame in detail. She is surprised at how much I remember from the conversation, but offers no comment on the drawings in the print. It seems that she wants to get it over with quickly. We come up with a title which is her name translated 'good luck'. I ask if I may take a photograph of her. No. I am disconcerted. I am enjoying these portraits so much. Signs the consent form and I leave feeling terribly disappointed. The mad white guy ethnographer.

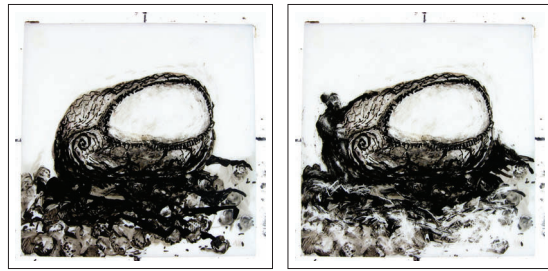
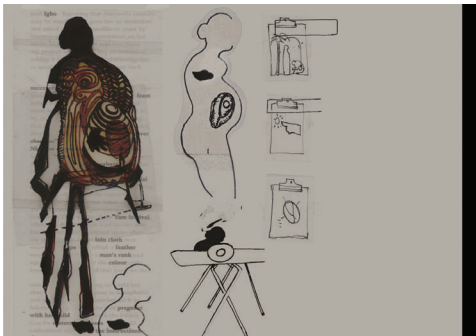


Figure 114: Brenden Gray, Lisha's sequence, *Wall Literature* 21, with storyboard, 2008.



Ronald is an English speaking ceramicist who has his home and studio on Raleigh street, living in Yeoville for two decades. I met him as he was throwing pots in his studi on Rockey Street.

17/12/08 13h35- 14h20

Ronald has arrived. He greets me like a friend, but I know what will follow and pray that he will not reject what I have done. Takes me through to the painting studio. Unravel the print. Sits in couch and opens up like it is a newspaper. I cannot make marks on the surface. He attempts to decode the piece, in a judgmental way and laughs when he recognizes his clay working implements transformed into characters. I explain that it is a proposal to work with a small group of street children in his studio, making characters representing Chaucer's seven deadly sins, using his kick wheel as an animation device. He takes offense at the sins enjoys the kick wheel idea and gives me no room to maneuver. Written off. Mad as a hatter. Artists! Their imaginations. Gets up to help a visitor and I am left with my despair. Pack up alone. Return to him to revisit the proposal and he ambivalently offers me a table and well I suppose it would be good as long as I am not taken from my work. I present ethics consent form and Ronald is suspicious inferring that the form suggests that I have scope to misrepresent him. I explain it carefully and he signs reluctantly. Ask for a photo. Reluctantly agrees. We chat about cars and other things, and I leave on good terms with him.

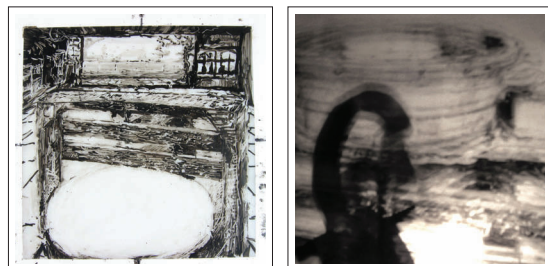


Figure 115: Brenden Gray, Ronald's sequence, *Wall Literature* 21, with storyboard, 2008.



17/12/08 14h30 – 15h30

Keaton is uncommonly subdued. He is waiting for me, dressed for the occasion in a slick, charcoal Italian suit and crocodile skin pointy shoes. I am adamant that this meeting will follow my programme. Ask if I can retrace the project again, to contextualize today's meeting. Immediately interrupted by preaching, boasting about the size of the congregation. Knew before I arrived that I would be seen as an opportunity that is not materializing. Telephone breaks into this. I unravel the storyboard/print and there is little or no direct response or reaction. I try and instigate this by narrating the relation to our conversations. The aesthetic of the image itself raises no interest- wind, openness, aspiration, in process, nothing registers. Even the literal stuff has no appeal. It seems that beauty, lightness, a feeling for form is entirely illegible to many of the participants. It is those literal representations that get things going, which was, well, to be expected. The preaching goes on and I take notes on the acetate. Decide to be more inquiring and to speak directly to the problems in Zimbabwe, taking the line that religion is making Zimbabweans passive to their situation. His 'peace' is in conflict with 'goals'. We talk about the use of violence to restore good in the world, but Keaton can offer little in this regard. Return to narcissistic exaggerations, size of congregation, how far they travel, born on 25th December. To be honest it all looks like lies, and I feel I have confused his aspirations with his selfishness and the print is simplistic and pointless. I bring the conversation to a close. Friend walks in. Invite Keaton for photo portrait. Uncomfortable. Strikes poses, each presenting a different 'priestly' persona as if he is testing versions of what he thinks a pastor should be. Consent form. Design of DVD, can you do it. Invited to next service. On the way out more boastfulness. Leave feeling very despondent. Want to put a match to the whole goddamn project. Fucking exhausted.

Notes for next set of sessions.

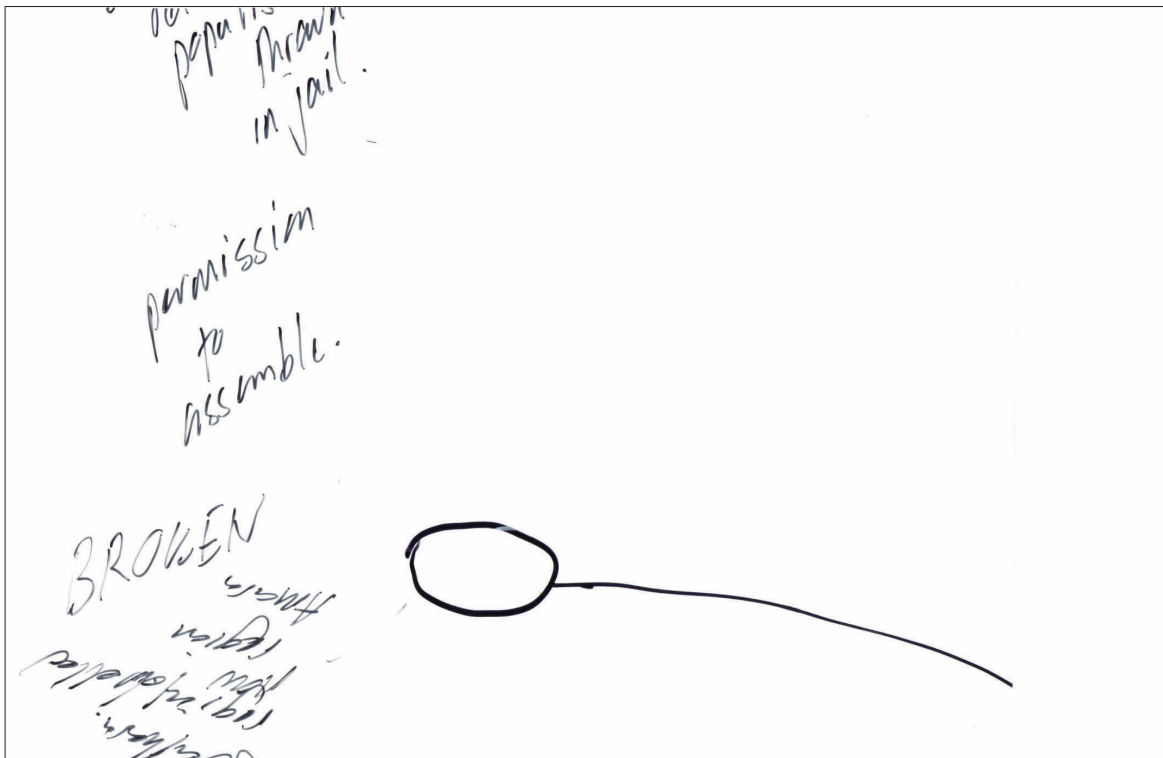
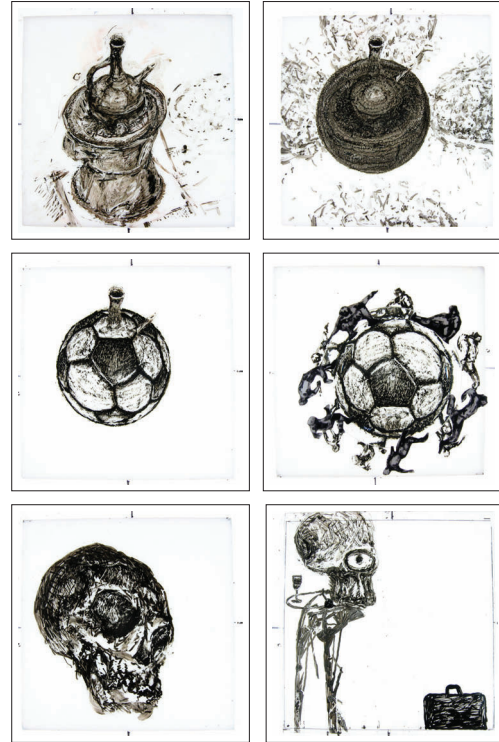
Kadar said something very interesting. He said that he was not in the project for money- 'no', people need to hear this' and the more people who do these kinds of project the better. To him, the image could amplify his voice, becoming a kind of enunciatory surface which legitimizes his voice and views. Perhaps after the exhibition, the newsprint images can return to the sites of conversations so that selected participants can speak to them in Yeoville, so there is a life after it. This is the only positive thing coming from today. But, if I look at this as an artist it was a failure- nothing 'worked'. But as a researcher, these responses are data. Why did the respondents behave in the way that they did? What does this say about the power of images in informal places, the kinds of respondents I am working with, the failure of things to catalyse? Through what lens am I looking at all of this? I want a critical and creative response, but what ideology colours my definition of this? It is critical at the exhibition that I document the responses to the prints as the participants present them. Will need a video recorder at the exhibition.

Desta is an Oromo speaking Ethiopian foreign national living on Becker Street, earning a living through gambling and community organisation. I met him for the first time at an Ethiopian restaurant while he was watching soccer and subsequently at the Bree street mall in downtown Johannesburg where he drinks coffee with me.

18/21/08 10h20

A prolific session. The print generated a great deal of discussion. Immediately the original drawing of the coffee boiler created recognition and I linked it to the idea of Ethiopian unity. Desta made concrete suggestions for the changing of the imagery for example asking for the soccer players to represent the various political parties in the country, linking the sequence of images to historical events, which he encouraged me to research. We also negotiated around changes such as the ballot box producing a tree of 85 Ethiopian languages. A definite theme was arrived at –ethnic conflict. A great deal of annotations were made on the acetate. A real struggle to reach a title which didn't really happen, but the stages in the ritual of making and serving coffee seemed apt to me, a tradition around which people in the country may reunite. I think him reading the letter/invitation in

A satirical cartoon by R. S. S. titled "Soccer Politics". The image is a dense, chaotic composition. At the top, there is a large, irregular shape filled with dense, illegible text, possibly representing a media or political landscape. Below this, a large, stylized figure of a person in a suit sits on a chair, surrounded by a chaotic environment. The figure is labeled "poison" and "soccer politics". The background is filled with various elements, including a large, dark, irregular shape labeled "poison" and "soccer politics", and a large, stylized figure of a person in a suit. The overall tone is dark and critical, suggesting a commentary on the intersection of politics and sports.



168



Erik, a Northern Sotho speaker, runs a tyre repair workshop from his home on Dunbar Street. I met him buying sweets at the tuckshop which is installed in his driveway.

18/12/08 11h20

Arrived late, but was very pleased to see me. Was careful to contextualize the session again before beginning but it didn't make much of a difference because it seemed that my presence rather than the print/storyboard itself generated an outpouring of elaborations on the original story told. Used as an opportunity to clarify elements in the print, and to add more. The imagery seemed to me even more appropriate expression of the themes preoccupying Erik in his life, which really centers on domestic space and definitions of masculinity. Together we came up with the title 'Men have to look after other people', and the theme of self sacrifice in men's dealings with their families, woman etc. The loaf of bread is a metaphor that cuts through so many of his memories and I hope that the house/bread image is something he can talk about at the exhibition. The session was good from the point of view that the storyboard was enriched by speech and further narration rather than being a contact surface for a dialogue. The photograph passed without any issues, and Erik said that he would come to the exhibition.



Figure 118: Brenden Gray, Erik's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, 2008.



Victoria is middle aged Swazi woman who left her home village to be with her husband Don, in Johannesburg 10 years ago. She lives with him and her son in their house on Kenmere where she runs a business as a dressmaker. I met her in their converted garage...

18/12/08 12h40

I am always delighted to see Victoria. She is so hospitable, offered me a non-alcoholic beverage and everything. I struggled to contextualize the project, and when I went through the storyboard was so mechanical and meaningless that she stopped me and said that she would prefer to have Don with her to do the discussion. I realized as I was going through the work that it is a beautiful drawing, but lacks resonance because there is no concept or issue informing it. It is going to be tough going on Saturday to get to that point- may have to do some serious on the spot drawing. Photograph was unproblematic even celebratory. Will return.

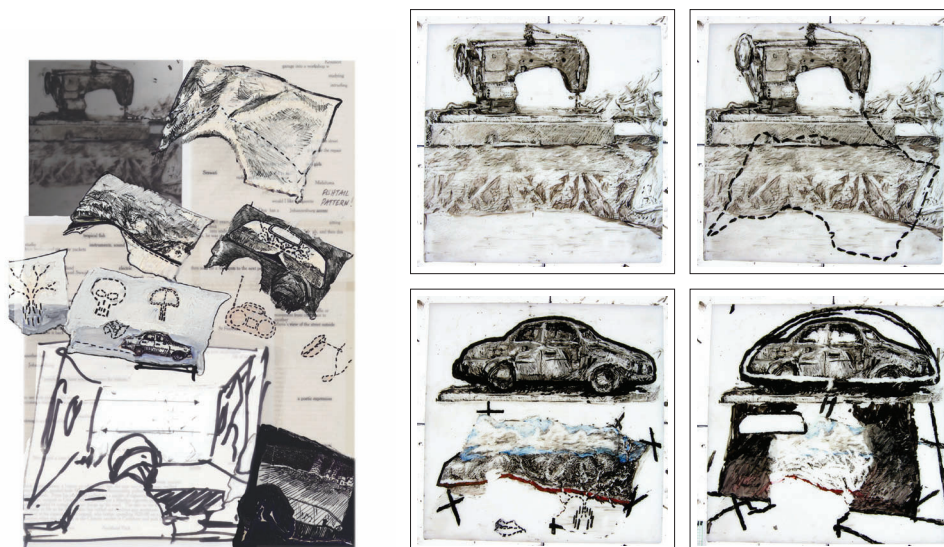


Figure 119: Brenden Gray, Victoria's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, 2008.

Mrs Singh

18/12/08

Needed a nap today badly, so I decided not to go ahead with full blown session at her shop, but rather pop in and ask if we can do it at her home. Happiness was there and glad to see me. She rather encouragingly agreed to host me at her place on the weekend, and for a seemingly suspicious woman she is always open to me. I asked Happiness to have a peek at the print, under my bonnet, and immediately he said 'yes, there is our shop, it is beautiful!'. Looking forward to seeing them on the weekend.

Notes for next set of sessions.

Themes provided to assist the participants in speaking to their artworks. Smaller groups share their experiences of the project, and readings of the prints. Come together to view the animations, images of key images from this available on acetate- fitting to the size of an overhead projector. Small groups asked to discuss key 'meta-issues' that came up in the course of the project- democracy, the role of religion in building agency, xenophobia etc. Assemble and 'enunciatory assemblage' with title for viewing in Yeoville in the form of site specific prints or a series of projections. Animations must emphasise morphing over narration, the title can diegetically generate a narrative element. There have been companions, observers to this process who must be invited to participate in the workshop- Happiness, Mrs. Singh's right hand man, Don, Victoria's husband and so on. They can offer a very useful perspective on the project and I must elicit their following of the project. I will have to design a superb plan for the session, for everyone to get the most out of that short time, a lesson plan structured in the richest way possible. More and more the scene of the drawing and the idea of being a stranger, and strangeness are central to the project. I am amazed that I have built these relationships with people I would have ordinarily never have known.

Joshua

19/12/08 10h10

Perhaps the most intense of sessions for me. I predicted this. As always the conversation was mixed up with everyday activities, in this case the photographing of Miss Congo, recently competing at the Miss World competition and Joshua's children. After looking at photographs from the Miss World gala dinner, Joshua and I get down to business. I attempt to contextualize this stage in the project, but once the print is unraveled he picks up immediately on the Elat flag hoisting, that symbol of Israel's war of independence. Says he knew the man in the drawing, the one climbing up the flag, and immediately does to his shelf to show me a lexicon of Israel's military published in the late seventies. I see maps, portraits of men he knew that have now gone on to become powerful government officials. For some time we page through this book. Of particular interest to me is the map of Israel, which he explains in terms of the war, speaking intensely of friends, the extent of the opposition to the establishment of a state of Israel: 'one gun for six men, the gun holder falls and it is taken by the next man'. The story of his friend with a medal for bravery who single handedly destroyed an entire contingent of Jordanians, moving through the trenches up a hill, without knowing that his unit of 10 men were being killed in the process. When we returned to the print, Joshua expressed great concern that it did not represent his views or stories, in particular the woman worshipper at the lower left of the composition, the 'Zionists' that one sees praying under trees and in the veld all over South Africa. He said that he had nothing to do with them, that Zion meant 'Jerusalem'. He then interrogated me about the frames depicting the mass graves for Jews in the Ukraine, and the image where I was not sure whether it was set in Stalingrad or St Petersburg. I then reached a critical insight about the project, where I said that the print did not represent him, but rather my response to our conversation which he reworded as **'our conversation has brought you to this'**. Yes, that's it. That is exactly what I am trying to do in this project, then I retraced his words from the conversation regarding war, religion, people worshipping under trees etc. This led to a discussion about religion, where I said that when people start talking about god I get nervous, to which he added, 'when people start talking for god I get nervous'. I agreed. I couldn't bring the conversation back to the print, but began to make connections between what he was saying 'a grain of sand' to the smallness of the worshipper in the print, but really didn't succeed. I asked if he could speak to these issues at the workshop to which he responded that he would if he felt it was necessary.

One thing stood out in the conversation. Before it, Crystal and her sister, were going through my drawings, and by accident left Kadar's storyboard on the top of the pile and Joshua seeing it said 'and who is this Arab?'. I told him about Kadar but he brushed this aside. He seemed at the end of the session satisfied that the artwork did not represent him, but a response. So I took photos of the gorgeous crystal, Joshua invited me to Hartebeestport dam and I declined.

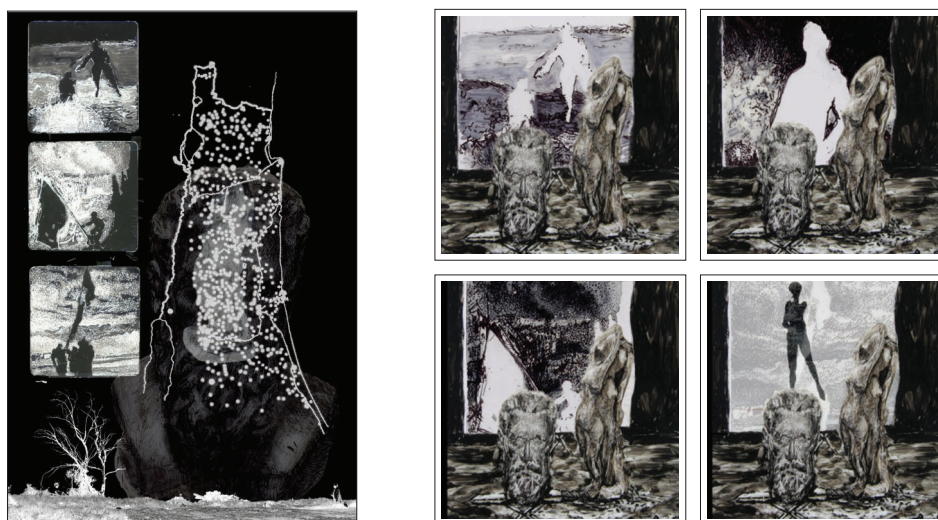


Figure 120: Brenden Gray, Joshua's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with storyboard, 2008,

Pastor Alfonso is a Lingala speaking, DRC foreign national, living at his church, Grace Baptist Church in Hunter Street. He is active in many of the neighbourhood's community organisations particularly in integrating newly arrived foreigners into Yeoville. I met him through Jacques and spoke to him on a white sofa, on the veranda, outside the church hall and subsequently in his reception room where we spoke about the meaning of the word 'pastor'.

19/12/08 12h30- 14h00

I am late. Alfonso's son is elated to see the artist. I am let in. Very welcoming. As is to expected from Alfonso, he asks me about my family, the problem with the shebeen. I give him an extended story and he speaks about delegating community elders to speak to such people. I contextualize the project and unravel the print, immediately relating my thinking around the chair and the jacket becoming metaphors for pastor and congregation. Of all the participants he picks up most readily on the metaphor, and extends on it, making suggestions, relating it to scripture, and essentially teaching me in the process. I make copious annotations, both in response, and notes to myself to sharpen and clarify the sequence. The way he moves his arms, that is what I picked up on in the drawings, curves, enclosing curves, he speaks from above people, like a shepherd, all the kinesthetic references are there in the storyboard. He speaks of the aptness of the chair as a metaphor for the work of the pastor to structure the community, and the transforming jacket as a kind of invisible leadership. He emphasizes the metaphor of 'living water' as central to the animation, and I add to this his predilection for definitions as a way of making scripture tangible to the congregation. The chair as every day, mortal flesh, the jacket floating above it spirit. He tells me about proverbs as a guide for living to confirm this. I tell him about other so called charismatic pastors in the area, who he systematically dismisses as rightly 'ignorant and confused'. He will be a powerful presence at the exhibition and can offer participants like Keaton a great deal. I take a photograph and he is so confident, pragmatic as opposed to Keaton, who is like that character in Alfonso's story who claimed that he could raised the dead but couldn't. Faith without action is dead. Amazing. Makes me want to study theology. I say as I am waling out that his church hall looks like a classroom, meaning to say that he is a great. Teacher. Hoped he got the reference.

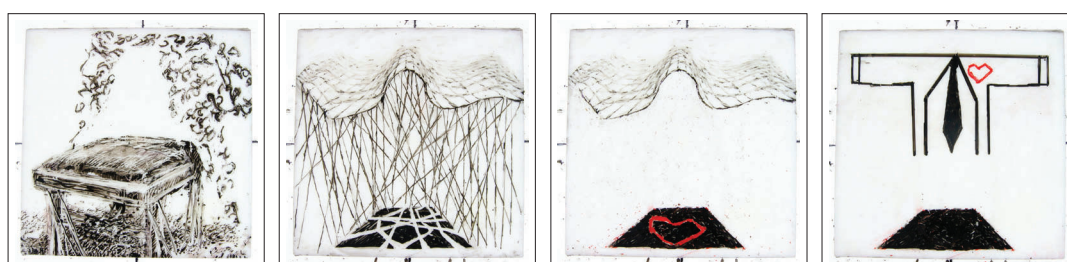
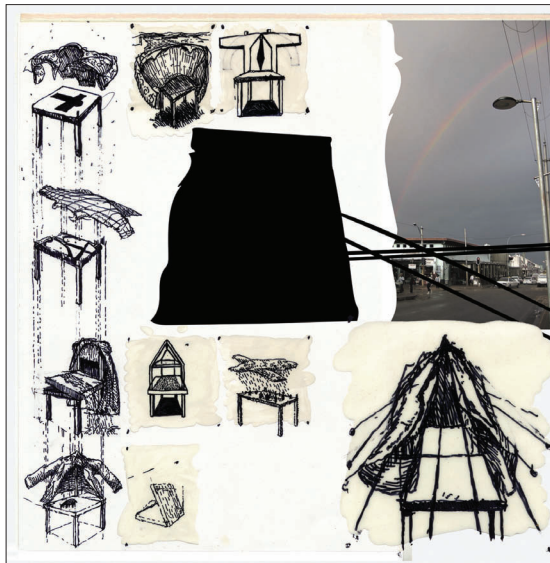


Figure 121: Brenden Gray, Pastor Alfonso's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with storyboard, and commentary (overleaf) 2008.



DEFINITIONS -

community
STRUCTURE *
purpose of Christianity
human dignity

the word 'pastor'
calling

LOVE
holistically.
affecting
holistically.
fables

PROVERBS
fengible
Antiqs.



Stefano is an elderly Greek man who has been living in the same house on Hunter Street, with his wife, domestic worker and adopted granddaughter for 40 years, where he works as an herbalist, healer, and masseur. I met him in his living room and spoke about carpentry...

19/12/08 14h00- 15h10

I am waiting while Stefanos tries to find the key to open the security gate. When he comes down I notice his missing fingers, and varicose veins which bulge from his calves and think of the mortality of the body, my father. A man so proud of health and vitality, he too must face the truth of decay. I put these thoughts aside as he opens the front gate. He immediately takes the print from my hands, showing great interest and smiles, 'wonderful!'. This is from a man who showed no interest at all at first in anything I made or related to art. I gave a cursory explanation and could see an immediate and direct appreciation, so felt no need to examine it later with him. The whole afternoon was so celebratory that I felt some kind of analysis entirely inappropriate, even though I explained it again later. The big thing was the garden, and it was big especially the pumpkins. He gave me a tour of his vegetables that burst everywhere around the house. Four meter high mielies, outlandishly enormous pumpkins, lengthy tomato plants- he wants me to capture all of this with my camera. Elaine and her sister follow us everywhere. Stefanos's wife Helen



comes out, looks at the storyboard and says that it is wonderful. At this Stefanos asks if I can take a photograph of Elaine and he in the 'garden of Eden' his pumpkin patch and I do so. We sit down so that I can contextualize the project, and go through the storyboard. He is delighted at everything I say and even picks up the style of the drawing, as being Hellenistic, and the jokes about his physical strength. I tell him about how difficult the project has been, and he tells me to 'be brave', not to give up and relates stories from his days in the army, where as someone with little education, he managed to impress his seniors (throwing the cooking pot over, exposing the corruption of a man managing an ammunitions depot). We go into his kitchen where he serves me sprite and homemade mampoer. He will come to my exhibition with his wife, domestic servant and her daughter and he will wear a suit. I will do anything to see this happen.

Figure 122: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Hunter Street (For Stefanos), Speak English To Me*, 2008.

I will spend a great deal of money on catering. I will slaughter a sheep for these people. The intimacy and sincerity of all of this is heartbreaking. Ask Stefanos if I can buy vegetables from his garden for the catering and ask Sheri to cook? The animation. It needs to be something that sets feeling and thought in motion for a group of people, rather than being a closed spectacle. The quality of conversation it generates is what I am after rather than some polished, moving, sublime animation. The animation is a trigger for the making of something that can be displayed, a more resolved animation to be projected in Yeoville for the broader community. The animation can be raw, and simple (fade in and outs, morphings, combinations of image and text), a series of poignant and potent transformations that take hold on the imagination on a collective. Must return to the 'site of conversation' photographs.

Mrs Singh

20/12/08 10h40 – 11h40

The security guard doesn't trust me. Finally left to wait in the garage with some other white guy. Mrs. Singh arrives and gives him a package (money?), he smiles and goes off. I am welcomed upstairs where I contextualize the project. I show her the print which she says is beautiful. I use the opportunity to explain each frame and she is satisfied that it is accurate. The print affords her the opportunity to elaborate on her experience of running the shop, speaking more intimately about her family's 'quality life', 'those days', which she clearly misses, providing a whole series of anecdotes about it. Even her children today search for that feeling of community and safety on Rockey Street. The theme is clearly nostalgia and the expectation that the street will never again gain that character; and indeed that no place in South Africa can offer what Rockey Street once did. She speaks a lot about money and business and the property that she has accrued over the years, her sons and daughters and their prospects. She then asks if there are any 'oldies' that are part of the project and I go through the rough storyboards detailing their histories. She amicably offers to do the catering for the event, briyani and so forth, 50% meat, 50% vegetarian. I leave. This nostalgia- should I invite oldies to the exhibition for a reunion of sorts.

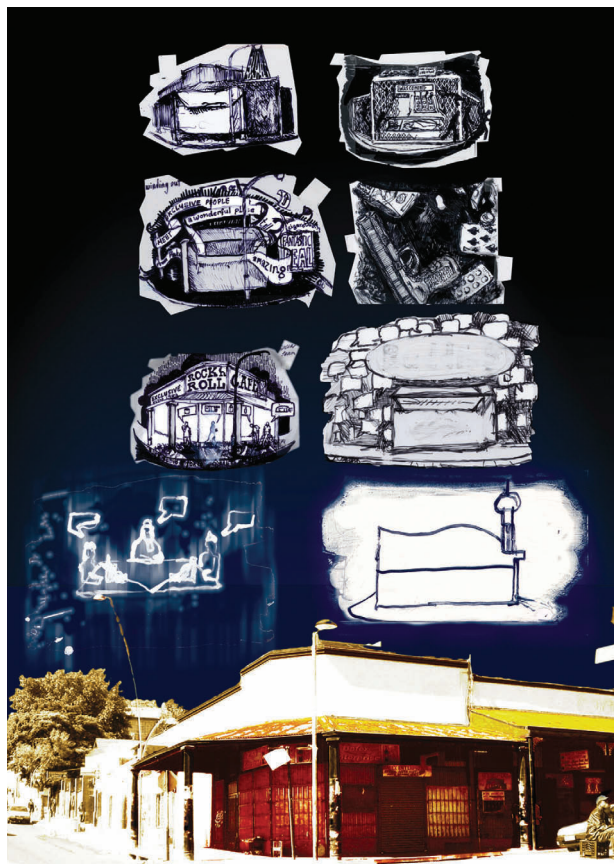


Figure 123: Brenden Gray, Mrs Singh's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with storyboard, 2008.

Victoria

20/12/08 14h00 -15h30

I go to Victoria with the express intent of talking to her and Don about the storyboard. I land up in Don's studio with a Rastafarian musician 'LSD' and see that some of their work may be appropriate to the animation sequence. I am fed beers and spend too much time with them neglecting Victoria. They love the idea of the project, but my goal for the day has been frustrated. By the time we are finished with the music it is time to visit Brita, and I cannot see Victoria and Don together. She is not happy that I am leaving without both their blessings. I need to weave this idea of being a woman and living in the shadow of a man into the animation sequence.



Abram

21/12/08 10h30 – 10h50

I spend half an hour waiting outside St. Francis church waiting for the church organ and signing to stop. While I am waiting I see Karl and his mother Sally approaching in the distance. They don't recognize me at first, and I am worried that my car will obstruct Karl's the path of his wheelchair. I wave and I tell them about the project which they find very interesting, opening up the bonnet of the car to show them what I have been up to in the past year. Karl is particularly excited about attending the workshop at Wits. He says that he attended a xenophobia workshop at St Aidans, which was very interesting because the foreigners, he explains are not 'victims', but harbour some serious resentment against South Africans, thinking lowly of them because they do not work as hard or as smart as they do. I will invite him to participate in the workshop. They disappear and the service is over. I wait at the gate in the dusty parking lot and cannot see John, wondering whether I will even recognize him after all of this time. Luckily he recognizes me. The



whole conversation, unraveling happens on the back of his friend's bakkie, and they (his family and friends) are very impressed with the storyboard, especially with the link between their ritual gathering in the parking lot and the transformation of the church. The exchange is very superficial given that my time with John has been so short, but we will see at the workshop what the result of his interactions with others will be. I take the photograph, he signs the ethics form and leaves me with a friend who talks to me for some time about the difficulties of Ethiopians living in Johannesburg.

Figure 124: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Muller Street (For Abram) , Speak English To Me*, 2008.



Brita is a Venda school teacher who lives with her 19 year old daughter in a shared house on.... I met her as she was speaking to the builders on her veranda, and spoke with herself and her daughter in their backyard.

21/12/08 17h00 -17h35

I visited Brita yesterday and phoned from her house. So sorry, I forgot. Postponed the Sunday appointment. When I arrived she was washing the floor in her house, and asked if we could do the session on the steps leading down to the narrow area between the door and the fence. I agreed, but suspect that she trusts me very little. Her daughter was delighted to see me. I reminded them of the conversation we had at the animation workshop and then proceeded to explain the storyboard, frame by frame. They enjoyed the resonance between what they had said so many months ago and what they were seeing now, as well as the use of the washing line which suggested that they understood the metaphorical nature of the narrative. I asked them to contribute to the final frame, in which an empty pole stands, waiting for some kind of correspondence between Brita's views as a traditional Venda and her daughter's 'modern' urban views. Brita's daughter said she had nothing in common with her mother, and worried that this was the cause of her initial suspicion of me 'trouble causer'. I refused to accept this, saying that they had shared their lives together. Her mother appreciated this. They could come to no real resolution for the final frame other to say that their love of learning was something shared though I doubted this was the case with her daughter. Took the photograph which was amicable but competitive, and am pretty sure that they will attend the workshop.



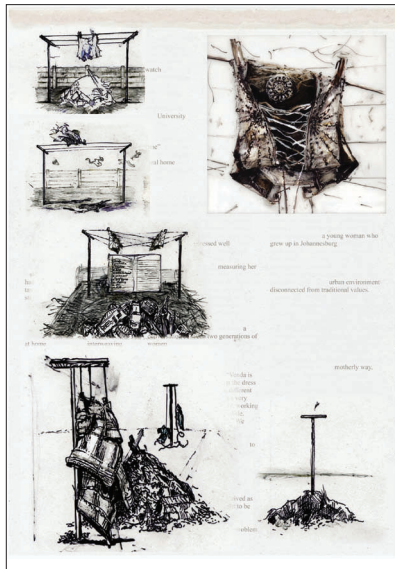
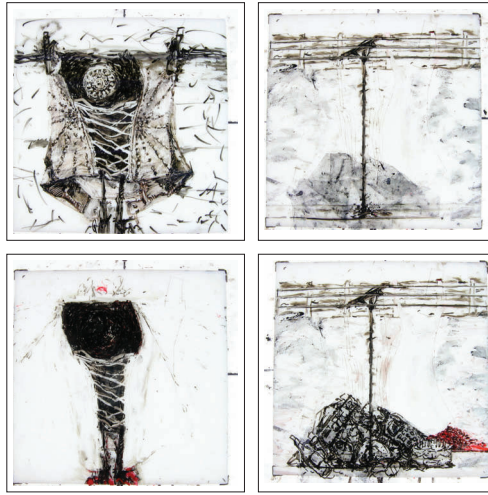


Figure 125: Brenden Gray, Brita's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with storyboard and commentary, 2008.



*never thought
I would come
up with that*

Notes for next set of sessions.

There are themes developing in my final conversations with the participants. I worked toward these in the storyboards, and they were confirmed in the final discussions, changed or elaborated upon. I need to synthesise these or select them for the final exhibition conversation, using the animation and prints to do so. The idea of defining a neighborhood is becoming a key concept informing my work. It is not so much about building community but creating a sense of neighborhood. If the final event manages to achieve that then this project has been a success. Perhaps the final artwork constructed collectively should be centered on the notion of neighborhood.

The aesthetics of intimacy: Edwina, Diogo, Jacques

This section gives the reader a more fine grained sense of the process a given participant would have experienced in the project in its totality. I relate these scenes in full to give the reader a more 'complete' account of my engagement with the participants. I have selected the participants because each engaged with every aspect of the project as it unfolded in the neighbourhood of Yeoville. My focus here is to provide the visual and textual materials generated as a result of our transactions, which are registered here in passages drawn from my 'walking novel'. For these three participants I give a full picture of the materials and aesthetic representations developed with/for them by linking the 'finished' art works to the field notes/project narrative.

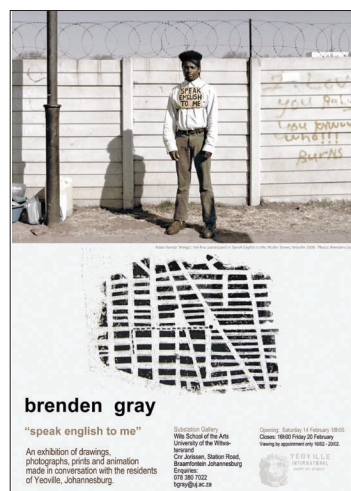


Figure 126: Invitation to *Speak English To Me*, Wits Substation Gallery February, 2008.



Diogo is a Portuguese speaking Angolan refugee who arrived in Johannesburg when he was eighteen. He has been homeless since then, living in a lean-to he had erected on the perimeter wall of Yeoville Boys School on Muller Street. He has recently found employment at a Nigerian tavern ('Hunger Jacks') on Muller Street and works as a security guard there.

First encounter

A week later, on my way home, as I was thinking about how to continue the project, I saw a man, wearing a tight fitting green shirt, jeans, and an elongated read peak cap, sitting on a pink plastic stool on Cavendish street, on the corner between the soccer field and Yeoville Community School, wearing a handmade cardboard placard over his chest upon which the words 'speak English to me' had been rendered in ball point pen. I immediately tried to place him in my mind as a drove past- was he a performance artist, an eccentric, a member of a drama group. I was sure that he was angry. Everything about his demeanour and posture suggested this. As a sign on the street he was almost entirely illegible to me. Four days later I saw him again outside St Aidan's church, hailed him, wound down my car window, and asked his name and inquired as to why he was wearing this placard on his chest. He said that his name was 'Diogo', and he told me that he was homeless, a refugee from Angola, a Portuguese speaker who had made the placard on his chest as a mark of protest against black South Africans, who he perceived as excluding him on the basis of language. His story was that if he spoke English to government officials and people on the street they replied in an indigenous language. If he could not respond in the same tongue, he was ostracised, harassed or ignored. He was protesting against the insistence that he should speak in Zulu, Xhosa or other indigenous languages. Hence the sign on his chest, where he attempted to compel his interlocutors to speak to him in English. I told him about my project in Yeoville and asked if I could speak to him at greater length later. He had no phone number but that he could be reached at the church across the road from where we were talking. A few days later I met Diogo again and told him about my plans to inquire about this language based xenophobia by speaking to more people in the area.

Conversation, storytelling.

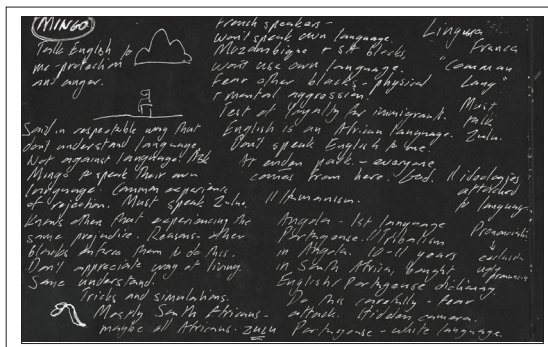
Because I did not know Diogo well at that time, he was somewhat suspicious of me, although very hospitable, pulling out the best fold up chair for me despite my protestations. I asked Diogo if I could get his permission make drawings as he spoke. This was the second time I would make notational drawings in combination with writing. I asked Diogo how he had arrived in South Africa. He said that at the age of eighteen he left Luanda because of the war in his country. When I asked him how he got here (a question I have asked many refugees and immigrants) he laughed and refused to tell me. I said that I needed images to draw as he spoke and that perhaps the story of his journey would assist me. So I drew a boat, a plane, and a bus and asked Diogo which of these he took, but still he refused to tell me. Diogo arrived in South Africa with some money but because he was young and naïve, he rented a flat that was far beyond his means, and soon ran out of money. He was forced to live on the streets for some time, until he found work in Johannesburg as a welder. Diogo's belief in social justice, a theme that came up in many of our conversations, was expressed for the first time here. Diogo and his fellow workers, mostly immigrants, were often not allowed to take meal or toilet breaks. As a result of this Diogo approached his boss and complained. Consequently his manager threatened to fire him. This only emboldened Diogo, who then attempted to take legal action against his employer. This failed, and Diogo found himself back on the streets again. During the decade that Diogo has been living on the street he has constantly found himself up against the law and discriminated against by members of the Yeoville community. His is a story of someone without power fighting for equality and dignity. Because of this, Diogo has gained some respect from members of the Yeoville community who supply him with food, work and opportunities. Diogo has never turned to crime, drugs or alcohol. I asked Diogo again why he wears the 'speak English to me' sign on his chest. He again explained how he was ostracised and marginalised by South Africans when he could not speak in an indigenous language: 'I say in a respectable way that I don't understand their language. I am not against their

language. They then ask me to speak in their own language. I must speak Zulu. I know that others are experiencing the same prejudice'. Diogo often launches into racist invectives against 'other blacks' who he believes are monkeys and resorts to simplistic ideas of evolutionism to defend his argument. I challenged him on this, explaining that injustice is something that occurs within and across races and cultures, that 'whites' have oppressed others. Diogo, during that time that he was living at Muller Street was constantly angry with a group of people he failed to identify. I would encourage him to identify, exactly, the people who were troubling him, but he would always return to those monkeys who interfere in his life. During the interview, Diogo summoned up two images, which for me are analogous to the split in his own dealings with the social world: the soldier and Christ. They stand at opposite extremes, the symbol of violence, aggression, versus forgiveness, generosity and kindness. Diogo will fight to defend his rights, at the cost of his own mental and physical health, but in the name of Christ. His zealousness to achieve justice very often looks like vengeance on those that have harmed or insulted his dignity. Diogo said that he is a Catholic believing, that despite the fact that he is living on the street God looks after him and protects him. Many of our conversations have centered on how Diogo can better spend his time and energy on improving the conditions of his own life, rather than wasting it on attacking the people who have done him wrong, or government officials who don't care about the complaints of a homeless man without papers. Later in the project, I would visit Diogo almost weekly to have conversations about how he could use his skills to get off the street.

Home language drawing



I asked Diogo if I could return on Friday afternoon to conclude the interview and make a drawing that represented his home language- Portuguese. He then made a strange request. He said that he would be deeply indebted to me if I could bring along my camera and make a video of 'those monkeys attacking me'. That way he could finally get them, and show the police the truth about how he is treated on the street. I said that this would be difficult to orchestrate and that I was not interested in doing that. I encouraged him to open a case at the police station against the people that intimidated and assaulted him, and that I could assist him in this. Diogo would not let the idea go.



On Friday, at about 3pm in the afternoon I arrived to see Diogo again. It was a warm day and massive storm clouds hung like neat sculptures above our heads. The children from Yeoville Boys and the nearby crèche were trickling back to their homes. The air was still and a yellow light infused the atmosphere. Diogo was waiting for me on the street corner and had already set out our fold up chairs. We spoke for a good two hours about how Diogo could earn an income. I said that I could provide him with wire, pliers and other things to make Christian

art works that he could sell at the numerous churches in the area. Diogo's feel for typography as evidenced in the many signs that he makes suggested to me that we could work together to produce these objects. I would be willing to get him started by delivering designs to him that he could translate into wire images. Diogo was interested so I promised to bring a tool box, wire the following day so that he could begin.

Whenever I speak with Diogo, I get this startling sense of how others on the street must perceive our meetings. As we were sitting perched on the corner of Cavendish and Muller, a friend of mine living on Muller street drove past, slowed down, waved and rode on and I thought, how would a sociologist, a professional academic working at Wits University interpret this meeting? The women who live in the church opposite Diogo's shelter? The messy groups or boys in white shirts that burst out of the school grounds? The tone of our meetings is so civil and relaxed suggested by our postures and manner of speaking. Two classes, and educated white man, and a homeless black foreigner discoursing on the street corner under a storm cloud. The wind picked up and it was getting dark so I asked Diogo if I could begin his drawing.

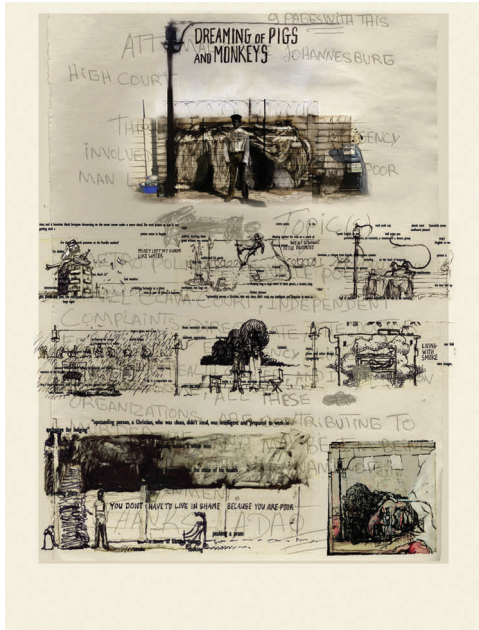
Figure 127: Brenden Gray, Adoia Gaspar ('Diogo'), *Shelter*. (Home language object drawing and conversation notes) *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

Once again I struggled to explain the significance of the object I wanted him to choose and present to me. Diogo wanted me to draw a special kind of potato eaten in Angola, a common ingredient in Portuguese dishes. He began to describe it and I interrupted him, by insisting that I need to see the object in order to draw it. Are there any such potatoes at the Yeoville market? No. I then asked him if there was anything in his shelter which was precious to him, or in some way emblematised his life situation. He did not answer. I then asked him if I could draw his shelter. Diogo laughed at this and I elaborated by telling him how I perceived it- so dignified, well structured and organised. He agreed, and I made a drawing of it. If our meeting on the street corner was perceived by passerbys as perhaps odd, this was uncanny- a white man sitting on a street corner, in near darkness, sketching a homeless person's tent across the road. The humour of this was not missed on Diogo who spent a good deal of the 1 ½ hours laughing at the situation. When I had finished I showed the drawing to Diogo and asked what he thought. Once again, as in the case of other participants, he merely smiled and said 'yes, that's it'. I promised to return on Saturday with Diogo's toolbox and walked home in the drizzle thinking about how Diogo manages to handle bad weather.

[...] I had been in conversation with Diogo for about two weeks about his condition on the street. His shelter was on my route to work so I would see how his condition was deteriorating. One day I saw Diogo leaning against the tree near his shelter scribbling furiously in a diary I had given to him. About a month before I had given him a tool box that contained a large quantity of wire, a pair of pliers, a hammer, glue, pencils and pens, two sketchpads and encouraged him to come up with designs for things he could make out of wire. He had recently put up large signs outside his shelter, essays on how the metro police were harassing him, written in a bold typeface scribbled in ball point pen. I read the sign, and basically in it he accused the metro police of attacking him in the night, taking his property and accosting him. He described them as animals and monkeys who had no respect for him as a human being. I was worried that this would provoke the police, but could not find him to warn him of the dangers of publicly insulting them. A few days later, I drove past Diogo's spot and found him sleeping against the wall, on a patch of grass without any shelter. I decided that the following day I would speak with him, but he was not there. I could not find him for a week, so one afternoon I went to the Hillbrow police station to report a missing person. The charge officer directed me to the cells, where I gave Diogo's details based on some documentation he had given me earlier. He was not there. I saw him about three days later. He looked terrible. His skin was flaking, he had lost weight and was angry. According to him the metro police had confiscated his goods, and when he went to the police station he was refused help. He blamed his physical condition (lice etc) on the fact that they had broken down his shelter and taken his private possessions, and had spent the last three days trying to open a case against them. He also walked to the Hillbrow hospital to receive treatment, but the doctor who treated him, refused to write a statement, or provide an affidavit that Diogo was suffering from lice. Diogo said that he was 'dying' and that his last act on earth would be to bring 'those monkeys' to justice. I tried to convince him not to follow this route, but rather spend his energy finding his feet, attending to his condition and most importantly finding shelter. He would not listen. So I went home and collected a sleeping bag, a large sheet of black plastic, a bucket, soap, toothpaste, two bags etc and gave it to him until he could find decent shelter.

On Saturday afternoon I returned to Diogo on my way to the shop. He was looking better. I decided to give Mother Patricia a call and ask if Diogo could find shelter there. I said that he was an 'up-standing person, a Christian, who was clean, didn't steal, and was intelligent and prepared to work in exchange for lodging'. He was welcome, she said, and asked if I could bring him over immediately. So carrying some of the things I had given Diogo, I accompanied him to Mother Patricia's flat. Many people who passed us marveled at the spectacle of a black man wearing a 'Speak English to Me' sign, limping beside a white man obviously carrying his goods. When we arrived at Mother Patricia, the security guard tried to stop Diogo and I explained the situation to him. We were escorted to her office where I alone, told Mother Patricia about Diogo. She then invited him in, and began a rather severe interview trying to ascertain his history, whether he had papers and inquiring into the state of his health. She said that she would not accept him into the shelter until he produced a medical certificate that proved that he had been examined and treated. She then laid down the law in terms of the rules of the flat, and ordered Maggie, a new Kenyan assistant to take his bags, arrange a sleeping place and take Diogo to a clinic for examination. Diogo left, thanked Mother Patricia profusely and went with Maggie. [...] I spoke to Mother Patricia for a while, testifying to Diogo's good character and went home. I felt good that Diogo was off the street and hoped that his sense of getting even with those who had done him in would not get the better of him. He had a tendency to challenge authority but I believed that Mother Patricia would be able to handle him.

Setting the home language object in motion

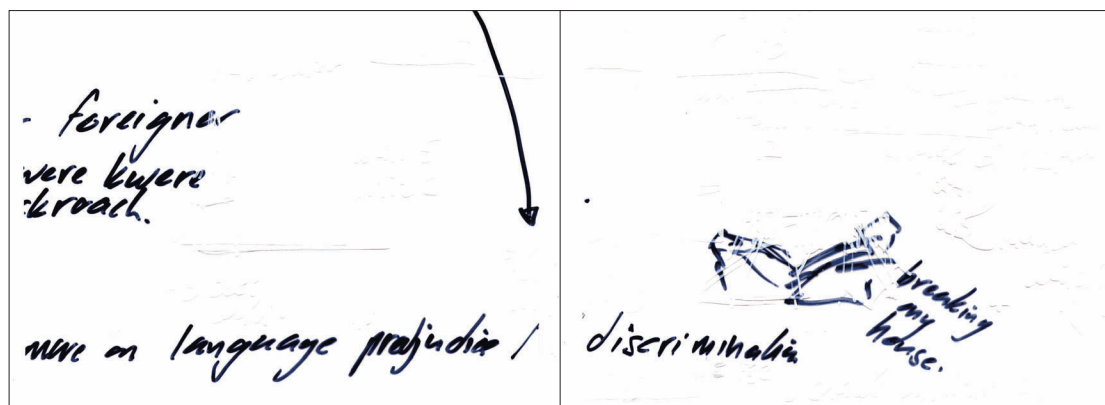


[...] The next participant was Diogo. I had no way of contacting him to tell him about the change in venue, so I walked between St Francis and St Aidan's church waiting for him to arrive. I saw him approaching St. Aidan's pushing a pram into which he had organised his belongings and onto which was piled a tower of banana boxes. I asked him how he was. He explained that he was living on the street again, because the smoke emanating from the cooking of the other tenants at Mother Patricia was affecting his health. There was no electricity there so the only source of energy was fire. I could imagine Diogo at his double bunk bed coughing in the darkness. He approached Mother Patricia who promised to help him but did nothing, so he packed up and left. He said that he was earning a living selling banana boxes that he collected from the vendors at the market and that this was sustaining him. Diogo pushed his pram as I walked to my house.

We went through to the studio, I showed him the sample animation and we began the session. In the formal space of the studio Diogo seemed less aggressive and more reflective. I reminded him about our discussions of language discrimination and asked if he would be interested in highlighting this, or if there was anything about the drawing I had made sparked off ideas for the animation storyboard. I then asked him again, thinking that he may be more receptive to dealing with the issue of his homelessness how he had come to South Africa, and what events led to his homelessness. He then began to speak, in short episodes which were egged on by the drawings I produced. In 1996, Diogo arrived in South Africa, when he was eighteen with some money. He rented a flat on Bezuidenhout, worked for sometime as a welder, lost his job because of an argument he had with the manager, and before he knew it, because of the high rental he had run out of money. 'Money left my hands like water'. He had to move and 'went straight to the pavement'. Soon thereafter his ID, passport and personal belongings were stolen. I suggested to Diogo that perhaps the entire sequence should unfold against the wall where he lives, including text appearing there, and images as if the story were a shadow playing against it. Diogo said that when he first set up his shelter people disturbed him, especially young, drunk men, but that after a while, people began to accept him, 'recognised me and left me alone'. I said to Diogo that this made sense, because he maintained his self esteem by keeping clean, showing courtesy, and organising his personal space so well. He agreed saying that people could see that he had 'self pride'. I told Diogo how it had upset me to see his written protests on the wall against the Metro police's harassment of him, and how he disappeared for some time and suggested that this absence be shown in the sequence. Diogo's sense of justice has meant that documentation is an important part of his life, so suggested including his letters to home affairs, the courts and the police as well as their official responses registered in the animation in some way. I said that it saddened me to see him return to the wall, sleeping without a shelter on a night when it was drizzling. (I remember returning from the Joburg Art Fair near midnight, seeing Diogo exposed against the wall, comparing the glut of cultural consumption to this scene of deprivation, my split self.) I drew an image of Diogo exposed below the wall, and from his head emanating the text 'dreaming of pigs and monkeys'. Diogo thought this was funny. I then suggested that the animation move to Mother Patricia's shelter where there the caption, 'living with smoke' would appear. I suggested to Diogo, that his battle for justice play out against the wall and he agreed. I was leading the session quite aggressively, but Diogo did not seem to mind, perhaps because I was so intimate with his story and situation so there was no need to elicit information from him. I then asked him, if we could end the sequence with his life as it is now. Then Diogo said something he had never said before, that he was at peace with being a homeless person, and did not want to fight anymore, that he felt in God's eyes he was a good person and that that is all that mattered to him. 'You don't have to live in shame because you are poor'. I wanted the sequence to end with an image of hope, so I suggested the final frame depict him with his banana boxes, slowly piling up to the sky, in a never ending heaping. He smiled at this and the session ended. I walked Diogo back to his spot, and reminded him to come to dinner later that day to meet the other participants.

Figure 130: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Muller Street (For Diogo)*, *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

I arrived late and Victoria and her family had already arrived as well as Diogo. They had only been there for a few minutes, but I suspect because Victoria and Don had recognised Diogo as a homeless person they were extremely uncomfortable. For Diogo, a man living on the street for eleven years, he may have felt unaccustomed to sitting in someone's lounge waiting for dinner. I welcomed them, and put the food out on the table. Soon after that Brita arrived with her daughter. The whole mix was uncanny, and unlikely. You could not imagine a situation of this kind occurring anywhere else. For a while everyone was silent, but soon everyone began to speak. Victoria, usually very quiet, asked Diogo questions, and soon views were exchanged and I had an opportunity to introduce everyone properly. Nicole offered everyone chia tea. Brita and her daughter refused but after some encouragement from Victoria they had some and enjoyed it. Don and I went outside for a cigarette. Dinner was served and Victoria began to praise the project, and congratulate me for bringing such a diverse range of people together. She went over to Nicole's mother and they spoke about sewing, Mary showing her pieces she had made to impress Victoria. Victoria was delighted with Mary and begged her to visit her shop to see what she produced there. Meanwhile Diogo and Don began to talk. Brita and her daughter though were very uncomfortable and quiet, insisting on not talking while they were eating, and tackling slices of pizza with a knife and fork on a paper plate, while everyone else was eating with their hands. The fact that Diogo sat right beside them also disturbed them and I had no way of breaking their nervousness. Nicole tried to speak with them but with little success. When Victoria returned she asked Brita questions and she opened up a little bit to talk about food. The dinner was over in about an hour and a half, and it seemed that everyone was much more comfortable but keen to go home. I thanked everyone and they walked home. We gave Diogo the left over pizza so that he would have something to eat the following day. I was exhausted. I felt as if I had exposed my private life to strangers, and accomplished the marvelous feat of not feeling any lesser a person for that. I felt that I had shared something intimate with this group of people and experienced an extraordinary coming together. I realised that this was the key in the project, bringing strangers together for conversations. Building trust through ritual and sharing.



Showing and responding to the storyboard

22/12/08

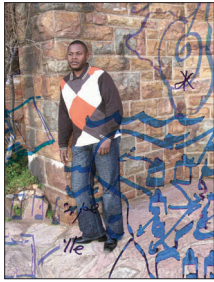
Diogo has become my gardener which presents its own set of problems, but the man is so independent that there were no problems when I asked him to talk to the storyboard. The man is really a friend, in a strange way. So 'noble' and sincere. He enjoyed the storyboard but insisted that I bring in the language discrimination in a more obvious way. The soldier/Christ image was particularly poignant. I had concentrated too much on the homelessness aspect and how he had come to be respected by the community despite his circumstances. I had no way of imaging that in his presence but I must find a way of integrating it into the existing storyboard. I asked him how it feels now that he is off the street and he said that it feels good to 'have a place and be human'. His life, something I cannot imagine. I wonder how his dignity manages to stay intact.

Animated sequence.



Figure 131: Brenden Gray, Adao Gaspar's ('Diogo) sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with his commentary 2009.

Jacques: suitcases, closing and opening doors.



Jacques is a French speaking refugee who left the Congo in 1994 and moved to Yeoville to escape persecution in his home country. He is an HIV/AIDS counsellor at Grace Baptist church, and has not received citizenship after living in South Africa for eleven years. I met him as he was carrying a canvas and paint through the park on Frances street. We have spoken in many places- my home, his office, flat and the parks in the neighbourhood.

First encounter

On the way home, walking through the park opposite my home, I bumped into Jacques Nkebi, a man I had known when I served on the block committee for Muller and Frances street. I told him about the project and handed him an invitation I was going to give to someone Alaghi could have introduced me to. Jacques was impressed by the design, and was holding a blank canvas, mentioning that he was trained informally as a painter. He immediately agreed to join the project and we set a date to meet at 17h00 the following Tuesday. He told me that he was always amused to find official signs in the area using French, Zulu and English to communicate information. French, he said was as an important language in the area as anything else. His native language was Kikongo, spoken in the Northern areas of the DRC.

Even before I came to know Jacques better, he always struck me as an essentially kind and humble person, always putting his own needs behind those of others. Jacques works as an HIV/AIDS counsellor for the Grace Baptist church, from a small office on Muller Street, where he also runs a clothes making workshop for unemployed woman. Living in the flat are also about three families who share the premises with his office. I arrived at 17h00 and Jacques was not in. I phoned him and he said that he could not make it, which was a serious disappointment because I was so sure of his interest. He promised we could meet the following Tuesday.

Conversation, storytelling.

That meeting was perhaps the most productive in terms of giving the project a firmer focus and indeed provided the central rationale for extending the life of the project. Jacques told me that there are about 450 different languages spoken in the Congo. Lingala and Swahili are dominant as spoken languages and French is the language of administration and education. Under Mobuto, Lingala came to be seen as the language of the oppressor. Because Swahili was a language used by rebels on the border of the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi and within the military it was difficult for the Mobuto government to determine who was a rebel or a citizen of the Congo. Jacques trained in health management, and left his home in Kikongo to become a hotel manager in Luanda. At the time, during the civil war, under Kabila's rule, it was compulsory for all managers to work for the intelligence services. Those who were not were persecuted by the police. The danger for the ruling government was that hotels could be used to track people's movements, limit infiltration but could also be used as bases for rebel camps. Jacques was caught up in this. In his time as a manager at an American hotel, he by accident, accommodated rebels, and was tried for treason. When the rebels left the hotel there was a riot in the area, they were arrested, and because they were Bikongo, closely related to Jacques's ethnic roots as a Kikongo he was accused of assisting the rebels in instigating unrest. The penalty for his involvement was he was forced to resign from his post. Jacques would not describe the conditions of his leaving the DRC, but left soon after the incident seeking asylum in South Africa. His first experience of South Africa was language discrimination which he experienced on the bus when he arrived in Johannesburg for the first time. Jacques attempted to begin a career as an artist which failed. He claims that he approached various galleries in Johannesburg but was turned down when he told them his nationality. He then began volunteer work for Grace Baptist Church, received training as an HIV/AIDS counsellor, opened up an office in Muller Street which he has been running for the past three years. Jacques has been active in the Yeoville Community through his counselling, involvement with the CPF, YSF and through the church choir. In every sense of the word, Jacques is committed to the improvement of the lives of the people in this area, without discriminating in terms of race, language or nationality.

I asked Jacques how language featured within his work and whether he experienced xenophobia in his daily interactions with South Africans. He confirmed that he experiences it on a daily basis, in taxis, government offices and on the street. In his experience, it is not a good idea to greet a black South

African in English. Jacques so greeting as his gateway to acceptance by other cultural groups and he said that in all his dealings with strangers he attempts to greet them in their own language. In terms of his work as a councillor Jacques said that much of the printed material produced by the Department of Health did not take into account the language needs of foreigners, who often could not read English or an indigenous language. At the same time, he like many other foreigners, felt resentment at the fact that despite living in South African for more than a decade, and investing in the country they were not granted citizenship. Jacques has approached the Department of Home Affairs on a number of occasions to demand his citizenship but nothing has come of it. He told me that it was commonly felt by his countrymen that attaining citizenship would provide them with a greater sense of safety within the South African community, implying that without it people from the Congo living in Yeoville feel that they live under the constant threat of intimidation. I described the relationships between what he was saying and the findings of my project and asked if he would be interested in working with me as an artist on a language project that highlighted some of the issues he was raising. He was very interested.

I then asked Jacques to talk more about his home, Kikongo. He described the people of his homeland as 'less talkative, peacemaking people, not interested in fighting, but protective of everything in the sense of keeping things safe'. A theme that comes up again and again in my interactions with Jacques is the importance of accommodation and hospitality in the day to day dealings between human beings. He cannot understand why South Africans cannot accommodate people from other African countries, when they are denied what they need to invest in the country- citizenship. For him, like many of the immigrants I have interviewed, hospitality must be reciprocal, and South Africans do not understand that if they were in need other African countries would support them. I asked if I could return a week later to discuss these issues further and make a drawing that represented his 'home'. Also, was there anyone he knew that did not speak the languages on my list that would be interested in participating in my project. He promised that he would phone Pastor Alfonso of the Grace Baptist Church to see if he was interested.

Home language drawing

I returned to Jacques to make his drawing. On the phone he said that he had an object for me to draw. When I arrived at his flat he was not there, and upon phoning him, he postponed the meeting. I was reaching the point where my list of potential participants was dwindling and I was struggling to get the existing participants to introduce me to new people. There were many moments in the project of total despair triggered by someone not arriving for an appointment, or joining me for a part of the process only to dump me later. Jacques arrived at our next meeting, and I was excited about the object that he would show me. He ushered me into his small, quiet office, packed with boxes, HIV/AIDS posters on the wall, a thick curtain allowing a sliver of light to illuminate the room. He sat behind a squarish office desk and I at the other. He asked me how the project was proceeding and I told him. Upon my request for the object, he went into the next door room and emerged with a very ordinary looking ceramic jug, and placed it sanctimoniously on the desk in front of me.

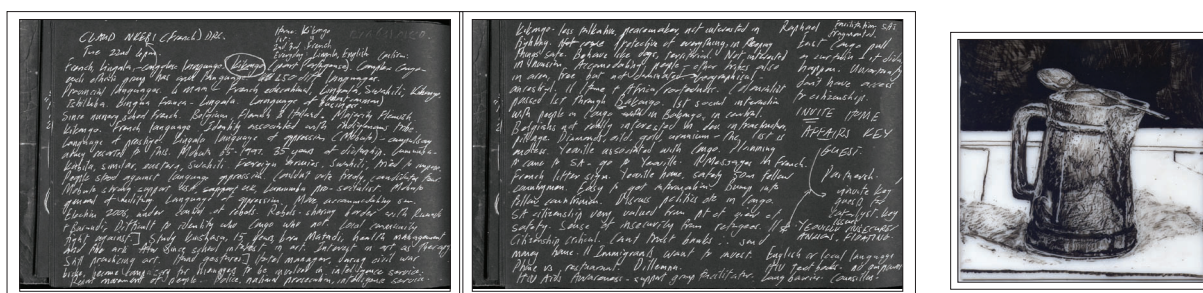


Figure 132: Brenden Gray, Jacques Nkebi, 'Jug (Home language object drawing)', *Speak English To Me*, 2008.

To hide my disappointment I asked him why he had chosen this object. Without answering he left the room again and balanced a cheap teaspoon over the top of the jug. I asked him again about the significance of the object. He said to me that Kikongo people are peaceful, and overflowing with generosity. When someone entered his home he would not refuse them a drink of water, so the jug became for him a symbol of hospitality. I accepted this. It occurred to me that what I saw as something quite ordinary was for him charged with intimacy and memory. I began to draw and Jacques stayed with me throughout the drawing session. We spoke primarily about religion. I did not want to engage him on art, because I tend to become quite critical when others talk to me about art. We spoke about religion, and particularly the relationship between Christianity and money. I put it to him: 'if you think

that there are church leaders out there, in Yeoville, that are using the word of God, his name, to manipulate their members to enrich themselves, then what should you do about it? If Christ was alive today how would he respond to this? Would it be a case of him throwing the money lenders out of the temple?'. Jacques and I argued for close to an hour on this point while I was drawing. His feeling was that God will see through their lies, and judge them accordingly. I rebutted that many people are being pulled into believing that faith is a monetary matter and through the machinations of these so-called 'men of God', missing the primary teachings of Christ. In fact these sham churches are obscuring his message. Jacques and I then spoke about how the fear of death prevents us from acting on our knowledge and conscience. The conversation was not resolved. As I was drawing, I become locked into the details of the jug, the tiny cracks meandering across a surface under which browns, greys and whites coalesced. How would I retain the shifts in tone and colour without disturbing the intricacy of cracks on the surface. How much of the background do I want to include? Jacques is sitting directly behind the object. Two narratives running side by side: the poetic/formal and the conversational/argumentative. When I was finished the drawing I showed it to Jacques and he thought that it was "beautiful". I told him that it is interesting how the drawings tend to reflect the personalities of their owners, quite inadvertently on my side. I said that I felt he was a generous, considerate and gentle person and that somehow the drawing conveyed this, to me at least. We discussed the language and home affairs issue related to the new direction of the project.

Setting the home language object in motion



He arrived at 10h00 and I was disappointed that he had arrived so late. We greeted each other and I took Jacques through the process. The most interesting aspect of my interaction with him was how the drawing surface becomes a space in which he could reflect on his life experiences. I asked him at first to write on the surface what came to mind as I asked my set of questions which centered on home, exile, and his perceptions of Yeoville. After a few minutes Jacques said that he felt uncomfortable writing and wanted me to take over. He had actually written a great deal: 'I have had a long trip and I need something to drink, sewing the seed of hospitality, water means future', and 'Africa is reflected in Yeoville'. As he was speaking I began to draw images, write down keywords, and generate some images of my own. My familiarity with the original conversation notes becomes indispensable in generating a concept for the animation sequence. I would make suggestions about how a particular

theme could be visualised and then made rough notational sketches, to which Jacques then spoke and elaborated upon. He wanted me to work with the idea of suitcases and doors acting as metaphors for travel, and pan-African tolerance, weaving his own story of persecution in the DRC into the mix. We quickly created ten frames for the animation. For him, the image of the suitcase moving through a continent revealed ambivalence, that it was at once an image of oppression (forced removal, refuge from oppression) but also of opportunity, where Africans from different places could share their knowledge, expertise and show their hospitality. For Jacques the theme of hospitality was key to his animation. I invited him to prepare a short verbal statement that he would read into the microphone which could be integrated as a soundtrack into the animation sequence. He spent some time phrasing it and then said.... There was something catalytic about the experience of making in this way as opposed to making a drawing for someone, where their only input was the choice of object. Jacques at one point in the development of the sequence was tearful about his experiences in the Congo, and the feeling of thanks he had towards those in South Africa who had shown generosity toward him. Jacques left and said he would return at 16h30 for dinner.

The dinner was an extraordinary event, and despite my initial thought that it would just be a nice way to say thank you for the workshop, it turned out that the quality of conversation elicited was intense. The dinner opened with a holding of hands and a prayer, where Jacques thanked god for my project, and prayed for its success. Although Edwina and her friend sat at the opposite side of the room to Jacques, myself and Samuel, with Nicole sitting somewhere in the middle, the conversation was ani-

mated. Edwina raised questions about the moral decay of Yeoville society and this encouraged Samuel and Jacques to speak about a kind of spiritual revolution. I interjected and asked them about the churches springing up in Yeoville whose primary aim was to exploit the conditions of poor people to make money, all in the name of prayer. I asked how we tell the 'real' churches from the fakes. Samuel and Jacques concurred that God would know. I argued that this is no good for people who may need moral and spiritual guidance who need some kind of vehicle on earth to know God and the philosophy of the New Testament. Jacques spoke about how important it was for the churches in the area to unite in the name of Christ so that this kind of exploitation would not take place, and Samuel, always talking about unity said that regardless of the colour of skin, we are united by God. It is unusual for me to have religious conversations, but listening to three strangers discussing Christianity in such lucid and open terms it struck me that religion really has the potential to construct a sense of belonging in Yeoville crossing over linguistic, cultural, racial borders. However, even though this possibility exists I have found that Christian leaders in the area jealously guard their congregations, placing their power and self esteem in the size of their congregation. Often churches are constructed along ethnic lines with churches for Nigerians, Congolese, and South Africans etc. I left the project that evening with notion that perhaps the most important aspect of the project was bringing strangers together in conversational contexts, in spaces free from expectations, institutional pressures, and common sense day-to-day experience. When the meal was finished I thanked everyone for coming and the participants walked home together, even though I offered to give them a lift home.



Showing and responding to the storyboard

16/12/08 15h10 – 15h55

Get lost on Mons. Find it and Jacques is at the gate. Welcomed into a plush apartment. Such a sophisticated organized man. I am really tired and a little frenetic. Unroll the print and Jacques says 'I am really, really impressed'. The storyboard seems to show a real clarity of understanding and synthesis of his story and as I go through it all makes so much sense. This is because I have listened so intently and he has followed the process so keenly. We agree that the final frame is powerful, but too dark. I relate from animation workshop about opening doors and skills. Yes. What can we do? A door opens. A footprint appears. How about the door falls, or sinks and two sets of footprints appear. All the doors fall and a dance of footprints. Jacques very happy about this, and I am too- the suspension resists closure in the last frame. Jacques wants me to come up with title from audio taped at workshop. Asks if I can burn him CD of print to show friends back home of experience in South Africa and will definitely be at the exhibition.

Animated sequence.



Figure 133: Brenden Gray, Jacques's sequence, *Wall Literature 21*, with his commentary, 2008.

Edwina: the dignity of women.



Edwina is a middle-aged Xhosa woman, a fervent Christian who runs a crèche from a hijacked building on Hunter Street. I met Edwina and her two boys at a community policing forum meeting in 2004, and again in 2008 as she was sweeping the pavement outside her crèche. Our many conversations were held in her living room/bedroom.

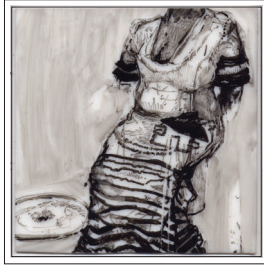
First encounter

While I was walking home from Stefano, I bumped into a woman I recognised outside a flat that was used as a crèche. She was sweeping and greeted me. She asked if I remembered her from my days at the CPF. I said yes. I also recalled that she had attended numerous ANC and ward meetings, stirring a great deal of trouble and accusing various people of not meeting her demands. She asked what I was doing on Hunter Street, so I explained my project. She immediately asked if she could be involved. I asked what her home language was and she said Xhosa which was perfect because I had not spoken with anyone in the context of the project that had. She would meet me a few weeks later. I thought then that an emergency plan for the lack of introductions on the part of existing participants may be meeting people by chance, introduction or possibly programme.

Conversation, storytelling.

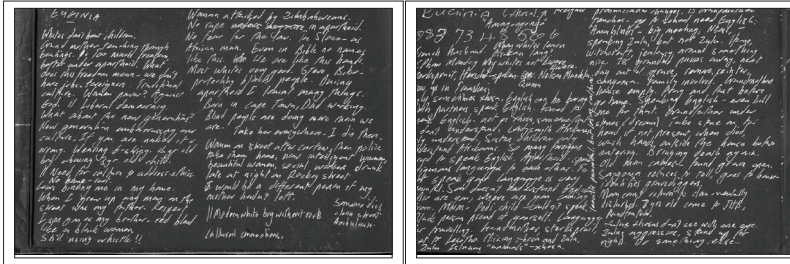
For about two weeks I had been phoning Edwina about meeting to discuss Xhosa. I had visited her twice and chatted without managing to set up a time for a conversation and drawing. At last, one Sunday afternoon I arrived outside her crèche on Hunter Street and she hailed me from the balcony to come outside. Her elder son, Nelson, opened the door for me, followed soon by her younger son who I had noticed a few days ago had some kind of speech impediment. He led me to a room that doubled as a bedroom and dining room. Against the far wall was an impressive, wooden king sized bed, covered in luxurious linen, boasting about ten voluminous pillows. It faced a large television, set into a lavish cabinet, which together with the fridge formed the wall between the dining area and bedroom. Nelson invited me to sit down. I could hear Edwina in the opposite 'room' who beckoned to me to join her. She was laying in her bed wearing nightgown covering a 100% Zuma T-shirt...

[...]For some reason she just wanted to talk politics and I had no way of directing the conversation back to her own life and history. She spent a great deal of time arguing why Zuma should be president and the charges against him dropped. Like other Zuma supporters I have met in the course of the project, she thought that Mbeki was not fit to rule, and leading some kind of political conspiracy against him. I tried to tell her how a constitutional democracy works, and share my concerns about the ANC putting personality above policy. I said that when the country's courts and the constitution are attacked in the name of political power, then it was time to consider leaving the country. She really didn't listen to what I had said and began to talk about how under apartheid, the country was better governed, less crime, lawlessness and more respect. I laughed and said that she couldn't possibly be a member of the ANC and at the same time subscribe to such a contradictory view. She saw none, and continued to argue for Zuma. She then pulled out from the dresser a box of photographs which she handed to me, asking what you see. There I saw Edwina at various political events posing with prominent officials among them Jacob Zuma himself and Zwelinzima Vavi. In it she was wearing traditional Xhosa costume, standing with a group of other women, around Vavi at what seemed the parking lot at a stadium. In another, she was sitting on a coach with Jacob Zuma and another woman, apparently his wife. I was amazed as she took me through these, how close she had come to these leaders. The photographs were somehow shown to me as a testament to her commitment as an ANC supporter, but I felt sitting there, that she was perhaps one of thousands of such supporters who have come to know the ANC more as a lifestyle, a promise, a culture, a community than merely a collection of policies and positions. There was no doubt that Edwina would do anything the party ordered. It was getting dark outside so I asked Edwina if I could return the following Saturday morning for a more formal conversation and to make the drawing. She agreed.



It was a lovely clear Saturday morning, and as usual when walking to meet people on Hunter Street I passed Tom to discuss things. I walked up the stairs and Edwina's younger son, opened the door for me, and made strange huff and puffs at me, putting his hands in my pockets to see what was there. He led me to the dining room, and it appeared as if everything had been laid out for me. A cup of hot tea on the glass coffee table, another seat opposite for Edwina to sit. Edwina emerged and asked me if I was hungry. Perhaps I should eat some morogo and pap while she put on her dress. I waited and tasted some of the food which was delicious but a bit too rich for breakfast. Edwina emerged wearing her bridal dress, a traditional Xhosa

garment which she wanted to model as I drew. She was so excited about it. Hesitantly, I warned her that she may have to sit for up to an hour and a half as a drew, but she had no problem. She was clearly preening at this opportunity.



I had two problems here. The first was that I knew that Edwina was not the kind of woman to sit still for prolonged periods of time, and also that I was hesitant to draw people as part of the project. For some reason, to become clearer later, I wanted to focus on the object as a kind of conversational intermediary between myself and the participant, something the conversation could center around or lead up to, a kind of totem. At the same time, I did not want to exoticise my "subjects" by making images of them.

Figure 134: Brenden Gray, Edwina, *Xhosa Bridal Dress* (Home language object drawing, *Speak English To Me*, 2008).

So there is Edwina, sitting in her tight fitting dress. I make the drawing as quickly as I can, cropping off her head, and trying not to offend by emphasising the folds that indicate that she does not have the figure of her youth. I complete the drawing. Edwina is very pleased pointing out the meaning of the patterns on it. I agree to return the following weekend on Sunday afternoon for a more formal conversation.

We sit again in her dining room. Her son is there alone with me and asks if I know if there is anywhere where he can find work. I ask him what education he has received and he tells me that he only has a grade eleven and that him and his mom failed to enrol him in time for matric this year. I tell him about learnerships and direct him to the SAQA website. I have been thinking for some time that there needs to be some kind of community development official in Yeoville that proactively identifies the needs of people like Nelson, resolves conflicts and generally educates people about their rights and responsibilities. In my walking in Yeoville I have met far too many people who have problems but have no way of accessing the information they need to empower themselves. Edwina comes into the room wearing a white T-shirt and jeans. She looks a bit tired.

She begins by telling me that her husband speaks French, is originally from the Congo. She is trying to learn French. I ask what language they communicate in and she says English. I ask what languages her children speak. Mostly English, but also a little Xhosa. I tell her about a middle aged Zulu woman I met during my studies, whose children could only speak English and ask her if she is concerned that indigenous languages are being replaced by English. She asks me why English people are not expected to learn an indigenous South African language, but black people like her are. I tell her that the education whites received often didn't allow this opportunity and that generally second language subjects are poorly taught. 'What I don't understand', I say, 'is that when foreign blacks cannot speak and indigenous language they are discriminated against by black South Africans, but when a white cannot, and speaks in English it is totally acceptable? Why are only black foreigners discriminated against?' 'Yes', she says, 'why are whites not kwere kwere?'. Edwina relates our discussion on language to her experience of growing up in Ladysmith, where Afrikaans is the common language of communication. She said that not being able to speak her own language now and during her childhood is 'very painful'. Knowing how to speak the language of one's ancestors, she believes, allows others to understand

who you are and where you come from. Edwina speaks a great deal about her late grandmother who she seems to respect greatly. Edwina's ancestral home is in Sterkspruit, near Lesotho. She speaks about how, there, her community mixed Zulu and Xhosa, and gives an example about how at an amahlubi, Njabulo, the head, spoke Zulu without being a Zulu. I ask her about her memories of home, and she tells a story illustrating how at home there was too much 'jealousy and witchcraft'. It is often very difficult to make sense of what Edwina says. She often gives narrative fragments rather than telling a story in a sequence. In 1978 her grandfather passed away, and because of jealousy, an unmentioned family member hired a sangoma, to disinter the body the day after the funeral. When she arrived home after the funeral she found that her grandmother's house was empty. The sangoma refused to give up the identity of the grave diggers. I did not want to push Edwina into explaining the circumstances surrounding this, so she changed direction to tell me about some of the customs observed in her home town. She told me that if someone close dies and you are not there, you are required at the funeral to place a stone on the head of the deceased, and wash your hands before entering the house of the deceased. If you don't she said, 'you will bring death again'. She then returned to the original narrative, and told me that because her mother had given birth to a mentally challenged child, her grandmother and family were exiled from their clan, and moved to Johannesburg when she was seven, to live in Randfontein. She said that there, the Zulus and the Xhosa's 'did not see with one eye'. I asked Edwina what her grandmother taught her given that her story was littered with compliments about her. Once again the apartheid theme entered her discussion. She told me that whites don't beat their children, but that her grandmother beat her. An idea that would resurface later, in the animation workshops, that society was more well ordered under apartheid, really began in earnest here. She asked 'we have freedom now, but what does that mean?' Edwina expressed the concern that the younger generation is embarrassing the culture and somehow against God. She said that if you are naked it is wrong, wearing a G-string at the age of thirteen, or abusing a 3 year old child is wrong. She argued that today people don't have homes, that 'laws bind me to my home', illustrating that when she grew up she was taught to treat any man on the street as if he were her father. I was her brother, she argued because we have the same blood, and then regaled me with the story of how I handed out whistles at a CPF meeting which she still used to this day.

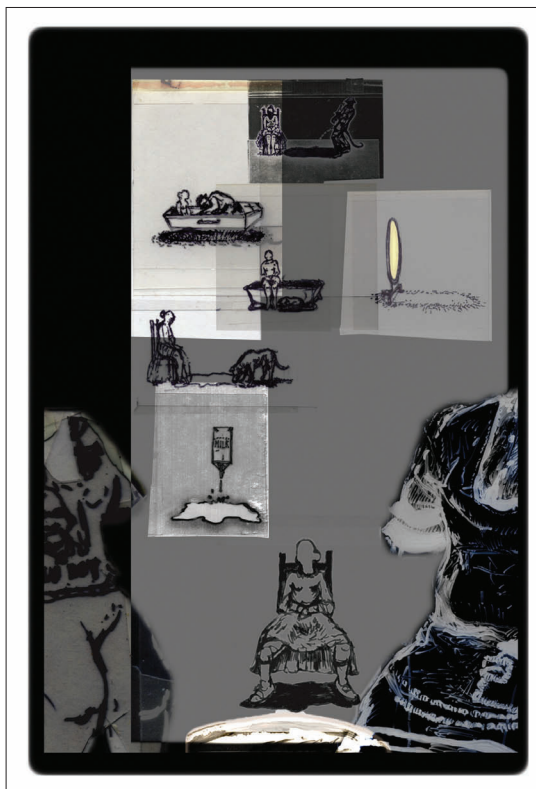
Edwina clearly has no time for foreigners living in South Africa, and again explained how under apartheid there was no rape and people feared the law. Woman in those days were taken off the street by police during curfew, but now today, intelligent, beautiful woman, like social workers can be found drunk, late at night on Rockey Street. She felt that during apartheid she learnt many things. 'I would be a different person if my mother hadn't left'. The conversation dipped and I was not sure whether I was listening to a confessional, a praise song for her own life, or a disjointed narrative torn apart by internal contradictions. At that point, a tenant and friend of Edwina entered the room and joined our conversation. It seemed to center around my identity as a white, because Edwina had introduced me as a researcher interested in her culture. The woman then told me about some of the stories connected to her village, a tree that wept and bleeds and other such things, each vignette designed to test my belief as a white person. After each telling, she would look at me inquiringly and say 'do you believe it'. I said that I was not sure. I then told both that I felt that they were lucky to have such homes, myths, customs and stories, because I, a young white man had no such connections to traditional culture. As someone who emerged from a working class, European immigrant class, I had lost 'my roots'. I asked them if they thought it possible for a white man such as myself to become Xhosa or Pedi, if I learnt their ways. Edwina interjected to argue that I must find my own roots, that there must be a way to find out who my ancestors are. I replied that I was not really interested in this, and that for me, identity was not an easy thing to define. All the while Edwina's friend kept looking at me seductively, and at the end of the conversation invited me back to talk with her. It was getting dark so told them I had to go home. Edwina encouraged me to bring my family next time I came. As I was walking out the building I asked a rather volatile question, given her ambivalence toward foreigners- did she know of anyone from another part of Africa who would she would be interested to invite to the project. 'Yes', she said, 'my pastor, you will love my pastor. He is a great man and you must meet him'.

Aside. I phoned Edwina about our Nigerian connection and she invited me to come on a Friday night to a service to meet him. His name was Pastor Emeke. She had told me about this church before at her front door pointing to the poster taped up there, hinting that I should join their congregation and become a Christian. So I walked through the dark, down Rockey Street past a film crew, countless taverns, and street vendors to 'The Lord's Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement Church'. There were about four people sitting in a first floor room, kitted out with the usual charismatic paraphernalia; clear Perspex podium on a raised floor, flanked by large ornate bowls containing fake red roses, behind which velvet curtains were draped. The whole scene framed by high powered speakers

connected to a small portable Casio keyboard, a graphic equalizer. The pastor has his own office just off from the main church above which a sign reads: 'Do not disturb the pastor. please speak to the church secretary. The pastor is busy praying for you'. I sat down. Two women and their children eyed me. A white man. A woman emerged from the office, and handed the man in front of me a florescent yellow bib, the kind traffic officers and parking attendants use. He spread it open and lifted it over his head. Upon it were screen printed, in blue, black and red, the churches various advertisements, logo and some scripture. The pastor, a stiff, sweaty man with a large solemn head, emerged and approached me and shook my hand, invited me to their service and inquired as to who told me about them. I told him about Edwina and that I was waiting for her. 'Welcome brother.' Upon his instruction the woman handed me a thin newspaper, 'The Time of Visitation', containing testimonies from various Nigerians who through the good work of this church had won new cars and employment, been healed of HIV/ Aids and cancer etc, and had gained general prosperity because of their involvement with the church. Edwina was now a good 30 minutes late, so I asked where the toilets were to burn time. Feeling quite ill, I vomited, felt a bit better, left the toilet partitioned with masonite boards nailed together, and returned to my white plastic chair, phoned Edwina then SMS'ed her, waited for 15 minutes and got up to leave. I was panicking that I would be left alone when the service started, and dreaded the moment when the pastor asked if there were any guests whose souls were in the need of saving. The woman asked whether I was leaving, and when I said yes, indeed I am, and then she asked if I wanted the pastor to pray for me, to which I agreed, purely out of curiosity. I was then led to Pastor Emeke's secret office, a tiny windowless room, containing a second hand desk, kettle, tea box, and a carpet. He invited me to sit down. We bowed our heads. 'Oh God, I lift my prayers to you for this young man, so that your supernatural manifestation may make his dreams come into being', then at break neck speed, 'M-a-n-i-f-e-s-t-a-t-i-o-n o-f a-l-l s-u-p-e-r-n-a-t-u-r-a-l i-n t-h-e n-a-m-e a-n-d b-l-o-o-d o-f C-h-r-i-s-t... Amen.'

Two days later Edwina phoned me and asked where I was on Friday night. I said that I had been waiting for her. She said that the arrangement was for Saturday night when they had a full service. Friday night was but a vigil. I told her that she was mistaken and she asked me to come the following Saturday. The next day I declined, and asked instead that she give me Pastor Emeke's telephone number so that I could make an appointment to see him. I phoned him and he agreed to meet me on Saturday morning at nine o' clock. I arrived at the gate which was shut and phoned him on my cell, a common occurrence in the project, me standing at a shut gate phoning a participant in the project that hadn't pitched. He told me that he was in a very important meeting and could not meet me that morning. So I decided to visit some of the participants in the project: Tom, Njabulo and Edwina. I arrived first at Edwina. She looked tired but elated and told me about Pastor Chris, a Nigerian warlord turned preacher who had just performed miracles before thousands of people at the Ellis Park stadium. She had brought her youngest son, who suffers from meningitis, for Pastor Chris to heal. Apparently as he entered the stage, a number of people in wheelchairs on the upper levels were instantly healed by his presence and proceeded to throw their wheelchairs away. She told me that she stood in a queue for two hours, until the early morning waiting to see the pastor about her son. When she finally reached him, he said that if she had enough faith, if she were ready God would intervene and heal her son. In other words nothing happened, but Edwina was convinced of his power to perform miracles. I told her that Pastor Emeke had not kept his appointment and she urged me to try again.

A few weeks later I went into the church on Rockey Street and found the Pastor talking to Edwina and a group of woman from the Congo. I was surprised to see her there and she welcomed me. The pastor was obviously in the process of giving them some kind of advice. He left the room when I arrived and Edwina told the other woman about my project. She told them quite proudly that the project was about dealing with xenophobia. For some reason, the conversation moved onto social injustice and then to apartheid and I asked the foreign women there if they knew about apartheid. None of them knew. Edwina and I explained what it was. For some reason they thought it was just some kind of generalised oppression against black South Africans. When I told them that apartheid was legislated racism they were surprised. Pastor Emeke entered the conversation to put his authoritative stamp on it. He argued that spiritualism was the answer to the social injustice and then prayed for all of us. I used the opportunity to give him an invitation to the project and explained it to him in some detail. Edwina added that Brenden is trying to bring people from different cultures together through language. Pastor Emeke promised to meet me the next Saturday morning for a conversation. That did not happen. When I arrived he was not there and did not answer his phoned for a few days after our appointment.



Setting the home language object in motion

Keaton did not pitch despite a confirmation. So I waited for Edwina to arrive. Like Samuel she had arrived well dressed thinking that there would be many people there. She had brought Patience, her friend and her infant daughter. She was excited by the prospect of generating a storyboard about her views. I went over the conversation notes with her and said that it seems that women's issues preoccupied her and did she not perhaps want to develop a piece around this. She said yes, and I suggested that perhaps we imagine the animation to be a conversation between herself and her grandmother; what would she say to her? Edwina then launched into a series of episodic stories dealing with issues she was struggling with in her own head. Generally on the left side of the scroll we came up with themes and then once a trigger ignited Edwina I would make small drawings, two women framing a picture of a girl walking a dog, a grandmother becoming a block of flats, a girl sitting with her legs open, a man cleaning his granddaughter's feet in a basin of water. This was punctuated with phrases drawn from Ed-

wina's speech: 'missing love', a woman will never be satisfied', 'stories of respect and dignity'. I would play these ideas back to Edwina who would then elaborate. At the point that a topic was exhausted I would refer Edwina to the drawing and ask if this is what she was looking for. The conversation generated a great deal of material, and that really was the purpose of the session. Even if a participant and I could not create a 10 frame storyboard, if I had enough material to work with we could at least agree on a conceptual framework. For Edwina it would be a piece where a young woman would sit opposite her grandmother, creating a frame, and the scenes passing behind them would index the possible topics of their conversation. At many points Edwina's friend murmured agreements with what she had said, and I suggested that perhaps for the soundtrack they could have a conversation around some of the questions I had elicited from Edwina's discussion and use pieces of this in the final animation. They agreed and spoke to a number of questions. I brought the session to a close and Edwina said she would return for the dinner.

I began immediately with the drawing aspect of the project and asked him how long he had lived in Yeoville, what was most important to him living in this country and what he wanted me to draw. He said the jug the church used to baptise his twins who were running around our legs. I asked if I would be able to request the priest if I could have access to it. It was nothing special, just a plastic jug, filled with holy water. He said I could find the same jug anywhere. A few weeks later when I returned to the church, I met Samson again who reminded me that he was still interested in the project. I sat in the church for a while. It was absolutely quiet, with one man a few rows behind praying quietly. I gazed at the communion table, pulpit, lectern, the sculptures of the saints and crucifixion mounted above the nave, wishing that I had a space like this in my mind to rest, hoping that I would finish my project before the end of the year and sort out the problem with the shebeen opposite my home. In all my interactions with Christians in this project, I could understand the power of religion to give people respite from the difficulties in their lives and hope that there is something better in the future. At the same time, I have always thought that although churches in the area have no equal in constructing a sense of belonging, creating support networks, it could prevent people from imagining a real future where their material conditions could be different. Religion tends to make people accept their situation and reduces agency. I rang the bell of the priest who never answered, so I phoned him, heard the telephone ringing inside and he answered. I requested to make the drawing (he was annoyed that I had disturbed him) and he emerged and gave Samson permission to lead me into the church to show me the baptism room. There was a baptism table, and in the corner of the room, the jug exactly as John had described it, sitting atop a zinc drum, with the words 'holy water' stenciled onto it. The entire scene was lit by the colours of the stained glass windows. A cheap fibre glass, life size Figure ure of Christ, with flaming, bleeding heart looked over a wooden table on which a bible and a bouquet of plastic flowers accompanied the scene. The jar and container of holy water struck me as a typical incongruity one sees in Yeoville, a combination of making do and an attempt to meet the normative standards elsewhere. I sat in the room and made the drawing in the dead quiet of the church.

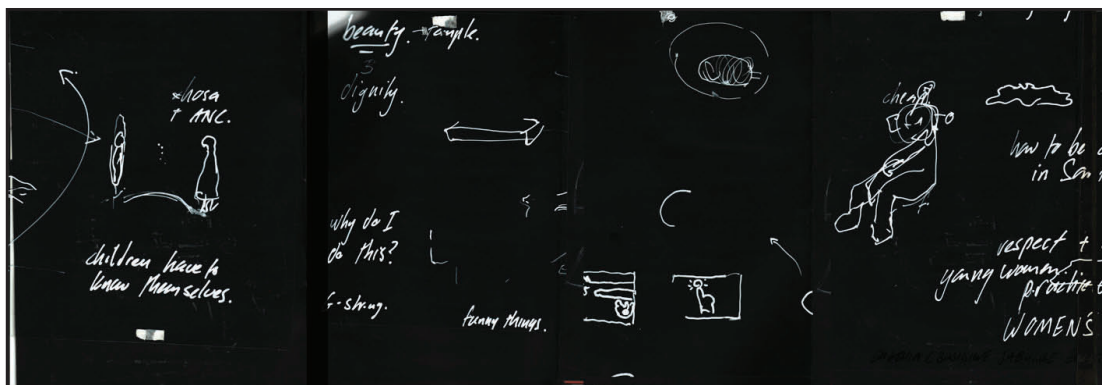


Figure 135: Brenden Gray, *Storyboard Hunter Street (For Edwina) , Speak English To Me*, with her commentary, (previous page) 2008.

Showing and responding to the storyboard

19/12/08 15h10 -16h10

I am a little late. Edwina is delighted to see me, as if I am some long lost friend. Struggle to find the photo in the cabinet, things rearranged, I suspect a new woman for some reason. I am to find later that she has been in court, and arrested for hijacking the building, but things are better now. Photos of Edwina posing with Velenzima, Sexwale, ask about the Bloemfontein rally. Her son, sits beside me, out of school for a year, no matric, she has plans for him. Watching some Hollywood film about terrorism on a big screen TV. I begin immediately to contextualize the project, and jump right into the piece being about 'woman practicing dignity' going through each frame, descriptively, I realize the violence is indexed superbly here; the idea of sexual violence is complexified. It clearly touches a nerve, and I can see that her moralisms are a way of covering up her own insecurities. The son, Nelson, becomes agitated, she is sitting right in front of the television screen talking loudly, her child suckling at her breast, and I know, for some reason, he thinks her a hypocrite. He moves away, the movie is turned off. The print stimulates a genuine discussion about woman, their bodies but we can never touch on patriarchy. Can you do a drawing, I have Tokyo, Zwelinzima, but I want this guy soon... JZ. I recognize that despite Edwina's talk of women's rights she falls right into the hands of a man accused of rape, showering to rid himself of HIV. The ANC is like Jesus, you follow it for life. I take notes as she speaks, developing captions for the animation sequence. I close the discussion about the storyboard, by saying that what the animation calls for is the need to reflect, constantly on what we are. The mirror image at the end of the sequence represents repentance through reflection. I know that she will think about this when I am gone. She says she will phone me to photograph her in her new Xhosa dress. Throughout the conversations and now she constantly encourages me to promote her image through the project: information about her, an aspiring actor, the councilor of the area, put my face in, I don't mind. And I wonder, what is the purpose of this, what I am doing, asking her to reflect on things? On the way out, 'write me a letter, I will get JZ to come to your exhibition!'

Animated sequence.



Figure 136: Brenden Gray, *Edwina's sequence, Wall Literature 21*, 2008.

The gallery and consummation.

How does the community appropriate to itself the meaning that it is? (Nancy. 1991:383)

This brings me to the consummative event of *Speak English to Me*. I found that because the materials generated by the project were exhibited in a gallery context (Figure 137 - 140) for the participants and given that I did not recontextualise my practice of drawing as it took place on the street in the, the final event failed utterly to bring aesthetic proliferation into play. Despite everything, I felt that this project, in the final analysis, was an immense failure perhaps because it interrogated the notion of immensity in its smallness; in its maniacal fine-grainedness. More centrally, I felt that it failed because I could not find a way of bringing the mixtures I saw emerging on the street into play in the gallery-workshop context. Failures only exist because of intentions, goals and objectives. Because the project lacked these, at the point of publishing it appeared to me to be fruitlessly radically, errant, hopelessly open with its main protagonist, myself, playing the outcast, a thief. I felt that in returning to the gallery I was committing a heresy against the world of legitimate culture and indeed against the culture of the street, exploiting both places for my own purposes. There were simply no findings to present either to the artworld or the project participants in the arrangement of the project materials in the gallery space. I had nothing to offer, to say, nothing to fix, I bore no solution, carried nothing profound in my suitcase of research materials. Seeing the exhibition mounted I felt that the project had achieved nothing politically tangible or aesthetically significant and now I was inviting the neighbourhood participants (a mix of people from radically different backgrounds and strangers to each other) and the general viewing public to partake in my spectacular absurdity which ultimately seemed to be as nothing but a burden that I would have to carry alone.

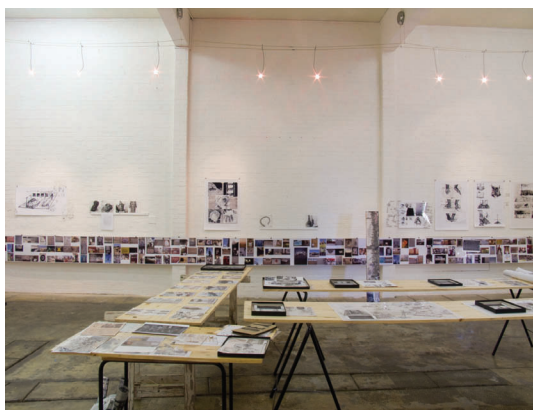


Figure 137-138: Brenden Gray, Exhibition Space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.



Figure 139-140: Brenden Gray, participants' writing in the exhibition Space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.

The participants would arrive and find no coherent findings. Setting up the exhibition seemed a lonely and solitary affair at odds with the processuality the project was beginning to establish despite its proclaimed emphasis on collaboration and collectivity. But I didn't care and I suppose it is in this that the heresy lay. I was accountable to no one in setting up the exhibition. I subscribed to no doxa. In feeling daunted by the gallery space, it seemed to me that I cared not a jot for my street constituency nor the art institution, neither of which I could claim as mine. The experience raised that familiar feeling of not belonging, of wandering and being lost in that nowhere land between the field of legitimate culture and my working class upbringing. But I knew that I had wandered the streets heroically, madly, armed with an absurd proposition of mixing which lent the project a Quixotian air. A year of walking had become my own vast misinterpretation because I realised that I had been alone in my project of bringing strangers together. In reflecting back, now, I can perhaps claim a little prize *because* I was heretical in that I entered the gallery space without legitimacy or credentials possessing but the insurrectional attitude of the shoemaker:

Heresy is first and foremost augmented religion or the radicalization of aesthetic legitimacy. The struggle for the right to speak freely is foremost a struggle for euphemization. It is by entering into the game of bourgeois passions (and the most "legitimate" ones) that fields of symbolic relations take shape at the limits of the classes, making possible the enunciations and utterances [*l'enonciation et les enonces*] of working class speech detached from the repetitions of *amor fati*. The first worker-militants began by taking themselves for poets and knights, priests and dandies. An allodoxia that is the only way to heterodoxia. Borrowed passions using the only words that make reappropriation possible: borrowed words. At the price of a few malapropisms and misinterpretations: the misinterpretations of the words that aver the necessary order of things is the first word of heretical discourse. The shoemaker's insurrection is a vast misinterpretation of *The Republic* (Rancière 2003: 200).

Entertaining every possibility of failure in the passionate mode of wonder, contemplation and meditation (no place) seemed to be heretical. My talk of emergence, informality, an ambulatory aesthetic belies the fact, that throughout the project, I carried in my head doxic notions of success which were exacerbated when I confronted the gallery. The pursuit of success tends to obfuscate and veil another kind of clarity that is not evaluative in nature. What happened in the project before my eyes could only be apprehended through description rather than interpretation, the latter of which the gallery prioritises. I asked if a communing of strangers was indeed possible in a gallery without a presentation of interpretation and further whether it was possible for a group of participants displaced into the gallery context to connect to one another through speech set in motion by these intimately made aesthetic representations. Was it possible that through the knowledge of shared strangeness a relation of intimacy could be forged? I had experienced it. Could others partake of this mad idea? The animation as a threaded polyvisual statement was supposed to achieve this recognition of the intimacy of strangeness. I hoped that through the spectacular cinematic representation of 'being-in-common', through the interplay of recognition and identification I could show how easy it seemed to enter into these impossible relations with others. Intimacy is relational and responsive and goes against the grain of objective findings. Intimacy cannot be accurate, reflective or verifiable, illustrative or reproductive, measurable. It seemed to be a translative affair. I realised in setting up the exhibition that in the project I had filtered and translated the experience of others (the borrowed words of the 'lowly ranked') through an aesthetic medium (a visual idiom borrowed from a distinguished possessor). How could I present this absurd and situated feeling of intimacy to a broader audience? If the street is cold and brutal, a non-place, the space where the detritus in the failure of imagining community is littered, then I could only present the scraps of my experience of working on the street. How could I do this when the gallery is a place reserved for the presentation of transcendental profundity?

In some senses, setting up an exhibition is like constructing a temporary home for a community of aesthetic statements to inhabit. But the idea of the home also evokes the image of the border. In arranging the materials in the space I wondered: where are we to locate this aesthetic 'we' if even our homes are defined by their borders and our institutions are artificial forms of tribal capital? Where is the home of aesthetic representation if indeed every single space is, in some way or another, contaminated by capital. What places of human exchange are not infected by the logic of profit? Where is that place to speak of freedom and to play? If I had made the decision to show the project materials and final animation on the street it may have provoked nothing but confusion and in the eyes of the participants and possibly devalue their special and tender contribution to the project. Where is that place that escapes spectacle and offers instead organic unity and continuity? Given these thoughts, my decision to locate the consummative event of the project in the gallery was a fraught one. Once the decision had been taken the situating of the project in the gallery became a test. Is the gallery in which a practice being-in-common can take place?

As was to be expected, the final workshop that took place in the gallery exhibited was chaotic and confused. The roving video camera, the kokis in boxes, the clean white walls, a map of Yeoville made by Diogo lying in the center on the space, the artworks on the walls waited for the arrival of the participants. When the participants arrived they then waited expectantly—what would be required of them? Everything about the situation suggested that the participants were expected to perform and work. As one participant remarked at the start; 'I am beginning to feel workshopped already!'. The workshop was attended by ten participants from *Speak English To Me* and their invited guests, eight community representatives, the exhibition examiner, an art critic from *Art South Africa* who had been commissioned to write a story on the project, a student camera operator and a variety of other guests who appeared uninvited and unexpected: two post graduate students studying at Wits University, Fine Arts lecturers from various institutions, and other interested members of the public. In introducing the project I said that the purpose of the workshop was to generate research data for my research report around neighbourhood participation in the construction and reception of aesthetic representations and secondly for the participants and myself to use the neighbourhood project material in the gallery to construct a series of artistic interventions that could be implemented in the Greater Yeoville area in 2009/2010. The first purpose would inform the report I am now writing and the second would allow the Yeoville community to present itself and its concerns to a broader audience ('the public') that would be arriving shortly after the workshop to see the exhibition. I told those gathered for the workshop that I was personally interested in the effects of bringing strangers into conversation with one another within a gallery space and that I was also interested in how dialogical-aesthetic materials generated in the neighbourhood setting could catalyse critical conversation.

In what follows I reflect critically on what took place in the workshop, both in terms of my embodied experience of facilitating the workshop and in terms of my observations of the video documentation of the event.

For me, the following critical elements emerged in the course of the workshop:

- The more consummative artworks generated on the street (the storyboards and home language drawings) had very little purchase for the participants in terms of the conversations that took place between them over the course of the workshop. Participants drew on the more functional visual statements (the map and series of

photographs of the area) in the gallery as contextual markers for meaning-making.

- Different modalities of speech emerged as the workshop activities proceeded. These shifted as the activities were reframed by myself. The change in activities modified the participants' discursive understanding of the neighbourhood.
- The gallery became a place of 'accounting' for the participants. Many of them (and to a large degree myself) seemed to 'perform' as representatives, delegates, spokespersons of Yeoville which suggested that they had to exhibit stable, essential identities in the gallery space. The participants needed to show that they were visible and legible to one another before more authentic dialogue could take place. Intimate dialogues generally did not emerge in the context of the gallery workshop.
- Certain internal conflicts that played out in my facilitation of the workshop which made the exhibition less productive than it could have been. I felt that I needed to publish something tangible for the art institution (an allegiance of sorts) and at the same time make the workshop relevant and meaningful to the participants. This inner conflict prevented me from generating the data I needed in order to investigate my research problem as thoroughly as I would have liked.
- The workshop arrived at a new aesthetic way of talking about place. I found that participants were able, toward the end of the workshop to read the neighbourhood aesthetically. Earlier readings of the neighbourhood were more normative, habitual and symptomatic.
- The workshop ultimately suggested that it is possible to understand proliferative conversation as a semi-autonomous form of aesthetic place-making and representation. The absence of my public drawing which had taken place in the street, but not in the gallery workshop prevented the group of participants from capitalizing on understanding the neighbourhood on an aesthetic basis.

The workshop was roughly divided into three parts which emerged organically over the three hour period. This was largely improvised as the workshop unfolded:

1. An informal walkabout and introduction to the project by the artist. This informed a general discussion about the meaning of the terms 'community' and 'neighbourhood'.
2. Participants writing on the walls and surfaces in the exhibition space. Here participants were asked to develop metaphors to characterize their experience of the neighbourhood and to share these with others.
3. A broader discussion around the challenges, needs and opportunities in Yeoville.
4. In the final section of the workshop, groups of participants were asked to visualise aesthetic/artistic interventions that may take place in the Yeoville area in 2009/2010 and share these with the larger group.

I implicitly expected participants to see the gallery as site of mixing and proliferation but because they brought their own sets of expectations to the gallery as a site of legitimate culture their expectations and mine clashed. From the outset, the participants knew that the workshop was not to be a rehearsed or strictly planned (the above phases were not formally introduced) event. The 'directions' it would take would most likely be unpredictable. Given this, the participants largely felt vulnerable in the gallery space and needed to make a choice as to how they would handle the

indeterminacy of the situation; to be attentive to the flow of the workshop and improvise accordingly, to control and determine its flow; refuse to take part in the activities or resist the flow of the workshop entirely. Given their vulnerability and the indeterminate nature of the workshop situation, I found that participants needed to take and make positions in what had become a fraught social space. In other words, this context of indeterminacy, strangeness and contingency rather than loosening up the group to dialogue instigated the making of fields of power. The three hour event in some senses mimicked, in a microcosmic way, the power plays that exist in the inner city, the culture of opportunism and also reflected and the dynamics I saw playing out between myself and participants on the street phase of the project.

An informal walk

The participants, at first, exhibited the usual signs of anxiety in the initial phases of a workshop. However, this anxiety was also, to an extent, a result of the indeterminacy of the situation before them. They spent the first few minutes of the workshop milling about the space and then began to tentatively approach each other because they had no measure by which to construct a firm evaluative position. In the informal walkabout, the participants struggled to formulate an 'interpretation' of what was expected from them, or failed to produce a 'correct' interpretation of the social situation before them. They needed at least a frame by which to take a favorable and profitable position in the context of the workshop. This meant that the participants were lost in the initial phases of the workshop. They simply walked around the space, looked at the images on the wall, observed the bodily signifiers present in the space and then slowly began to search for contact points, nodes of identification at which they could 'stand' and speak with confidence. The participants therefore needed to make a place to speak from made it almost from scratch in the absence of one being provided. Once a discursive frame and a hermeneutic ground was introduced (the problematics in defining community and neighbourhood) by myself, the participants seemed to feel that they could now more readily approach one another and engage more productively and confidently with each other. Given the tentativeness of the participants and their conversations, it was important, in the initial stages of the workshop for me to move around the space and open up their conceptions of notions 'neighbourhood' and 'community'. I needed to be mobile and flexible; asking questions, introducing problems and deferring providing my own answers to these questions. The last thing I wanted was a banal, commonsensical and reproductive reaction to the workshop materials and activities which is so often the case in community-based art workshops so my movement through the space was neither didactic nor pedagogical. Rather I had to instigate collaborative meaning-making by perturbing the conversations that were taking place. I achieved this through slight inflections in the instructions that I gave (that tended to undo themselves as I was peaking) and by reiterating that my interests in the workshop stemmed from my connection to Yeoville as a resident rather than a researcher-artist.

Metaphoric writing on the walls and surfaces in the exhibition space.

In the second stage of the workshop, I spent much of my time in the gallery operating somewhat as a dialogical educator/facilitator: perturbing situations and their attendant meaning-makings through question asking, framing and reframing activities and motivating speech and responsiveness assisting the participants to construct a relation of intimacy. But because the workshop placed so much emphasis on chaos and proliferation it made it impossible for me to work on its surface in

any coherent way which was a good thing, because if I had ordered and encoded the social material in the space it could both determine and obscure the dynamics taking place between strangers. This was a constant temptation because I needed a result from the workshop. A viewing public would be arriving later to see the exhibition. Rather like the camera and the participant that roamed the gallery space during the workshop unpredictably searching for points of comprehensibility, significance and legibility I would get lost between small dynamics, seek out and nest in situations and nodes of activity visibly emerging, in which I sought to intervene as an equal interlocutor. This reflected in many ways my wandering on the streets of Yeoville. The proliferative nature of the workshop therefore made it impossible for me to exert a panoptic control, in short, to use my agency as the medium by which a series of utterances made in times and space could reach a coherent and publishable form. And yet despite my interest in creating a rewarding experience for the participants I was haunted/hunted by the need to be answerable to the viewing public who would be expecting something very different..

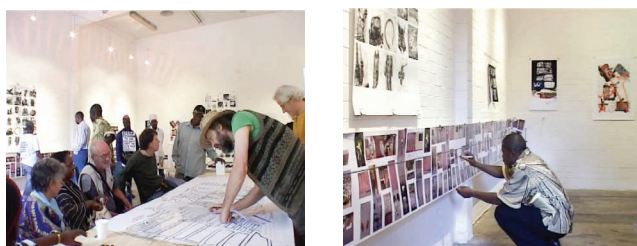


Figure 141 -142: Brenden Gray, participants' engaging with material in the exhibition Space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.

In the second part of the workshop participants were essentially asked to 'leave their places' as part of an artificially constructed audience by being asked to think more metaphorically. It became clear to me that the participants felt the need to assume apriori positions as they transacted with others which lent the first few stages of the workshop an artificial quality. I sensed that a real effort was involved for the participants in physically getting up and engaging with others. The context created by the exhibition, my framing of the activity and the fact that for many of the participants they were working and speaking amongst strangers made it difficult for them to maintain these stable apriori positions. Although they had transported more legitimate neighbourhood roles into the gallery or made them up as if out of thin air there was a sense, as the workshop progressed that they could not maintain these role ad infinitum. In the second stage of the workshop, participants assumed what they felt to be legitimate public positions rather than their more resident-private positions the latter of which were more evident here. Groups began to form based on existing linguistic and cultural allegiances and commonalities in habitus and I had momentary glimpses were strange mixtures were concocted between groups and individuals I had met during the project. It was interesting to me that the participants who already had an affinity with the formality of the university, (participants with high social capital) for example; those who felt most ready to speak authoritatively in the workshop setting tended to speak to each other. This congealing was natural in the workshop situation. In situations of extreme indeterminacy participants must aggressively claim their territories by making groups.

In the second stage of the workshop participants were asked to move through the space individually and construct metaphors about their experience of Yeoville. It was here that I saw a whole range of 'congealings' and individual position takings/makings occurring. For example, the church pastors, community activists, university lecturers assumed positions of authority assuming that, by virtue of their titles, they automatically had the right to frame, consolidate speak publicly and thus later direct the conversations of others. The sociologist, ANC ward committee member, community activist, met, notably, at the center of the space, over the map considering the problem of Yeoville as one

that needed a total solution. Other peripheral groups formed toward the edges of the gallery around language, with Jacques and Joshua's wife speaking extensively about Yeoville in French. Other groups formed because their homes were close to one another.

However, there were those participants who could not find places within the context of group making and mixing and mingling that took place later in the workshop, among them, Mrs. Singh, Diogo and Samuel. Diogo and Samuel (both have experienced homelessness in the time that I have known them) could not find their places as it were because in Yeoville itself both were outsiders. Here in the workshop they were seen as alien both in terms of the neighbourhood itself and in the area of legitimate culture as indexed by the gallery. They spent most of their time looking and wandering through the space, without showing much interest in finding a place in which to speak. They were willing to entertain a certain placelessness and did not seem uncomfortable with their status as outsiders. It is worth noting though that Diogo arrived at the exhibition with visibility constructed for him beforehand, through the representation of his body on the invitation cover, he did not feel sufficiently confident enough to mix with the others. This, however did not stop others from approaching him, notably the external examiner and art critic who felt the need, as delegates of a certain kind, to meet him. Perhaps this was because Diogo was seen by them as being 'the' representative of the project and the neighbourhood when in fact Diogo was its quintessential outsider. I wondered, at the time, what thematics emerged in this radical meeting of representatives from different regimes?

Conflicts in facilitation: artist-resident vs. artist-researcher.

The various movements toward consummation and critical singularity, a sharing or being in common was constantly frustrated by my need to bring the participants to a point of publishing which often broke the back of certain conversations as they were reaching points of coherence. There were two reasons for this which implicate my own fraught position within the context of this exhibition. I felt as an artist-researcher that I would "carry the can" if the participants were not made to perform in the course of the workshop by publishing something profound for opening of the exhibition, for the art community, a constituency toward which I felt a certain unconscious allegiance and loyalty which translated on a feeling that I must impose a goal upon their chattering and squeeze at least one "finding" out of this social situation. At the same time, I felt as an artist-resident that the goal to publish was of little importance that the quality of conversation about the neighbourhood was of central importance even if this did not produce anything tangible. Both unreflexive positions tended to result in a methodology of undoing, destabilization that was on the one hand productive (it prevented the collaborative point from consummating in clichés) but on the other these interruptions were destructive preventing the participants from positing a kind of being-in-common which after all was my central interest as an artist, a researcher, resident and person.

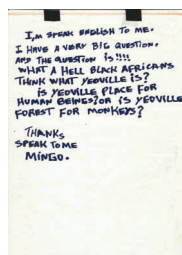


Figure 143: Brenden Gray, workshop activities in the exhibition Space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.

Figure 144: Diogo's attachment to gallery material, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.

This conflict in myself between serving the participants and the discursive space of the gallery was exacerbated by the presence of various ‘outsiders’ who attended the exhibition workshop. I knew that my attempt to destabilize the participant’s meaning-making processes and also the attempt to create a sense of being-in-common was being continually judged by the Art South Africa critic and external examiner. Their presence tended to make me self-censor and be self-conscious and the result of this is that I drove a wedge between myself and the participants. I was concerned that they would misinterpret what I was trying to achieve and see the situation of chaos unfolding and my lack of ability to control it as a weakness. I would be unable to intervene in and to *control* their readings of the situation because they were not so much participants in the workshop as observers. I would have therefore felt far more comfortable and confident speaking to this group of participants ‘alone’ within the context of neighbourhood rather than having to continuously consider the evaluative eyes of the art critic and external examiner in everything I did and said. I perceived their presence as threatening and this impeded my performance. I felt, somewhat prejudicially, I might say, that the critic and examiner demanded a result, something significant, legible and coherent from the workshop when I was but groping toward that. This created difficulties for me because I would need to again, within the context of the workshop, strike a balance between a certain goal orientedness and openness. I resisted my own impulse to treat both the participants and outside visitors as caricatures and decided to move through the space as a participant myself observing and contributing to the conversations that were taking place. However given the short time available to me for the workshop, and because of what I perceived as being an outside interference in the workshop my reframing of the activities became too blunt and rushed to make the experience meaningful for the participants. I was frustrated by the fact that the visiting public may expect closure from the workshop and at times I imposed this frustration on the participants, forcing them to publish something significant for an audience that would soon be visiting the space.

As was to be expected, the review of the workshop, published in *Art South Africa* ‘misrecognised’ the situation or at least did it no justice (the critic only stayed for a quarter of the workshop). This is perhaps because the review brought the obvious and normative frames of ‘community-based art’ to bear upon it. I felt that the review had imposed a scheme drawn from literature on community based art (participativeness, site specificity etc) upon the workshop. I also felt that the review was poor for political reasons. Bourdieu (1993:94) argues that when two or more positions in the field are too close, or homologous they threaten one another. In order to monopolise a given position one of the players must displace the other’s practice. The review was written by someone in the field whose position was, indeed, very similar to my own. Both the reviewer, Buys, and myself are critics and practitioners in an emerging local discourse in ‘socially engaged art’. I saw the review as an attempt to displace my practice by inventing a frame of reference that was artificial. The assumption made in the passage below assumes that the workshop was designed to allow the ‘participants to make art’ (Buys 2009: 88) which entirely misinterpreted the aim of the workshop. Participants were responding to the exhibition rather than making art which made the project less about art and more about speech. Buys felt that, because the project was located in the gallery (a decision she thought was made by the artist alone) the participants were unable to ‘make their mark’. So given the power of the critic a displacement was in order:

His ambition was all but thwarted when the work moved off the street and into the gallery. Hours before the opening of the exhibition Gray held a workshop in the gallery, during which he invited his subjects to interact with the installed works, modifying them and adding their own narratives, as represented by Gray. But instead of doing this, the participants struggled against some insurmountable barrier- perhaps the monumentality of the gallery space, or the very idea of making art. Those who did approach the hung works mostly did so shyly, clutching a fat Artline marker and looking for the safest corner in which to make a mark (Buys 2009: 88).

'If you had to win five million': visual speaking.

Despite my frustrations about the workshop and the participant's confusion, we did seem to arrive at a point where I felt a new form of confident and generative speech emerged. Notably a speech form centered on visualization tended to undo much of the anxiety around the taking of legitimate positions. Toward the end of the workshop participants felt that they could speak from their dispositions rather than from their positions and a more intimate way of speaking about the neighbourhood emerged. The art critic did not stay to witness this. This way of speaking 'arrived' in an interesting manner. Toward the end of the workshop a white community activist living in Yeoville felt the need to 'take control' of the workshop because he perhaps thought that I had, up to that point, failed to direct it successfully. He asked the group of participants, in effect hailing them as *his* 'audience' a rhetorical and political question: "if you had the means to move out of Yeoville would you do it?" His supposed that everyone would say 'yes'. When no-one did he felt the need to speak through another less vocal and visible participant; the Malawian tailor Mzila whom he had spoken to earlier; claiming that someone like Mzila would. Using this device he could then go on to claim that the lack of affective investment in the area is its primary problem and that this could be proven *through* his representation of another.



Figure 145: Brenden Gray, neighbourhood discussion in the exhibition Space, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.

This rhetoric of the community activist prompted a counterargument from a sociologist also living in the area. At this point a general argument ensued between the various authorities on Yeoville: a well-known pastor, sociologist and community activist. The community activist felt the need to hijack the workshop from myself assuming that he his position allowed him to bring the group toward the 'right conclusion':- that Yeoville must be read universally by its residents as a 'problem to be solved'. This position was subsequently challenged by the sociologist who claimed that there were no problems in Yeoville. For him, it depended on how you looked at the area. He said that himself and others gained pleasure seeing in the area what the activist saw as a problem. The argument began to open up to other participants which became one about how the neighbourhood *should* be read as a *text*. The sociologist claimed an aesthetic and opportunistic reading of the area arguing that 'we' should 'work with what is already here'. The activist replied by arguing that this was an easy claim to make if you come from a privileged economic background. Whites living in the area had a choice to live there or to move away. For me, the sociologist saw the area as a phenomenon, to be 'left as it is' because it was in his professional interests to keep things as they were. The activist, on the other hand felt that Yeoville was problematic and needed to be changed. In order to support his argument he claimed a certain political representivity assuming that as a community activist he represented the interests of the dispossessed in Yeoville (despite his identity as a privileged white government official). He assumed that by virtue of his position, he could assist Yeoville residents in 'fixing' the area which meant convincing them that it was a problem in the first place. It became clear to me that it was in the interests of both parties to make the claims that they did. 'Yeoville as a problem' is useful to an activist and 'Yeoville as an object' is useful to a sociologist. A DRC foreign national, and pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church intervened in the debate and put forward the idea that because the city is defined by aspiration it can never be a place in which to invest. Yeoville is a site of aspiration and as such cannot be 'fixed' whether it be as a problem or as an object of study. This move tended to nullify the arguments of the sociologist and activist. The subtext in the pastor's claim was even more universal than the previous two statements because he insinuated that the church, broadly speaking, should manage the aspirations and ethics of those living in Yeoville.



Figure 146: Brenden Gray, participants visualising interventions in Yeoville, *Speak English To Me*, Wits University Substation Gallery, 2008.

The various political, social, religious ‘representatives’ in this workshop situation (those who had a right to speak and a place from which to speak) effectively undid each other’s representations of the neighbourhood and left the rest of the Yeoville participants; the more or less ‘ordinary’ residents, (those without discursive positions) ‘speech less’. Between the church, the state and the university the others did not know what to say. It may have been more productive, for them, to ask more simply: what makes the neighbourhood our home? Confronted by the monopolisation of the workshop by these three players and the general muteness of the rest of the Yeoville participants, I felt compelled to ask everyone in the group to think in less discursive and binary terms. I asked the other participants to introduce images from their everyday experience into this discursive deadlock which at once encouraged those silent to speak. Rather than putting arguments forward, the other participants began to describe their visions of Yeoville without feeling the need to explain, justify or explicate their reasons for doing so. Interestingly, parenthood emerged as a central image in the imaginary of many participants including Jacques, Joseph, Mzila and Alfonso who expressed their understanding of Yeoville in terms of the many children who play on its streets and the parents who do and don’t look after them. The other participants began to speak in terms of images such as these and their words seemed to sit in the air, suspended and possessed a mute legitimacy on their own. These imagistic statements were not so much designed to convince the others as much as to be ‘just present’. I recorded these statements on the map in the center of the gallery while the other Yeoville residents ‘listened’ attentively to each of their images. Because the modality of speech shifted from the abstract and universal claims about ‘the problems of Yeoville’ to the particular lived experience of each of the residents a certain kind of respectfulness was entertained, if only for a few minutes. Everyone ‘just listened’ rather than judging these representations in denunciatory manner. This kind of attentive listening (reading without commentary) emerged for me as a form of democratic practice in the workshop situation. Everyone in the group was naturally given a turn to speak for its own sake, without being interrupted as was the case with the strategic position-taking that was evident earlier. Here the group dynamics shifted, dissolved and reconfigured which this aestheticised speech tended to do toward the end of the workshop.

The speech in the gallery reached a point of reading the area in a new way because of the nature of social situation that was emerging. This occurred *in spite rather than because of the presence of the aesthetic materials in the space*. It became impossible to elicit authentic and nuanced responses from the participants to most of the images exhibited in the space through my facilitation. There were perhaps two reasons for this. The first was that I did not direct them explicitly to ‘speak to’ the storyboards, photographs and drawings in the space. When the participants were asked to use the art works and images in their metaphorisation of the neighbourhood they did not feel the right to give commentary on them perhaps because they were seen as lofty aesthetic representations, mutely legitimized by the gallery space. In the informal street domain this was *not* the case. In the gallery the participants felt that they could neither identify with, nor use the aesthetic representations as the material by which to construct their positions within the dialogical situation of the workshop. What they did give attention to in their discussions was the collage of photographic material of Yeoville arranged as snapshots running below the storyboards and home language drawings and the maps.

This was perhaps the most significant disappointment of the workshop. The aesthetic statements that were most critical to me in terms of the research project were ignored in the process of conversa-

tion. There was a strong sense of misinterpretation in the way that the participants responded to the storyboards and drawings in the gallery, as if they were there for decoration rather than as critical catalysts for conversation even when the participants were encouraged to speak to and write about them. I resisted framing the exhibition materials in an ostensive or overt way feeling that by doing so I would impose my meanings upon the participants. The points was that we had made them collaboratively and yet despite this they were not used. I felt that the artworks should prompt a spontaneous reaction in the later phases of the workshop which they did not. Why was this the case? Perhaps the problem lay with me and my facilitation of the workshop. Perhaps, in my mind I could not, myself, accommodate or tolerate the mixings between the everyday and the legitimate culture of the gallery. I only tolerated mixing within the domain of the everyday. Why for example, did I not encourage the participants to tear up, write on, and reassemble the storyboards and the materials in the exhibition? Why this preciousness? Apart from the fact that it cost R15 000 to make the digital prints, I felt that this would achieve very little because only through an elaborate conversation could the larger groups of participants come to value the story board constructed by myself and a given participant. In many senses, the intimacy of the storyboards repelled open-ended discussion about them. I was not willing to take the risk, within the context of a three hour workshop, of having these valuable prints damaged. I also knew, implicitly, that the aesthetic relation needed to be realised through commentary on and looking rather than in the direct intervention in valuable works of art. Would allowing the physical reconfiguration of the works be transgressive or appropriative act. Were these two kinds of acts mutually exclusive? In short, I was afraid that the most banal allodoxia would be applied to these multivalent, precious pieces and that in the process these works, worthy of being preserved, would be destroyed. Indeed, the scriptural contributions of the participants made at the start of the workshop were banal and did not exhibit the same richness as their responsive speech in informal dialogical situations in the street again, again because the gallery wall was perhaps seen as a site of legitimate meanings. This tended to constrain establishing a relation of equality in the workshop between the participants and community of images scattered across the walls. Speech as a form of visualization, as it was evidenced later in the workshop, almost made the gallery and the objects it contained somewhat invisible and irrelevant. I could have found ways of presenting the exhibition more as a body of processual materials than a conventional exhibition. The exhibition could have been designed in such a way that it could have been ordered, reassembled, curated etc by the participants themselves. The fact that this was not the case constituted a major failure for me.

In hindsight, the gallery was selected as the site of a consummative conversation because the participants chose it. It was only place left to me in which this relation of intimate undoing could be afforded and that too failed because it became a ritualisation of the relation of intimacy rather than its performance. I sought to test the gallery as a site of sociability and it failed. The attempt from the start was a “madness” where I thought it “possible to separate the community of aesthetic sentiment from the feasts of domination and competences of knowledge” (Rancière 2003:198). Participants implicitly wanted to know what was expected of them, how they could be dominated and when this was not provided they circled the room quietly looking for meaning. They revealed all of the traits of the dispossessed who have no right to speak or act in the domain of legitimate culture (the university gallery). A durational approach to conversation, the relative autonomy of the intimate conversation as a dialogical form tended, on the street to generate far richer imagery and response because this activity took place in an open-ended aesthetic-everyday domain. When transposed into a gallery setting, it failed to generate rich dialogical transactions. These I only glimpsed later as the participants were entering into a more intimate aesthetic of conversation. Without enumerating the many practical failures on my part to facilitate the workshop successfully, I felt that it was ultimately the gallery that was responsible for the stultified conversation because the participants assumed a certain inequality, built into the gallery walls, as the departure point for the workshop which I could do very little to overturn.

Chapter Five: by Way of a Conclusion: Informal Dialogue, Drawing and Aesthetics.

In conclusion, I will return to the original question posed in Chapter Two; how the perceived antinomy between the social and aesthetic may be productively interlaced in new places. I do this by reflecting generally on the whole project and by grounding my discussion in a more local context of cultural production. I do this in order to make sense of the decision to locate the final conversation of the project *Speak English To Me* in a formally gallery setting and to make sense of the activities that took place there. My concluding remarks look critically at the relationship between aesthetics/drawing, dialogue and most importantly between these ideas and ‘place’. I interrogate this social-aesthetic antinomy (as it was discussed in Chapter One) as of being essentially a problem of place and emplacement, contexts and markets of enunciation. I explore Rancière’s notion of proliferation; the “excess of words” (Rancière 2000: 115) as a theoretical solution to this antinomy. In doing so, I ask also *where* it may be possible for an aesthetic to operate in terms of Rancière’s (1991: 70) “principle of equality”. I make use of Bakhtin’s (Holquist 2002) dialogical concepts such as “speech acts”, “speech genres”, and “speech performances” and particularly the idea of “addressability” and “unrepeatability” in dialogical transactions to define the relationship between place and dialogue. I problematise Bakhtin’s and Rancière’s understanding of dialogue in terms of Bourdieu’s (1989) understanding of speech as “the enactment of symbolic power” and define the aesthetic-social antinomy as being one that arises out of the discourse of mastery in communicative exchange. Finally, I look at the position of failure within the consummative moments of the project *Speak English To Me* by asking why I could not create the kind of “literary communism” Nancy (1991) either in the street or in the gallery context.

The street, informal aesthetics- the right place?

It occurs to me that despite everything, what the project did achieve was realizing a set of small neighbourhood miracles enacted and emerging in a modest way in informal, everyday settings through drawing and writing. Returning to the participants with their storyboards was an exhilarating experience for me because it was indicative of the possibilities of continuing the project in that vein, building upon its narrative processuality in a neighbourhood. It seemed that the project needed to continue and that closing it in an exhibition was a poor decision. During the project, I sought to expand it into ‘writing’ the collaboratively produced statements on public surfaces in Yeoville and through this develop wider, more sturdy lattice-like (Efland 1995) community structures through aesthetic work. The more potent moments in the project pointed toward this as a more appropriate approach than exhibiting pieces from the street project on a gallery wall. But, somehow, the need to consummate the street experience in the form of an exhibition and/or a communal projection put all of that excitement to sleep, inoculated my excitement, anaesthetised the enthusiasm of the participants and drew a sheet over the living body of what was becoming a more projective and ambitious project. In retrospect I should have ‘published’ on an ongoing basis within the informal everyday context, rather than closing the project in the formalized setting of the gallery. This indicates to me that there is a significant connection between a dialogical aesthetics and the politics of place which I explore in this chapter, almost regrettably because place and publishing hardly featured in my thinking about the project.

Perhaps I ought to begin my interrogation of emplacement in *Speak English to Me* by revisiting my original interest in initiating this project. This was sparked by reading Joseph Gaylard’s *The Retreat*

of *Creativity: Reflections on the Role of the South African Visual Arts in Social Development* (2005). The piece about the relationship between artistic practice and place. He argues that there is a reluctance on the part of contemporary South African artist to engage in new places, beyond that of the gallery, museum and arts journal. He asks why it is not common for artists to work in: “in the world of the crèche, the school, the prison, the old age home, the HIV/AIDS hospice, mental facility...” (Gaylard 2005: 1). He suggests that the failure on the part of mainstream local contemporary art practices to imagine working in new places is endemic to the way we, as practitioners understand the limits of aesthetic practice. He claims that there are,

... dynamics internal to our field, in a failure to respond to the radical challenges of building a new society with substantive shifts in how we think about the visual arts, and what it is that visual artists do. A central problem here has been the extent to which the visual arts community has by and large operated within a more or solipsistic framework around these questions. It is a framework that has produced work that often engages in a serious and sophisticated way with sets of broadly ‘social’ issues (identity, race, gender, etc), but does so in a fashion, or for contexts, in which it can have no real impact in a wider society.

I would now return to my original assertion, and respond to this statement by arguing that what is responsible for this “failure” is the residual avant-garde universalism entrenched in the discourse of socially engaged art. Rather than identifying the places in which art must work we could explore those ‘other’ places in which art would ‘unwork’ itself. It is possible for artists to think beyond the social ‘impact’ their work may have in other places and to entertain less instrumental and ‘measurable’ ways of approaching the aesthetic-social antimony. What would an artform that allows the reappropriations of legitimate culture Rancière speaks of to proliferate. For me, this is less a question of measurable social “impacts” and audience “building” than it is about *where* the legitimate aesthetic work and the authoritative play of visual artists is undone/unmade. In order for art to operate in other places on the basis of a principle of equality, it needs to take a less aesthetic and more material form so that it can be appropriated. Rancière asserts, in this regard, that it is the worker’s misunderstandings of science, rather in the projective workings of pedagogy, where an emancipatory potential can be found. What allows workers to “leave their places” is not pedagogy but misunderstanding and science:

There remain the lowly ranked. We know that they can expect nothing from an emancipatory pedagogy. As for the prophetic word which, through its misunderstandings, sometimes allows them to leave their places... after all what liberates is not pedagogy but science (Rancière 2003:179).

The question which remains to be answered is what is the workers *place* (be it discursive, institutional, physical, dialogical, disciplinary) and how can art effect the leaving of that place? Where will Rancière’s proliferations and misunderstandings of science take place and by what catalytic, *aesthetic* work? Menke points out that conceptions of the polysemic aesthetic such as Rancière’s “are indifferent to the way in which the superabundance of the aesthetic object is grounded” (Derrida as cited by Menke 1998: 66). A hermeneutic approach to aesthetics suggests that “without some kind of linkage to meaningful, non-aesthetic structures, the concept of aesthetic meaning loses its foundation” (Menke 1998: 94) and fails to be “recognised”. The dispute between an negative aesthetics and hermeneutics (Menke 1998:99) is really about establishing a dialogical relationship between two discursive places: the everyday where commonsense meanings are made and the aesthetic domain of legitimate culture. Rancière asks if the habitus is a useful way of understanding the worker’s appreciation of the aesthetic. For him, the problem of the cultural dispossession of the worker and their political emancipation are related. He claims that they may “assume” and may “appropriate” the “*science* of his dispossession” and that this “would entail a dismissal of those who would see the worker’s destiny as bound up with a certain aesthetic charisma which tends to close revolutionary doors rather than opening them:

What does it mean exactly to appropriate the science of one's dispossession? The love of art is a privilege of the inheritors; what consequence will a non-inheritor draw from the appropriation of this knowledge? Could he claim the right that the inheritors reserve for themselves? But is this not falling into the charismatic ideology that justifies their inheritance? Would he renounce pleasures that in order to be tasted presuppose the habitus of distinguished people? But is this not what necessity already teaches? Could he liberate himself from this 'misery' that 'often comes from a dispossession that cannot be assumed'? Should he therefore assume this dispossession? This advice is 'good' only to those suffering from it- for the ones who try to change something in the destiny of those who have 'nothing else' to do than assume their destiny. This would mean, in sum, closing another door before them (Rancière 2003: 181).

This passage suggests that discourse and practice of a socially engaged/oriented art may perhaps be an attempt to address the needs of the dispossessed but that it is its mode of address that is, to a large extent, the problem. Emplacing artistic practices in new ways attempts to address Bourdieu's criticism of the field of cultural production as one that is elitist by attempting to find ways of disentangling the emancipatory possibilities of the political from the aesthetic from the grip of legitimate culture. However, he contends that this cannot take place without a loss being entailed. Artistic practice, if it is to remain pure, transcendental, and uncontaminated cannot by virtue of this transpose itself into new place. A "post-autonomous art" must, therefore, accept a loss. It must become material rather than essence if it wants to work in new places so that it can "mix" with everyday culture and its "daily intricacies" (Ndebele in Nutall. 2003: 9). And yet, at the same time, it must retain some of itself in the process, without its difference becoming "exhausted" and without becoming a "miscreated perversion" (Nuttall 2008: 7). Rancière (2003: 189) is categorical in this regard. A new social-aesthetic practice, if it is to realise its emancipatory or egalitarian principle, must put itself at risk in other places. The aesthetic as an institutional effect must be accepted by artists. They need to perhaps be able to demystify their practice or allow their work to be radically misinterpreted so that it may be reappropriated by "the dispossessed worker" through their vast misunderstandings. This may, at first glance, seem an entirely "undialogical" state of affairs because it would entail a violent and fraudulent kind of mixing. The aesthetic must become material again and allow itself to be dominated in new places. It can no longer make absolute claims about the essentials of human nature if it seeks to become mingled with other everyday aesthetics.

It is in the various *places of arbitrary mixing* (Rancière 2003: 197) where "poetics of the sensible" can be found. It is here after all where, "by accident or fraud", the "popular" and "bourgeois gestus", "meet up", where "distinction would come to mingle with those of *amor fati*" and "heaven and earth, the labour of artisans and the leisure of philosophers" (Rancière 2006: 191) meet. Rancière's entire philosophical programme hinges on bringing new readings of various discursive fields into play by entertaining such heretical mixings. Ironically, for Rancière it is bourgeois culture itself that provides the aesthetic material by which the dispossessed worker can momentarily leave their "love of fate" (Rancière 2006:184). And it is through the worker that the doxa's, privileges and distinctions of bourgeois culture can be challenged. For Rancière this is *a relation of entanglement (relational) and creolisation (dialectic/agonistic)*. The liberation of the dispossessed worker cannot be envisaged without the resources of legitimate culture, emblematised in the aesthetic. However, in order for mixing between two cultures to take place, both must accept a loss and become 'material' and 'resource' rather than essence and magic. The mixing of bourgeois and proletarian culture is an art of situations, a social-ethico-aesthetic dance because illicit mixing shows that what is not objectionable is privilege nor dispossession itself as, "regime as such... what is unsupportable is the whole notion that human life should be normalised, regulated, institutionalised" (Eagleton 1990: 385). The objection to regime can only take the form of an impossible conversation between two sets of doxic materials. If anything, the project *Speak English To Me* pointed toward that as a possibility to be entertained.

For me, Rancière's (1991) proliferation of words, dissimulation, the notion of reappropriation through grand misinterpretations, "torsion of the habitus" (Rancière. 2006:199) resolves the social-aesthetic antinomy. However, it cannot resolve the problem of place. Where will these proliferating dialogisations of which he speaks take place? Emplacement tends to constrain mixing and mingling. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the voice of the neighbourhood participant can begin to transact in a sophisticated and situated manner with 'legitimate' aesthetic representations in the informal domain, within the context of their habitus and within various unrepeatable dialogical situations through their modest showings and sharings. But what of the aesthetic operating in formal places such as the gallery, the church, workplace, the university, the shop floor where a conversational aesthetic stands to be instrumentalised, reduced, grounded and subsumed in the dominative logic of essential group identities, institutionalisation and political agendas? Is it the essence of art that undoes this foundationalism, communalism (Nancy 40: 1991) or *the proliferation of its materials in new places*? *Speak English to Me* appeared to be an absurd project to me because I presented these aesthetic representations as material surfaces which were studied, and overwritten by the participants and myself diagrammatically as a parody of science.

I have argued, like Roberts (2004), that by situating a socially oriented/engaged art within the discursive framework of the avant-garde, the art institution and the gallery the voice of the participant (and the attendant mixings) tend to be suppressed by the mythical valorisation of the artist. The discursive space of the avant-garde tends to implicitly favour distinction and false universalism. The emphasis in the discourse of socially engaged art could be productively shifted away from what constitutes a 'truly' collaborative/ dialogical/relational art to the delicate theoretical adjacencies, contact points and indeterminacies that may or may not emerge between different discursive places. The terms of the discussion should not be the 'the' political and 'the' aesthetic per se (as universal apriori categories) but about the heterogeneous relationships that are possible between situated and concrete micro-politics and the *many* aesthetics found on the street and in the gallery. How situated practices comes to intermingle and remediate one another takes us beyond the unhelpful concepts of the 'autonomy' of art and the value of the avant-garde. Artists, by seeing themselves more modestly as Rancierian artisan can make existing and new forms of aesthetic practice visible in the interstices of the capitalist economy.

My question, after experiencing *Speak English To Me*, was; what is the relationship between social heterogeneity, aesthetics and place? Where should the artisan work? More importantly, what places can an artist and his/her interlocutors bring into play new aesthetics? Is it possible to construct a place in which modest new aesthetics-politics can be made and unmade through appropriation and proliferation of sentence-images? Is it possible to imagine a relational and dialectical aesthetic practice that operates somewhat outside the parameters of official or avant-garde culture **and** somewhat outside the radical particularities of the everyday? I would say that drawing, as an in-between medium; one that operates between more consummated visual statements and visual performance can offer such dialogical opportunities. How can art and work, work and play operate in the wrong places? How as artists do we construct place of heteroglossia if those places are not immediately available and if their appearance is both exceptional and miraculous? How do we make those places despite their absence? How do 'we' make a work of an impossibility and misinterpretation- converting miracle into a method through the perilous language of research findings? The space of the informal, emblematised in the neighbourhood becomes, for me, an interesting place in which an artist can address this question of elicit mixing because it can give credence to the creativity and voice of the worker-participant so rarely accounted for in the discourse of socially engaged/oriented art. But there are serious limitations in realising a project such as this. *Speak English to Me* 'revealed' that

the informal is a necessarily fractured place which makes achieving consummation, social movement and the development of tangible political outcomes through the aesthetic a treacherous affair. Reflecting back on my experience of the project I feel that Rancière's aesthetic-politics is a somewhat tendentious, idealistic and abstract idea because it is difficult to make those places in which it may be constructed. I would argue as the conversation drawn as sentence-image production is a place making practice and that *Speak English To Me* was an incomplete project because it failed to envisage place-making through the aesthetic as its primary object of study.

In many of its aspects, *Speak English to Me* was a modest 'project' about being simply attentive, through the medium of drawing, to the everyday practices of mixing and proliferation. I was less interested in the projective, and professional-subjective dimension of the project; how it and I attempted to achieve 'good things' for the community, how it 'undid' notions of community or how my identity was rethought through it. I sought to simply be aware of and attentive to "what just happened"; to the inclinations between various living agents/characters (myself, strangers, objects, spaces, discursivities, institutions, materials, practices) that became implicated in my wanderings through the streets of Yeoville. This led me to the point where I could explore, through this research report, the role aesthetics plays in constructing new places within the domain of the informal. I was interested, in the aesthetic project itself, in facilitating various inclining (micro-environments) in order to see what forms of participation these various "clinamen" (Nancy 1996: 30) produced. It was to be expected, given that the informal is the place of mixing, fraughtness, chaos, provisional place-making par excellence, that I could not produce "a clear understanding of why people collaborate at all.... (Wright 2004: 343). In many senses, the nature of the project allowed me to resist also enumerating clear findings.

It is easy enough to speculate on the relations between a stereotypical worker and bourgeois in this philosophical discourse of mixing. But what are the implications of these entanglements in a local, post colonial, diasporic inner city urban context; where the lines between the inheritors and the dispossessed are not so clear cut, where hybridity, uncertainty, clashes between orders of being; the construction of third places may be the order of the day? The urban discourses emerging around the Johannesburg inner-city is an attempt to provide *clear* understandings about the nature of these entanglements which, interestingly my project could not provide. Ivor Chipkin (2005: 97) comments that discourse around the African inner city, as a fraught place, tends to romanticise its chaos. He believes that this view, as it informs official discourse and urban research, obscures the obvious pressing economic needs that face the inhabitants living in places such as Yeoville, Hillbrow, Berea and so on. For him, the discourse of 'urban chaos' as it is problematically applied to such places, derived from theorists such as Debord, Lefebvre, De Certeau, Nancy, seems to make the inner city seem positively ungovernable, impossible to regulate. In so doing, this romanticisation of chaos also masks the possibilities of bringing the formal (the city, council, state) and the informal (neighbourhood, 'community', inner city) into play. Chipkin asks if through the mingling and mixing of formal and informal communities new public spheres can come into being. He contends that discourses that valorise the chaos of the inner city make constructing a sense of place or community impossible.

Chipkin (2005:98) suggests that the fashionable lenses that theoretically astute, urban geographers bring to bear on the relationship between government and African inner city community cast both players (in the game that is the inner city 'problem') as caricatures. The state is seen as a totalising, dominative, administrative, map-making regime that, by its very nature, is blind to another stereotype; the tactical, make do, survivalist everyday culture which goes about its business valiantly in spite of government, inscribing its marks on the urban fabric. For Chipkin it is perhaps unhelpful to celebrate the inner city community as unstable and chaotic domain and worse to valorise it over the

regularity, normative mechanisms of the formal. It is an unhelpful binary because it is implied that chaos belongs to 'the people' and order to their 'rulers' which effectively makes no place for either to meet. Maliq Simone and Gotz (2003: 125) subscribe to the sorts of urban discourses Chipkin critiques. Maliq Simone and Gotz encourage urban researchers to align themselves with the survivalist stereotype of the inner city street community and to be attentive to the "mobile social formations" which characterise African urbanity. This creates an inaccurate dichotomy between the formal and informal:

Movement to the city is not associated with stabilising of identities and the formation of durable collectives. Rather it is premised on the exchanges and associations that fail to congeal, to become institutionalised or regularised. Maliq Simone suggests, therefore, that the challenge of the inner city is for researchers, policymakers, and urban activists to practice ways of seeing and engaging urban spaces that are characterised simultaneously by regularity and provisionality (Maliq Simone & Gotz in Chipkin 2005: 98).

Chipkin brings us back to the ground by providing a case study; the Yeoville Market on Rockey Street; wherein he argues that the institutionalisation of street culture, rather than a celebration of its chaos, will lead to "durable arrangements" that, for him will solve the inner city problem:

In the course of reviewing municipal interventions in the Rockey Street Market... Gotz and Maliq Simone suggest that the municipality worked well when it facilitated a process that did not require the individual parties to give up their basic identity (2003:146). Presumably by this they mean a process that lets parties come together to reach binding agreements but that respects the autonomy of each. This is not possible, however, when the "identities" in question fail to ever congeal as bodies or institutions. How can there be a binding agreement between interests when the latter are constantly dissolving and reconstituting differently?...if what characterises new social forms in the inner city is precisely that they are provisional, how can they simultaneously be party to durable arrangements? Surely contracts and agreements require that "interests" crystallise into organisations, even when they have their own and often obscure ways of working (Chipkin 2005: 99)?

Chipkin (2005:100) recognises that the problem of governance through partnerships (a mixing of sorts) is one of visibility. Communities can only reveal themselves and recognise themselves as communities if they "congeal" (a patronising metaphor that treats the people of the street as if they were specimens). He offers this as an alternative to romanticising the chaos of the inner city in, and of itself. He asserts that the discourse of chaos is a totalising discourse in its own way: "there is a danger of positing the inner-city society as fundamentally provisional, fleeting chaotic. It can be used to legitimise forsaking working with the poor in favour of other partners" (Chipkin 2005: 103 -104). In other words, for Chipkin, a hierarchy of inner city needs must be chalked up nullifying a relation of equality. Only government can choose who it will work with which is conditional on the degree to which a community can present itself as ordered and legible. However it is both the discourse of order and the discourse of chaos that defers mixing between the formal and the informal.

Chipkin's (2005) thesis is that the problem of empowerment sits in three places: with the institutional authorities (who need to learn how to see), with the urban residents and social actors (the blind organisms of the street that need to learn how to "congeal" through their self-representation) and with the theoretical lenses that are brought to both sets of actors/forces (which is opaque in its own way). Because all parties are, in effect, blind in their own way, a new way of seeing must be introduced so that productive 'partnering' can take place. This new way of seeing will of course be supplied by Chipkin himself. On the one hand, because government (and I would argue their partners- cultural workers, researchers, etc) can only work with what they can see, they tend to favour visible, territorialised and coherent identities. This effectively excludes the already dispossessed because in order to realise their visibility they must cohere and assume a position of visibility themselves. They must recognise their needs on their own present this to an authoritative other or remain lost in their own blindness. This is patently absurd and impossible. Despite the obviousness of this Chipkin suggests that in order to solve

the inner city problem, number of responsibilities need to be undertaken. First the state needs to play a remediative/facilitative role in bringing coherent organisations into being so that it can work with the poor and disenfranchised (Chipkin 2005: 103 -104). The fragmented organisms of the inner need to accept this facilitated “congealing” (Chipkin 2005: 98), and present themselves to those who have the capacity to assist them in achieving this. By employing the right lenses (those offered by researchers, experts in constructing forms of visibility) the inner city can be brought out of this conundrum into the life of rational planning, and theorisation, and ultimately become rejuvenated. It is no wonder then as Chipkin (2005: 103) tells us urban theories “create the impression that “community” in the inner city is dead” because it is only dead in so far as it is not visible.

Chipkin also asserts the role culture (and perhaps its partner the aesthetic) can play in the community creating the gainful kind of visibility he speaks of. In a way similar to his critique of Adbdolique Simone, Chipkin critiques Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) for using culture as a tool to “defamiliaris[e] how Africa is understood” which they use to sideline an analytic Marxist approach to the problem of the inner city. However, in a later article he concedes that a cultural-political analysis of the inner city could engender new ways of understanding political dynamics in the African inner city. He begins to think in terms of cosmopolitan mixing and mingling (rather than a place of sheer, organic chaos that needs to be ordered by research, planning and partnering). Reservedly, Chipkin remarks:

Potentially, this new interest in pleasure and imagination is important. It asks us to start inquiring about the city in terms of what people make of it and desire there. How do they use public spaces, not simply as functional entities... but as places of sociability, of walking, of wandering, of shopping, of meeting? If we think in this way about the city, as a place of hospitality instead of simply as a place of surviving, working, earning a living, then we ask different questions about the city. We can think about the city in terms of democracy, for example, not simply in terms of economy and politics. We can think about it in terms of values and culture: of city form. What would it mean for Johannesburg to be a place of democratic urbanity? How would people relate to one another in such a city? How would they use public places? What would it mean for it to be hospitable to the poor, to the marginalised, to the migrant, to the foreigner (Chipkin 2005: 106)?

How do we imagine public space in the first place? The project *Speak English To Me* argued for an understanding of the inner city neighbourhood as a public place of strangeness and difference. It began to consider the informal as a form democratic urbanity, even if it failed to realise this. The way that we imagine urban space arguably hinges on how it is seen and from what vantage point. The perspectives of those looking at the inner city of course constrains how the inner city community is seen. Is it a self-representational machine (wherein the community autopoetically makes itself visible as needy, deformed, political subject to a state apparatus). Is it an aesthetic representation of a situation itself (an aesthetic object to be judged by a community of beholders, inert, a text for study and decipherment that never moves, never transforms), or an intractable and unrepresentable situation itself (reterritorialising and deterritorialising itself constantly).

Perhaps the questions we should be asking about the inner city must be political. However, they also need to be cultural and aesthetic. Asking how does the inner city comes to be *a home* to its inhabitants is as important as asking by what logic it comes to be seen as a strange problem by urban planners and as an exciting opportunity for artists and researchers? These positions require a very different conceptions of community and space. If we can assume that the unstable, invisible, disenfranchised, make-do community can come to represent itself and in doing so, mix and mingle on its own terms, (so that it can ‘form partnerships’ with other entities) with other more ‘legitimate’ communities then what role could the aesthetic experience and the improvisational-delineating practice of drawing play in this regard. What are the visual and aesthetic capacities the dispossessed have at their disposal in order to realise a relation of equality on their own, to construct a

place for democracy? Rancière suggests that these capacities are absent and need to be *borrowed and reappropriated* from the formal. It is because of this that a variety of legitimate players feel the need to intervene in the ‘problem of the inner city’; the artist, researcher, urban planner, activist place, with their languages and pedagogies. The critical question, for me, is that if this is the case, to what extent can the more legitimate outside players tolerate *their own* languages being appropriated, translated, abused and misinterpreted by the inner city. This is of critical concern to me.

Appadurai’s thesis (2004) on cultivating the navigational capacities of the poor highlights some of the problems involved in what I have discussed above. He employs a cartographic or drawing metaphor in describing how communities can empower themselves. He argues that community developers, by capitalising on the cultural sensibilities of the poor can engender a political “capacity to aspire”. His thesis appears to suggest that self-representation can be generated autopoetically, from the inside, as it were, with the assistance of urban activist-facilitators. They would collaborate with a given community their “... cultural capacity”. This “may well be a capacity (i.e. a meta-capacity) whose fortification may accelerate the building of other capacities by the poor themselves” (Appadurai 2004: 19) (rather than through the imposition of reformist projects/projectivisms). Appadurai, like Kester puts forward a catalytic approach to the issue of empowerment. However it is useful only in so far as it works within the existing framework of communities that are already culturally coherent. Here their aspirations are generated through representational practices which would be co-ordinated by a cultural agent whether that be a researcher, artist, social worker. Their role in empowering poor communities would be to draw on pre-existing rituals and capacities of a given community in order to construct, almost aesthetically, their “navigational competences”. The community therefore becomes reliant on the presence of a legitimate other in order to empower themselves.

The problem of empowerment is urgent when one is working within the context of a neighbourhood (such as Yeoville) where the grounds upon which the “exercise of voice” and “sets of tools for ... placing technologies” such as “rituals of consensus” (Appadurai 2004: 19), “maps in which aspirations are located” are largely absent and fragmented. Among the many failures of *Speak English To Me* was its inability to provide to the strangers I had met these maps, tools, rituals that are required to empower them. The project could have more aggressively developed more collective practices of drawing (drawing with words, drawing in public, drawing maps) in terms of empowerment. A central assumption in Appadurai’s argument is that if the capacity to aspire is linked to self-representation, then that capacity is usually realised as one that needs to address a more powerful, legitimate and strange other. The legitimate other, whether that be delegates a state official, artist, researcher, politician mediates between the community’s “subjective expectations” and its “objective chances” (Bourdieu 1995: 135). The nature of a given community’s self-representation is dependent on who it must address and the languages that it must use in order to empower itself. Rancière may argue that it is the cultural and discursive inheritance of the powerful addressee of these aspirations that needs to be reappropriated by the addressor for its own ends. In Yeoville, specifically, this “capacity to aspire”, where it is to be found, is already to a large degree lodged in many unofficial and official places and discourses; in the charismatic churches in the area (borrowed doxas), the community hall (political doxas) whose work it often is to keep the poor in their places. These organisations of community self-presentation, I have found, tend to defer and displace action in favour of the eternal exercise of hope, through the representational technologies of priests, pastors, church services and so on. These are institutional places where languages are operationalised rather than appropriated. Any real action in self-representation, in these contexts, is deferred in the interests of those who want to keep the social world exactly the way it is. The aspirations of the fragmented community come to be

embodied in various delegates; the pastor, church leader, community activist, ward councillor, government official, community based-artist and so on. This community's expectation that a legitimate other will catalyse their self presentation tends to make the business of the artist difficult. There is a certain expectation, on the community's part, that he/she has been delegated to dispense an emancipatory pedagogy which is what I experienced throughout the whole project. The question for me is less about whether the capacity to represent one's self/community is valuable in itself, than it is about the ends to which those representations are put. More to the point, what is important is the *the place and modality* in which those self-representations are continually built, unbuilt, made and unmade. It is clear to me that new, provisional surfaces of community need to be constructed in unfamiliar places so that modest forms of representation, proliferation and action can be assembled where "equality can be demonstrated continually" (Rancière 1992: 60). What would this place and practice look like? It is a place that is also not a place. The project proposed that the investigation into the construction of more egalitarian, appropriative practices may begin in informal places through the expanded art of drawing.

Sarah Nuttall's (2004) notion of a politics of "transformative entanglements" and creolisations provide an interesting framework in which the role of aesthetic representation and experience in the inner city may be rethought. Nuttall sees processes of creolisation as a violent and intimate dialogical place in which new languages and identities are constructed (Nuttall & Michael 2000: 6) in colonial contexts which she sees as "crucial to " the production of "early modernity "and to the "formation of diasporic communities"(Nuttall 2004: 734). Languages and thus identities are constructed through creolisation in the interstices of the oppressed and the oppressor, where borrowings and appropriations take place continually. Cultural pollution and contamination is a dynamic form of assemblage or dialogic agonism which violently brings into play new reterritorialising subjectivities. The "creolite hypothesis" (Nuttall 2004: 734), because of its emphasis in the violence inherent to mixing, could replace "notions of hybridity and syncretism which have dominated post colonial theory in the past few decades" because:

...both in South Africa and elsewhere, creolisation carries with it a particularly vivid sense of the cruelty that processes of mixing have involved. While, to date, we have undertaken few readings of the intimacies, across race and class, which have long characterised a deeply segregated society- that is, the often unexpected points of intersection and practical knowledge of the "other" wrought from a common, though mutually coercive and confrontational experience- we might equally remark, using the South African case as a particularly powerful moment in a wider global history of race, that intimacy does not necessarily exclude violation. Intimacy is not always a happy process. On the contrary, it may often be another name for tyranny (Nuttall 2004: 736).

Nuttall's alternative to the dominative dialogism of creolisation is the more "entangled transformative encounters" theorised by Glissant (2006). Entanglements are less violent in orientation because they do not require the violent uprooting of culture. I saw this kind of rhizomatic mixing taking place on a regular basis playing out on a regular basis in the Yeoville neighbourhood. The interplay between more violent forms of mixing and modest entanglements is largely dependent on the contexts of mixing. Perhaps some forms of mixing are violent because they occur within contexts of mastery and capital which I would argue takes place in contexts where there is an emphasis on formality and formal language. Bakhtin argues that, in order for speech to be comprehensible, a speaker needs to choose a particular speech genre, and apply this to their speech plan, in relation to a given performative situation in order communicate "legibly" to their interlocutor. They need to master language in order for a conversation to be constituted. The unrepeatability of a given dialogical transaction is determined by the "index of mastery of the speech plan" (Bakhtin in Burkitt 1998:168) or in other words the ability of the speaker to master a linguistic repertoire. "Speech genres" play an important

role in this regard. They “organise our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do” (Bakhtin. 2006: 103). Therefore, a speaker must be fluent in order to improvise. This suggests that conversation, rather being the enactment of egalitarian dialogicality is essentially about mastery and domination: “genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely”. For a speaker to improvise they need to master a set of contextual codes or schemes.

A similar proviso is evident in Bourdieu. He argues that speech, in a given transaction is the performance of a limiting and internalised habitus (a position) within a “market” of utterances. The key ingredient in fluency is the mastery of evaluative codes. Bakhtin’s mastery of genre could therefore be imagined, in Rancière’s (1992: 60) terms as the “proper place” from which a speaker *must* speak. The context in which a speaker makes their utterance modifies their internal speech plan and thus constitutes their sense of “social worth”. Like Bakhtin, Bourdieu links the notion of the utterance in conversation to questions of mastery:

... competence, which is acquired in a social context and through practice, is inseparable from the practical mastery of a usage of language and the practical mastery of situations in which this usage of language is socially acceptable. *The sense of the value of one’s own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social place.* [added emphasis]. One’s original relation with different markets and the experience of the sanctions applied to one’s own productions, together with the experience of the price attributed to one’s own body, are doubtless some of the mediations which help to constitute that sense of one’s own social worth which governs the practical relation to different markets... and, more generally, one’s whole physical posture in the social world (Bourdieu. 2005: 82).

Bakhtin asserts similarly that the spoken word in conversation “appears as an expression of some evaluative position of an individual person” (Bakhtin 2006: 105). Extending this logic we can then assume that conversation, as a speech performance, is constrained by the habitual evaluative mechanisms and self-censorships the interlocutors bring to the scene of conversation. The dialogical situation is determined by the “place” from which a speaker makes their utterance which is embedded in the notion of the speech genre. The speech genre is how the speech performance comes to be ideologised. Utterances become discourse through legibility. All forms of dialogical speech must therefore entail mastery and symbolic power in exchange and conversation, in these terms, is always a “coercive and confrontational experience” (Nuttall 2004:735). It is no wonder then, that mixing in conversation may be seen in some discursive contexts as transactions in symbolic violence, however intimate. Although conversations may be limited by transactional power, self censorship, mastery, the imposition of an evaluative codes, conversations are also always materialised *in forms* (e.g. sound, ground). When a conversation and its utterances are textualised they become open to “reaccentuation” (Holloway & Kneale 1998:79). There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, because speech has the capacity to be translated, by an “other”, made into material (through various modalities- transcription, drawing, remembering) and replayed to the speaker, the codes of mastery and the genres upon which they are based may be interrogated and the material of conversation and narrativity remixed and assembled. Secondly, although speech performances are to a large extent ideologically constrained, we cannot say they are wholly externally determined, because each communicative event/situation is “unrepeatable and distinct” (Holloway & Kneale 1998:78) developing its own autonomous contextual frame in tension with the broader ideologies at work in a given market of utterances.

Thirdly, because communication is delimited by praxis, speaking agents are continually assimilating, modifying and accommodating their speech performances against that of the perturbations of their immediate interlocutors. This is why we can learn through conversation. Learning is when we do not simply react to the evaluative imposition constrained by a market of utterances. Mutual misinterpretation is the discursive practice where power in transaction falls away. Authentic conversation

emerges when the dominative framework of speech genre is corrupted by. The project, *Speak English To Me*, attempted to allow the speaker to reaccentuate their narrative and our conversation through the presentation of various translative materialities. By ‘drawing’ the speech of the participant translatively, turning linguistic signs into marks and images, dialogical situations into visual fields and so on I attempted to overturn the notion that transactionality is always determined by relations of power. Drawing became the primary vehicle for the reaccentuation and remediation of speech.

Bourdieu, and Bakhtin assumed that the speaker’s mastery of schemes and the organisation of codes is the prerequisite for fluency. In believing this, they relegate the principle of equality as the departure point of conversation to the dialogical trash heap assuming that speakers are automatically and mechanically emplaced/interpolated from the start of a given conversation. Hence, very little agency can be accorded, in their terms, to a speaker in any transactional situation. The drawn image tends to disrupt this dominative nature of human communication because it is a representational system that tends, by its very nature, to undo codes and schemes that regulate communication. Because of this drawing can generate interplays of legibility and unintelligibility and in this sense make the operations of power visible. The difficulties arise, for Bourdieu and Bakhtin (Holloway & Kneale 2000: 71) in defining *the role context plays* in the communicative exchange. They assume that context, as an apriori construct *determines* the value of the utterance. They fail to acknowledge that speech does not necessarily ‘take place’ in communicative contexts but enacts them. It is for this reason that the unrepeatability of a conversational context is created by the speakers themselves. The relation of two sets of speech in a conversations become an evaluative construct in its own right that can show potential to resist more instrumentalising, ‘violent’ communicative frames. Both Bakhtin and Bourdieu tend to forget that human beings have the capacity to change their intelligence by changing their semiotic environment, that the performance of speech is in itself a kind of evaluative environment and context. The labour of certain kinds of situated speech performances create their own contexts, which posses their own special, aesthetic-like autonomy. When this autonomy is externalised through various modes of situated drawing a new, third frame comes into view.

The radical unrepeatability of conversational contexts in informal places is the ‘other’ to official, magisterial speech. A such the informal domain (registered by the street conversation) becomes intractable to the legitimising vocabularies of the pedagogue, researcher, scientist working in inner city contexts. A true mixing would necessitate that the informal be able to challenge of the dominative positions of legitimacy. Which of course brings me to the problem of how the city may be read. How do we approach Johannesburg inner city as an informal spatial/social, aesthetic construct? Similar to Chipkin, Nuttall invokes the aesthetic as a means of understanding the nature of the city. She asks “how [we can] find a method of reading the social which is about mutual entanglements”. She apprehends the city as a place of mixing because it contains both “contexts of both violence and transformation-as-entanglement”. The city can only be understood when practitioners pay attention to the “cultural dimensions of city life and *form*” (Nuttall 2004:742) [added emphasis] rather than solely reading it as a political construct the latter of which tends to evoke mastery as its underlying logic. In arguing this, she promotes “post apartheid fiction” as offering,

...a fruitful site for understanding city-culture as a spatial formation, its density as a concentration of people, things, institutions and architectural forms; the heterogeneity of lives juxtaposed in close proximity, the citiness of cities, the ways in which they gather, mix, remix, separate, conceal and display and the ways in which urban life becomes the irreducible product of mixture, each urban moment sparking performative improvisations which are foreseen and unforeseeable (Nuttall. 2004: 740).

Speak English to Me, as a literary/literacy project took this “irreducible product of mixture” and “performative improvisations” as its starting point. It asked if it were indeed possible to construct a new aesthetic language in new places. Rancière imagines the capacity to place-make in the polis as the practice of democracy itself. This capacity requires “literarity”: an “excess of words”, that by its very nature “disrupts the relation between an order of discourse and its social function”. For him, “the excess of words available in relation to the thing named; to that excess relating to the requirements for the production of life; and finally, to an excess of words vis-a-vis the modes of communication that function to legitimate “the proper itself” (Rancière 2000:115). The aesthetic for me, is the proper name for this literarity. Aesthetic practice refutes the idea that conversation is the performance of mastery in a market place of utterances. If the aesthetic is, according to Mitchell (2005:76) the practice that makes visible the surplus of meaning that produces the social goods that cannot be “claimed as profit” but rather as the “bounty of collective labour”, then we see a mode of speaking that is in itself aesthetic because it is surplus. Conversation is thus the “poetics of the political” (Rancière 2004: 115); a “literary communism” (Nancy 1991:71). If artistic production, as Bourdieu (1989:125 -168) suggests, is inherently about the making of intrinsically useless goods, that are converted into symbolic capital and hence instrumentalised, then it by its very superfluity it can be set in motion in ‘the wrong places’ in order to catalyse of mixing and mingling. Excess, surplus and materiality become key to both defining the aesthetic field and political contestation:

...humans are political animals because they are literary animals: not only in the Aristotelian sense or using language in order to discuss questions of justice, but also because we are confounded by the excess of words in relation to things. Humans are political animals, then, for two reasons: first because we have the power to put into circulation more words, “useless” and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation; secondly, because this fundamental ability to proliferate words is unceasingly contested by those who claim to “speak correctly” – that is, by the masters of designation and classification who, by virtue of wanting to retain their status and power, flat out deny this capacity to speak (Rancière. 2000: 115).

Rancière’s narrative (if I can call it that- it is not a paradigm, an ethos, an argument, or even necessarily a proposition) walks through and circumscribes a practice of egalitarianism in aesthetics, speech and place (culture) that is entirely different in texture to Bourdieu’s assault on culture which is thoroughly institutional. Rancière is opposed to the denunciatory language of a readerly regime based on symptomology. Dominative reading of the social world commits a violence against it in its pursuit of truth. Rather Rancière sees the truth of dominative rationality as merely an element in the texture of a world. By literalising discourse he undermines the notion of the “the great explication”. He is foremost interested in formulating the conditions (places and modalities) in which *everyone* claims their right to think. Rancière conclude, that by adopting a political-literarity in relation to the world; the aesthetic it is possible to “reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable”:

Political subjectivity therefore refers to an enunciative and demonstrative capacity to reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies: namely, what I refer to as the “partition of the sensible”... To affirm the nature of the “poetic” in politics means to assert first and foremost that politics is an activity of reconfiguration of that which is given in the sensible (Rancière 2000: 115).

I mentioned earlier how Mitchell (2005: 33) argued that we need to “invite images” as a mute species of the dispossessed “to speak”. In the passage above Rancière asks if it is possible for drawing to be the vehicle through which the speech of the worker is “be sounded out” in terms of the “*disagreement*”. I wonder if we can imagine that when both the performative modalities of image-making and speech are seen in terms of the disagreement whether we can create a place in which to reconfigure social relations on the principle of equality? I imagine two sounding outs, two invitations: one to the image, the other to the dispossessed worker, taking place in the space of the everyday: speak! But from where will this invitation be made and who shall be invited to speak?

Entangling conversation and drawing.

Aesthetic discourse is one which revises and reflects back on itself in the very act of enunciation (Eagleton 1990:187).

As I reflect back on the project, the only place that was left to me to explore a social aesthetic, as a place of authenticity, was in the small situation of miracles, compacted onto dining room tables, floors, and street corners, couches where I held conversations with participants, made the home language drawings, and returned to them with the storyboards. If a revolutionary conversation is to be imagined now in the context of my own practice, then it must take a massive or tiny form, a thunderous and sublime release or an utterly compressed singularity unfolding in private and intimate spaces. I hope that through my expanded field drawing tiny singularities in the field of the everyday may be linked up, incline toward each other. I don't know what I achieved in this project and I don't care. The project *Speak English To Me* has left me with nothing but fragments that I do not have the capacity to decipher. I realized, in my experience of this project, that it is not progressiveness or movement that counts but place; the place we make from which we speak. And we make places of miracle and mixing everyday when we simply speak which we somehow mistake as being real, when they are, after all, just arbitrary constructions, things which we can change whenever we want to. Our voices are linked to the places we make but our voices also make place. Conversation, like drawing is an appropriative and tactical mode that simply *takes place*. It occurs without/outside the strictures of genre. In conversation words are like marks on a page; they proliferate, interlace, work, are worked on. Words make their speakers, and marks mark their makers. Conversation is the emblem of the informal and the everyday place and allows us to escape the proper. It is a space stolen, the 'la per-ruque' (De Certeau 1984: 25) of the bored worker who poaches time from his boss to be creative. If genres are misrecognised as autonomous in their own way this is because they regulate enunciative semiosis; because genre is regime. It puts before the speaker procedures, frames, rhythms and expectations before he has even yet spoken. Unlike genre, conversation and drawing are more fluid performances that generate a permeable autonomy *from the inside* as it were. Lacan is wrong; it is not "language that speaks us" but genre that speaks us. If the genre in speech institutes the beginning, the teleos and ontic, the conversation is, paradoxically, pure speech performance; parole without langue, stadium without punctum, pure day dream, the unconscious puncturing into the conscious present to be shared. Like drawing, the only contract conversation institutes between its performers is a commitment to openness. The conversation-as-drawing is rhizomatic and messy, ill-structured, jazzy and stable, improvisational, a place where we can speak on the push and pull border between chaos and complexity, change our positions, return, admit to the limitations of our perspectivalism and of course, admit others. It is the place where minds and the institutional positions those minds inhabit can be changed by the suspensiveness of conversation. Conversation flirts; it is infinitely deferred foreplay, a dangerous in-between place where power is objectified and instrumentalised; power is made all instrument, all machine, revealing its bluntness and poverty. The prerequisite of conversation is not the giving up of power, but the reflexive playing with, in, around and because of power. In conversation we are allowed to change our minds, because power, here, is just what it is: a dead letter. We are not fixed by what we say in conversation, or the marks we make when we draw it and because of this, power has no place in conversation. When we speakers in conversation engage with one another they recognise that power is the stuff of conversation and yet despite/in spite of this, they glance sideways at the power over them, between them, around them, next to them, but the conversationalists don't care, because they recognise that, as human beings, they need the space of conversation in order to survive. In conversation speakers have objectified power and put it to one side. In this sense, conversation is our right to freedom and our right to think. There is no other truth. How could there be? Imagine a world without conversation? And because conversation and drawing are not a genre, but what is left over when genre is abandoned at the door, it cannot be a competence, because

it is the “place of miracle”, a point of unrepeatability, in which the habitus is performed and performs fantastically. Conversation is a place of pure relationality, praxis, agonism and suspensive-dialectic. The conversation is informal, and it is this informality which lends it an aesthetic air. If conversation is a place, then it is the place that conversation makes. Thus it vanishes and is insubstantial. It has to be constructed anew every time and sustained in order to retain its ‘compearance’. The general is not split by the particular and the particular is not subsumed into the frame of the general in both drawing and conversation. Drawing and conversation is the place of suspensive transaction, and provisional inclination; a place in which to think contradiction, and play along limits. At the risk of sounding facile, I think that is rare for people nowadays to have ‘conversations’ at all because they are speech performances that undo normativity and instrumentalism easily, without even really trying. The label assigning, name giving, structure-making mania that is our codified modern existence cannot tolerate the conversation as a kind of errant and dangerous practice of drawing in the interstitial spaces of capital logic. Conversation is dangerous because it is so easily triumphant. When the place of we have generated through conversation is no longer generative, errant and playful; when the semiotic proliferations of its interlocutors have subsided, or when the state of mimetic suspension (the perfect and improper distance) has reached its natural end, we must return to our *work*; our ‘natural’ place. This is the place where learning does not take place out in the open as it does with conversation. Because of this there is no ‘expert’ in conversation. Bourdieu (as an expert) cannot name or place conversation because it has no visible place: it makes and unmakes place. So he will simply not speak of it. For him, nothing can be imagined outside the logic of slavery and mastery. Conversation and drawing are the places of dissimulation par excellence. They are practices that cannot be pinned down. They are the places we make in order to talk of the “secret we all know”. It is not speech acts per se that are liberatory but the places in which we speak. These are usually places that are made where they should not be made (makeshift, portable, dangerous), and take place in places not yet made. Conversation is the errant practice of place making. The question, then, is how does that non-discursive place come into being, when it naturally “compears” (Nancy 1991:372) spontaneously, simultaneously, seamlessly, sensuously, anarchically, organically, knowingly? What in short, are the conditions, modalities and registers of conversation... of miracle making? How do we manufacture it? Let’s make conversation! A model, a case study, a parcelling out and a theorisation of conversation! Let’s make a case for it: the conversation commodity! I would hope that conversation *is* the place of resistance against the noxious notion of regime exactly because it has no measure (Rancière 2007:42).

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