

Reflections on the Contemporary Moment in South Africa:
Art Publics, Art Money, and Art Objects at Joburg Art Fair, 2008–2009

Cobi Labuscagne

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Abstract

This study is aimed at understanding recent changes in the social and economic landscape of South Africa in this contemporary moment. The field within which these changes are monitored is that of the Joburg Art Fair 2008 and 2009. The Joburg Art Fair, positioned as a corporate art sponsorship endeavor that attempts to bridge the realms of contemporary African art and commerce, speaks to aspects in the social and economic fields of South Africa beyond the case itself. A close reading of the event, through key actors, publics, and institutions throws into relief a moment in the South African art market which suggests the circulation of money, art works and notions of aesthetics and value. The event also highlights particular anxieties about the present in South Africa, while, through the language of hype and speculation, speaks of the hopes and ideals for the country's present and future. Three different 'lenses' are used to read this field: that of the social to understand the 'publics' of this event; that of the cultural economic to investigate how such an event comes to exist at this time; and that of the aesthetic through which art works are read as markers of the contemporary moment. Moreover, the study asks 'In what ways do art publics, art money and art works in the field of visual contemporary art production, reflect and produce a public culture in contemporary South Africa?'

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted in fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, WISER, the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, nor has it been prepared with the assistance of any other body or organization or person outside of the University of the Witwatersrand.

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INTRODUCTION

It's the second Tuesday in June, so I must be in Switzerland. Ten forty-five A.M. The world's most important contemporary art fair opens in just fifteen minutes. In the lobby of this black glass trade-show building ... (c)ollectors – some worth billions, others just millions – stand in a tight throng, clutching their credit-card VIP passes. Many are studying their floor plans, mapping the fastest routes through the maze of gallery stands. In the old days, when art sales were slow, a few collectors would wait until the fair was closing before sauntering in to strike bargains. Nobody would think of doing that now. By noon today, there may be nothing left to buy (Thornton, 2008: 77).

This is an extract from Sarah Thornton's *Seven Days in the Art World* (2008). I reference this study by way of introducing my own as it is one of the few that describe the social world of art at a specific time in contemporary history. The time she studied is what many now consider 'pre-global economic recession', between 2005 and 2006. Her description of Art Basel 2006 above is of specific interest to my own study as it captures well the frenzy and excitement that had grown around art generally and art fairs in particular. Art fairs, in the world studied by Thornton, had become the pinnacle of a massively escalating, some would say, reckless art industry that brought together the best contemporary art and a growing art public. The art fair, furthermore, was one of the main arenas around which art had become topical, potentially lucrative and 'fervently' social (Thornton, 2008: xiv). While it is important to note that the picture has changed somewhat since the economic recession and that many say things will never be the same again, the art fair retains its allure as a glamorous art buying social arena.

At the same time as the international art world was descending on this art fair in Switzerland, then in its thirty-seventh year, a small arts company in South Africa was starting to conceive of the first art fair to be held on the African continent, planned for March 2008 in Johannesburg. This study follows the process of creating this first art fair in Africa – an event that aimed to mimic the international model described by Thornton while also departing from it, to become a specifically local, social, contemporary art event.

If it has become increasingly necessary to understand culture as a field that overlaps and is interwoven with the social, the economic, and the aesthetic, as many writers referenced in this study suggest, few models more fittingly condenses those 'worlds' into one layered construction than does the art fair.

The Art Fair Model and its Meanings

Art fairs are trading grounds for art works by art galleries. In form, the art fair follows closely the model of the international conference, or trade 'show' and often takes place in conference venues. Art fairs generally behave as business ventures that charge a ticket entry to visitors, rent out floor space to clients, and have corporate, or other, sponsors. Galleries rent stands with three walls and standardised systems of lighting into which they move for the duration of the fair to showcase and trade in different kinds of art. In recent years the art fair 'event', which had its first incarnation in Cologne in 1966, has been adopted by hundreds of countries and cities, although a mapping of the world's art fairs will show a dense conglomeration in the metropolitan areas of the northern hemisphere.¹ Typically, the art fair would be annual and open with a 'by invitation only' gala event, in some cases preceded by other, smaller, and only for the very select, VIP 'openings'. The opening night will often take place on a Thursday, after which three or four days of public trading would follow.

The 'fair' first offered a solution to long distance trade in the Champagne areas of the thirteenth century and has since retained its structure as a *market*, dependant on economic agents, social relations, networks and desirable goods (Munro, 2000). The *art* fair, as one such derivative amongst many, is particular in that it trades in both cultural goods and the vernacular of 'lifestyle', thereby enabling and displaying a multi-tiered system of meaning creation and value exchange. 'Value exchange' in this context might signify the exchange between artists and dealers, between art buyers and art objects, between banks and art, and between money, art and politics, to name just a few configurations. Each of these configurations are constructed, negotiated and produced, and all of them have to do with positionings relative to others in a social dynamic. In this way, the art fair can be seen as a physical market that 'represents', in small, truncated

¹ Goodwin, James. 2007 'Art Fairs and Art Markets.' 1988–2007, Published online by AXA Art Insurance.

scale, an economic market sector, and a *marketplace* for less tangible forms of exchange and display.

Art fairs are frequently attacked for their brazen foregrounding of the money-side of culture and so sit uncomfortably between stoic notions of a supposedly 'pure' art and an increasing corporatisation of arts and culture sectors. For this reason, this type of art showcase is fairly widely regarded as compromised and many remain cynical about it. Yet, given the ubiquity of art fairs and other cultural platforms that highlight prestige, self-styling, and constructions of value, I have found that such an approach limits an understanding of the full spectrum of contemporary cultural production enacted by the art fair model. At stake at art fairs are, fundamentally, relations between people and things, as well as relations between people, fields and institutions. When regarded in these terms, the art fair exposes a politics of representation, access and power that can be examined to illuminate what Rancière (2004) elaborates as the 'politics of the aesthetics' in which '(p)olitics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (2004: 13).

Accordingly the art fair exemplifies a relationship between culture, the social, the political, the aesthetic and the economic that expresses an aspect of how culture has come to function in the contemporary world. Cultural production is increasingly merging and in dialogue with elements of lifestyle and performances of identity and so operates *across* fields rather than remaining confined to the field-specific. An event such as the art fair, then, might be constructed around what used to be termed 'high art', but trades in the 'popular' specifically to demystify such concepts as 'high art', rather positioning itself as about contemporary living. This certainly sounds like a model that dovetails well with contemporary capitalism, and there is reason to retain a level of cynicism about the enterprise, yet if an art fair is to be seen as a supermarket, it is still one that showcases *art* objects. Art objects in themselves are signifiers and are in dialogue with a social world. The art fair is a place that offers up a trading ground for art objects but also for their significations. In so doing, it not only displays works of art on a large scale to an interested audience, but also, simultaneously, attempts to grow that audience. Moreover, the art fair highlights the possibility of buying art and living with it for a public. It does this through the register of consumption and so invokes contemporary economic forms

of privatisation. Yet this emanates also from a pragmatism resulting from its aim to be a sustainable, annual event, offering a varied art platform across which discourse is created, elements of education are offered and publics conglomerate.

The Joburg Art Fair

The local instantiation of the art fair is particularly interesting in relation to this set of debates, not least of all because it is the only large-scale annual visual art platform in South Africa. Therefore, the literature on art fairs generally could be applied to the South African case in order to gain a better understanding of contemporary relations to culture. However, when such an understanding of the Joburg Art Fair is superimposed onto local socio-economic and socio-political landscapes, it can be read at a deeper level to articulate a repositioning in the social structure of the post-apartheid.

Where Art Basel and the world studied by Thornton quoted above was composed of personalities vying for recognition, power and 'control' (2008: xii), in a well-established art world and social order, the South African endeavour entered into a much more fluid social milieu in the midst of a radical transformative process. The team from Artlogic, the small company that owns and produces the Art Fair, was at the 2006 Art Basel fair, making notes on what an international art fair entails. While they were embarking upon the creation of the first art fair on the African continent, South Africa, in 2008, was just electing its fourth president after the first democratic elections in 1994; the art market itself was small and changing fast; and shifts were occurring in the social structure of the country. Within this context the Joburg Art Fair's most striking relation to its local context was the fact that it fashioned itself as 'just another art fair'; thereby working in contradistinction to a South African exceptionalism that has long prevailed in local cultural platforms, in the era post-1994. To this end, it is a celebration of having arrived at a new present and possibilities of different futures. Yet, while the event highlights the excitement of living in a changed South African society, it also exposes the glaring limits of those changes, some of which include the widening of the income gap; the inability of the new government to speak to all its citizens; the slow, yet forceful process of South Africans seeing themselves as part of the African continent; and the throwbacks of being positioned far outside the nodal points of global travel. As is often the case in South

Africa, its contradictions and sometimes unexpected, sometimes banal, paradoxes, are embedded in the very fibre of the Joburg Art Fair and its people.

In the case of the Joburg Art Fair, each of the aspects mentioned above brought their own sets of challenges to the simple structure that is the 'trade fair'. It is that area of overlap between what an art fair could signify generally as art's relation to various forms of exchange, and a specifically local temporality that forms the terrain that this study explores. This, then, is a study of the first and second Joburg Art Fairs. As I describe in more detail below, the research is based on a fourteen-month period of participant observation in the office of Artlogic, the company that produces and owns the Fair.

The narrative underpinning my findings is of this small company that saw economic opportunity in reproducing an international, relatively successful, cultural product in the South African context. In order for it to be at all viable, production and marketing funds had to be raised. As the government showed no interest, the corporate sector – a bank specifically – was approached. At this point personal relationships between people in positions of power were enacted for the project to be accepted as a sponsorship property. Once this had been achieved, the local art community had to be won over and some institutions – the galleries – had to make further financial commitments to the project. At the same time, both the art community's and the corporate sponsor's agendas for the project had to be managed and incorporated into initial conceptions of what the event might be and how it might look. Eventually an art fair was created that was a large-scale social event structured around a vast array of art objects that were priced, sold and spoken about.

What the ethnographic fieldwork – including a period spent working in the office of Artlogic on all aspects of producing, funding and conceptualising the Joburg Art Fair – laid bare, and what this study has chosen as its focus, is how different constituencies occupy the same field differently with sometimes overlapping goals and agendas and sometimes vastly divergent ones. When considered as a public and a social event, for example, that is, as a time-and-place-happening in one's diary, the Joburg Art Fair throws layers of 'publics' into relief that does not fit the mould of a narrowly-defined, local, 'art public'. As such, it brought into proximity long-time art buyers, first-time art enthusiasts, clients of the sponsor out on a corporate entertainment evening, established and revered

artists as well as young, irreverent new comers. The event also positioned itself as international, thereby attempting to call on material publics from elsewhere, and, through its theming as 'African Contemporary' in the first year, and 'Global South' in the second, publics that are imaginary. In economic terms, it is a corporate sponsorship endeavour that attempts to draw together more closely the realms of contemporary art and business. Such an analysis exposes traits of the South African corporate sector and how 'their' systems of valuation intersect with those of the arts. A third lens through which to view the Art Fair is that of cultural production. The art fair's very nature, as a market for art, forces one to consider art works differently from other forms of art display, such as the museum or biennale. South African art works have long been associated with the politics of resistance and social commentary, and so their market value, or place in the market as goods, has been exceptionally under-traded. The Art Fair marks a shift in that contextualisation. This does not suggest that these artworks should be considered in a one-dimensional register as production-line commodity goods, but rather as objects that have complex relations to the social worlds of meaning-creation, ownership and status, while remaining unique markers of a time. Art objects, in the first instance, remain perpetually in conversation with a present, a context, and so allow for hermeneutic readings of a time and a place.

Notes on Method

When considering this study's methodology, the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu is of specific interest in relation to the way he constructs a researcher's relation to his or her field. Richard Jenkins (2002) explains that Bourdieu's 'model of participant observation is one in which a genuine degree of participant comprehension can ideally, be attained: in which the ethnographer can 'get inside the skin' of his or her research subjects, thinking as they think' (Jenkins, 2002: 55). While this approach and Bourdieu's social theories generally have seen some criticism especially for being overtly structuralist (Sewell, 2005: 139), his suggestions for fieldwork as essentially self-reflexive and immersive, has proven invaluable for this study during the fourteen months of ethnography. A thorough participation in most activities around creating the Fair over a relatively long period of time has not only lent the analysis at hand a necessary depth, but has also moved the approach away from being merely cynical to a much more empathetic understanding (sometimes in ways that were nerve-wracking) of what was at stake. Much of the time

spent 'in the field' gathering material was of necessity not at the Fair itself, but leading up to, after and in preparation for the events – a process that draws into focus a range of different aspects involved in bringing such an event into existence. I had also been involved in the company before the fourteen months of ethnography and so was well positioned to understand the genesis and journey of the Joburg Art Fair.

I joined Artlogic initially as employee in December 2006, after first-round discussions with sponsors had been conducted and the Fair structure had been decided upon. Then commenced a period as part-time employee while the company was working on another project together with the early planning phase for the Fair, after which, in February 2008 I entered into my role as participant observer. From that point onwards, the ethnographic process involved daily practical, conceptual and financial meetings with all stakeholders within the relevant fields as well as working closely with key documents and their functions.

At the Artlogic offices, the team working on the Fair was always small, between four and six people, and scaled up to between nine and thirteen during the critical months that the two Fairs took place. During this time I was granted access to *all* proceedings having to do with the Fair. The reason for this complete access was at least threefold apart from the fact that I was already familiar with and immersed in the company. First, the aim of the study was to understand not only how an office runs and constructs an art fair, but also to get the opinions of high-ranking decision-makers in as many sectors involved in the Fair as possible. These included the head of the bank, the head of sponsorship at the bank, and directors of galleries, as well as bureaucrats and those 'on the ground' making things happen. This access was granted based on the fact that I spent working-time with the director and was present where decision making was involved and so gained a thorough knowledge of the vernacular around the Fair and the person in question's role, both in his or her professional position, and as it related to the Fair. These individuals, all of whom were well aware of the research project, as they were its respondents, saw me as part of the team, especially so since I had been 'with' the project from its very early days.

A second reason for the degree of access was more pragmatic and had to do with the company generally being under-resourced and at the mercy of an incredibly high staff turn-over, sometimes due to theft, and other times due to operating in a field for which

no specific training exists in this country. For example, staff would often be recruited from art schools where the person's ambition was to become an artist or curator, rather than an administrator, or receptionist. For this reason, the two Art Fairs had almost no overlapping staff members, apart from me and the director, thereby placing me in a position to get intimately acquainted with the production aspect of the event through staff training, role allocation and management. A third reason would be that the participant observation role included tasks outside that of attending meetings and I too had to learn to master the language of the *Microsoft Office* package, especially the excel spreadsheet on which endless budgets, timelines and 'recons' were constructed and deliberated over. I was specifically involved in the compilation of the catalogues for the two Fairs and worked closely with material provided for these two 'books'. I discuss later in this thesis how the catalogue itself can be seen as a document that represents the way Artlogic works with its clients in that none of the content in the catalogue is created by the company itself, but rather it consists of the cutting and pasting of images and text provided by galleries and institutions involved. (In Chapter Three I look at what this means).

I developed a close relation with the Fair director and sometimes the closeness to the project resulted in a situation of wearing 'two hats': as participant observer, I was both employee and researcher and it was only through this dual status that the study could gain the depth that it has. It also meant that most interviewees knew me and spoke openly about their feelings around the project because they were aware of my intimate knowledge of it. There was a sense in which first, even though the interviews were prefaced with the fact that I was conducting research for a doctoral project, respondents felt that by speaking to me, they could somehow influence, or aid the organisation of the event itself; and second they seemed to express a sense that we were all 'in the same boat'. Since my background is in the arts in South Africa and, as this study lays bear it is a fairly small field, this latter notion was true from the inception of the project.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with many individuals, which together with the field notes, form the bases of the evidence brought forward for the claims made in the study. Art enters the lives of many different people in different ways, and so the individuals that have come to form the respondents to this study range from the organising company, the sponsor, local arts institutions, art buyers, art collectors, artists,

academics, members of the press and beyond. Many interviews were granted because the person in question liked or were familiar with the Fair director, but many others had to do with a relationship of trust and mutual understanding around the project specifically. Other factors influencing the decision to grant interviews naturally also included egos and the prestige of academic research, as well as sometimes a disregard for academic research, and the assumption that this kind of interview would be benign, when compared to, for example, newspaper articles or other forms of publishing.

Interviews were conducted in three batches, each with a distinct emphasis: the first was focused narrowly on the Fair itself and personalities that enabled the event, such as the Art Fair organisers, decision makers in the bank, important individuals at the Fair such as international speakers, the chosen curator and figure heads within institutions. The second batch of interviews was with galleries and people that constitute the local art world. The third batch of interviews was with artists, buyers, and collectors. These interviews were almost all conducted either at people's places of work or in their homes. I conducted seventy-two interviews ranging between forty-five to ninety minutes each. The questions were tailored to specific groups but centred around 'experience in the art world' and 'thoughts on the Art Fair'.

The intense period of fieldwork at the two Art Fairs themselves over the four days that they took place was augmented by survey questionnaires to the visiting public. Surveys were circulated at both Art Fairs. In 2008 the Fair had 6500 visitors, I collected 642 surveys; in 2009 the visitor count went up to 10000, I collected 1300 surveys. These were done to coincide with those Artlogic was planning so as to ensure that every visitor could receive one. The survey research was, thus, funded by the Art Fair, but the questions were formulated by myself in order to serve both my own research ends as well as offer findings to Artlogic. I employed assistants to ensure that the return rate was good. These assistants were briefed each day of the Fair and I consulted with them throughout to learn from their experiences of interacting with the Fair public through the survey. Only one open-ended question was asked: What did you most like or dislike about the Fair? Other questions included: How did you first hear about the art fair? What age bracket do you fall in to? To which economic sector do you belong? What is your favourite genre of art? Please name one of the sponsors?

My fieldwork period was bracketed by the two Joburg Art Fairs: February 2008 to April 2009. I felt it necessary to look at the cycle from the first to the second art fair and in that sense the duration in the field was predetermined. Yet, as I progressed, the time period itself came to inform the study as a specific moment in South Africa. Both the data from interviews and from field notes make clear the strong sense in which the Joburg Art Fair is an art event that is closely aligned to aspects of living in 'real time' contemporary South Africa. During the fieldwork I have been very aware of the changing economic and political climate in South Africa, and globally. Interviewees, for example, make constant reference to and speculations on what the implications of a new government might be; how crime affects their lives; and what role art can play in a new South Africa. In a similar way the interview discussions reference the global economic turn that came about in late 2007 (in this country) and the effects that a local recession might have, or in some instances, have had on individuals and business. Secondly, in my role as participant observer in the Artlogic office, I have witnessed the Joburg Art Fair itself constructing and attempting various strategies to ensure its own sustainability or survival. There is, thus, a sense in which the present speaks through the Joburg Art Fair, as the Joburg Art Fair is precariously balanced within this present.

I have come to understand that the Joburg Art Fair was an 'event' in the contemporary usages of the word that signify an organised public gathering, thereby falling within the economic sphere of 'the event business' or 'eventing'. But, as William Sewell (2005) reminds, the same word also denotes a historical turning point or occurrence. The Art Fair, I argue is 'event' in both these terms. Thinking critically about the project of the interdisciplinary, Sewell seeks to better understand the meeting point or mutual strengths of social sciences on the one hand and history on the other. He points out that for social scientists, structure is fundamental which leads much social scientific work to suggest that the social world is essentially bound up within structures that do not change (125). Historians, on the other hand, are concerned fundamentally with change and see time as 'eventful' (9), yet struggles to use 'theory' to underpin their narrative accounts. Sewell makes an argument for social science work to allow for this view of 'change' to enter into their theoretically rigorous account of the world and so to further a properly interdisciplinary dialogue with historians and anthropologists. The 'change' that this study aims to track is one that occurred in the social and economic worlds of South Africa, but which is viewed through the visual arts sector. Below I briefly describe

aspects of the South African art landscape after 1994, in order to contextualise both the ‘change’ that I speak of in the rest of this study, and those elements and aspects I identify as resistant to change.

Placing the Event: Art and the contemporary moment

What became immediately apparent as I commenced with interviews was the strong relation in the art community between the Joburg Art Fair and the last biennale ever held in South Africa. It transpired as crucial to recognise that the first Joburg Art Fair took place almost exactly a decade after the termination of the last national art biennale in this country, also held in Johannesburg.

While many would argue that the models of the art fair and that of the biennale are so vastly different in their aims and execution that comparison is non-productive, in South Africa, there is a constant dialogue between the two events in the local art community and in the arts press. Gallerist Monna Mokoena² draws the following distinction between these two events:

Look, if you go back ten years ago, here was this new country, it wants to change but there is still a lot of conflict. We had people thrown into positions. Where there is change there is conflict. There is kind of uneasy relationship. And here you are, and you say here is a biennale, the big guys from both sides had interest. They said it is a beautiful thing, let's do it. It drew attention to this country. So now ten years later when there is so much negativity about this country, the Art Fair comes long, and maybe it does come at the right time. To reposition this country. This country still has a lot to offer. It might divert attention away from the negative.

I use this ‘dialogue’ between the Joburg Art Fair and the Johannesburg Biennales here in a similar way to understand something of that time, 1995, and 1997; the government then; and the one now; to position the expectations that many citizens had of the government that took over the leadership of South Africa in 1994, after years of political oppression and resistance politics; and to showcase the manner in which these art events can be read as markers of specific moments in the country's history. It is also here that I begin to introduce some of my interview respondents and essentially tell the story

² Interview, 24 April 2008, Monna, Mokoena, Owner and director of Gallery Momo, Johannesburg.

through their descriptions of it. In so doing much of the discussion to follow has to do with issues of transformation into a new era in this country within the arts sector.

The First Johannesburg Biennale, *Africus Biennale*, was announced just prior to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. Biennales are large-scale international exhibitions organised around the principle of national ‘pavilions’ where artists are grouped together as representatives of their country. Internationally, biennales had become highly popular and new ones were appearing all over the globe every year. That, according to Christopher Till, then director of Culture for the Transitional Metropolitan Chamber, was just the intention of the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale. At stake were both the ‘introduction’ of South Africa to the world as a newly formed democracy, and questions of how to build a new national culture (Rosengarten, 1995). The event was not without contention and while some critics felt that this was a missed opportunity to focus on South Africa itself, it was the first time that major contemporary art curators, critics, and artists travelled in large numbers to this country to share and observe.³

The Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 closed its doors to the public before the event was scheduled to be over for reasons that differ depending on who one asks. Most would say it was because of the high costs of keeping the venues open in the face of exceptionally low visitor numbers⁴; others insist it had to do with political restructuring on national, provincial and municipal levels within the arts and culture domains. The event was never repeated. It was the last major art platform of the previous century in South Africa and remained a landmark event both for its scope and for the gap it left when it was terminated. The inability of this event to have a longer life left a scar on the art public. Members of the local art community speak of the biennales now in terms that

³ Ivor Powell in a *Mail and Guardian* (March 3–9, 1995) review, quoted in Herbst (1998), ‘It is one of the ironies of the Biennale project that though it comes to fruition in the post-election new South Africa, and though it is represented under the auspices of the non-racial Transitional Metropolitan Chamber, its conception and most of its gestation belong in the old South Africa and the essentially white Johannesburg City Council.’

⁴ Organised by Christopher Till and directed by Okwui Enwezor, the event was made up of various international exhibitions and some local ones. The largest exhibition was *Alternating Currents* in the Electric Workshop in Newtown and was curated by Octavio Zaya and Okwui Enwezor. Some of the problems with the biennale as pointed out by Herbst (1998: 75) was that ‘Mega-exhibitions, of which the many international biennales are an obvious example, are always axes of crisis in critical practice, igniting profuse and heated questions. One such question targets the merit of the exorbitant expenditures on shows that, on account of their global focus, can never be representative of the arts of either the host nation or the world at large.’

suggest a jadedness, almost a cynicism for the optimism of that time. For example, in our interview, academic and local artist, Colin Richards⁵ described the framing of the biennales as ‘a celebration of 1994, the so-called diversity in our lives’. Speaking specifically of that time, he continued:

I think the first one was in the flush of rainbow-ism and the flush of nation-building, very large social dynamics that were funded by the state. I mean, there was a lot of the rhetoric around, and there was support from the state. It was pre-TRC, so it was really a moment. And those elections really were extraordinary. And I suspect it was on the bandwagon of that, and there was a lot of funding coming in, locally and abroad.

In my conversation with art buyer, Oupa Morare,⁶ he explained that ‘if you think where we came from, from the first Johannesburg Biennale, the politics about space and about allocation of space, (at) the second Johannesburg Biennale the art at the peripheries came into centre stage’. To grasp the significance of the moment of the Biennales for the local art world one has to take on board the manner in which the industry existed prior to this momentous event. Linda Givon⁷, director at the time of one of the oldest contemporary art galleries in South Africa, reflected on this in answer to my question about what has changed post-1994 period in the art world:

A lot. Well, let’s go back a little further and I will tell you what we couldn’t do and what we can do now, we couldn’t show anything with homosexuality, nothing; we couldn’t show anything that was against the state; we couldn’t show anything that was controversial by a black artist; we couldn’t have mixed openings. And what you had was your own special branch police man that looked after you. So if you showed those things, they would come in and grab you and take you to John Voster Square and question you. And always wanted to know the names of your clients, that is very confidential and I always refused to give them access.

Givon described incidents where black artists and clientele to the gallery had to transform themselves into waiters when the ‘special police’ arrived; someone was always on the look-out for their presence. This for her was part of the ‘crazy and horrendous’, ‘Alice in Wonderland’-country South Africa used to be. Givon’s description is of the

⁵ Interview, 15 August 2008, Colin Richards, Practicing South Africa artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

⁶ Interview, 6 December 2008, Oupa Morare, Private buyer.

⁷ Interview, 25 November 2008, Linda Givon, Former owner and director of Goodman Gallery

state of a country where only white artists had the privilege of formal art education or funding from the government and many artists of all races started making 'resistance' art works. There is plenty of evidence that artists in South Africa took seriously the political struggle in this country. Art production during the late 1980s and 1990s in South Africa were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the political elements of inclusion, race, and art as site of political struggle (see Minty, 2006; Williamson, 1999). Speaking of visual art practice 'during the years of apartheid', Kreutzfeldt states, in agreement with many similarly minded writers (see also, Williamson, 2004) that 'arts and culture registered primarily as resistance to state domination' (Kreutzfeldt 2004:42). During apartheid, many artists felt obliged to make this kind of art, and it exists today still as a preoccupation marked by explicit political subject matter.

According to Andries Oberholzer⁸, one of my respondents from the Arts and Culture department of the national government, the two Johannesburg Biennales really were 'magnificent', but very quickly, 'your local government started to say, "But where's the people from the townships, where's the people from the previously disadvantaged areas, where are the people from the rural areas in and around Johannesburg?"' and that created this whole tension between the Johannesburg City Metropolitan, the local council, the provincial council'. Oberholzer's comment points to an overarching concern of the then government. It was the government that took over after the fall of apartheid and was understandably focused on the burning issues of transforming power, access and 'representation' from what it had been, to something more in line with their version of democracy. In their introduction to a series of writing on 'culture' in the post-apartheid South Africa, Abebe Zegeye and Robert Kriger (2001) prefates their collection with a detailed account of institutional changes that were brought about in the period directly after the formation of the new government. The changes that they speak of signalled, at the time, new ways of articulating culture, not only to be more inclusive, but also better to 'represent' a new nation. They outline the emergence of the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG), a 23-person elective 'representing all disciplines, regions and forms of art – to solicit and present recommendations for new policies with the support of the arts community' (Kriger & Zegeye 2001: 3). Discussions from the task team resulted in the 1996 White Paper for the arts. The authors reflect, however, that, 'the momentum

⁸ Interview, 7 March 2008, Andries Oberholzer, Directorate Multimedia: Visual Arts, Department of Arts and Culture.

and enthusiasm generated through the ACTAG process has largely dissipated through the slow process of establishing new government structures and equally slow processes of preparing and adopting legislation' (Kriger & Zegeye 2001: 3). What this suggests is a degree of failure to enact on the level of government the need for policy change within the arts and culture sector. This failure, as I describe below, is still an active ingredient of the sector and was expressed by many of my respondents.

While Ross Douglas⁹, the Art Fair Director, never intended to create anything resembling a biennale, he sees the emergence of the Art Fair, a privately-funded enterprise, as symptomatic of the government 'loosing economic focus in the arts'. He explained the difference between the two events as 'symbolic': 'Biennales are very much about the state wanting to show that it's good for art and it has a culture and that it knows about what is current and happening. An art fair is very much about a company saying 'I know how cool art is and I can make it work for my brand'.' Douglas, having approached the government on many occasions to fund his projects, has strong opinions on this matter. In his experience, the government creates policies that rely on what is called public-private partnerships, yet neither 'public' nor 'private' sectors act in ways that enable such partnerships to exist. He has found that if the private sector gets involved, the public sector feels the project has enough funding because corporates are 'rich' and 'their money is needed elsewhere'. Often, in his opinion, government projects are 'too political' for the private sector to attach their brand to it and so those projects are also only 'half-funded'. He believes that the government is far too reliant on culture to speak a political message, which he demonstrated in one of our interviews with the following anecdote:

The one meeting that I had with the Department of Art and Culture was with the DG and he said to me, and it was for me a very poignant moment, he said that 'our minister', who was then, Pallo Jordan, 'is in a very difficult position'. And he said Mbeki called a meeting and Mbeki said to him: 'Do we have a nation?' 'Do we have a nation?', and he kept repeating and repeating this. And I said, shit Sydney, I am confused, what does he mean? And he said, 'what is it that defines our nation, what is it that is our identity? And I said, well what does it matter, as long as it is sort of excellence and good stuff. And he said, the minister was under huge pressure and wasn't able to answer this question.

⁹ Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

Douglas seems to be suggesting that the government of the day's confusion as to 'what the nation is', reflects in their decision-making in budget allocation for the arts. Coming across as similarly disillusioned, Karel Nel¹⁰, a South African mid-career artist and academic, explained that for him the two Biennales were about 'propelling South Africa back into the world'. He does not seem surprised that the government is not involved in the Joburg Art Fair: 'One is not going to depend on government to give money which they haven't given, so it has had to be this private initiative, which really helps to bring it back on track and to start to become part of a *small global network again*. And that we have to take responsibility ourselves.' He concludes: 'It is not easy but it is important.' Another mid-career, South African artist, Sam Nhlengethwa,¹¹ expressed to me some of his deepest disappointment in the government of the new South Africa as 'this government was the government that was supposed to show the world that it supports the arts full time, and big time'. When asked what he meant he elaborated:

My disappointment comes from during the days of the struggle, I mean the arts was at the forefront, be it music, theatre, visual arts, protest art used to come from those disciplines. People who do posters and there were things that we artists were doing, not expecting money but we knew that this is the only way to send the message to the regime that enough is enough. You know poetry, we used to go and perform around the country, challenging the system.

Giving voice to an issue I take up in the fourth chapter, Nhlengethwa states that often the people he knew from the 'struggle', who are now in government would state HIV Aids and 'development' as priorities above the arts. Yet, he feels that culture broadly could have an effect on these sectors too, should they be supported by the state. Nhlengethwa's complaints echoes what Gilroy refers to in the UK as 'governmental drift' and 'institutional indifference' (2004: 8).

It is true, however, that the visual arts sector remains notoriously un-transformed in the decade after ACTAG set out its objectives. The previous government, under Thabo Mbeki, had a mandate of development and skills transfer and so, much of the money allocated by the national treasury to the Department of Arts and Culture was for 'poverty

¹⁰ Interview, 11 March 2008, Karel Nel, Practicing South African artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

¹¹ Interview, 24 March 2009, Sam Nhlengethwa, Practicing South African artist.

alleviation', which sits uncomfortably with the current 'face' of the arts sector. By this I mean to suggest that the sector is overwhelmingly white, yet as some of the findings in this study suggest this is not for lack of trying from many of those within the sector. Further demonstrating this point as well as a deep tension at the heart of it, is the example of a large-scale art exhibition held in Cape Town some years ago. In 2006 an independent group of curators approached the government for funding for an African Biennale to be held in Cape Town. This event highlighted the degree to which there might be said to exist 'racial' camps within the local art world.¹² What bears upon this study, from what came to be called, *Cape 07*, is the fact that the biennale was preceded, in 2006 by a series of discussions, entitled *Sessions Ekapa* to which different art world constituencies were invited. An art critic and self-appointed blogger at the sessions explained his stance thus: '... I felt myself rendered mute on account of my skin colour ... I felt that my right to speak on such politically charged issues (that there needs to be a shift in structural power, and furthermore that art history needs to be re-contextualised) was being hijacked'.¹³ The issues raised, mostly by black members of the audience, were about the invisibility of, and apparent apathy towards transformation in the arts sector.

One need only look at the demographics of artists, art lecturers, arts writers and curators in this country, to know that unlike many spheres of business, transformation has been very slow in being realised. Academic and curator, Thembinkosi Goniwe¹⁴, at the time the only black lecturer in the Fine Arts Department at the Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg – as he pointed out to me, lamented this fact in our interview and suggested that perhaps, 'identity politics' have been 'done away with too quickly'. He also spoke of the short space of time in which many of his white colleagues expect the 'transformation period' to be over, in the face of the absolute lack of examples of black individuals in positions of power within the arts sector. Stephen Sack, Director for Arts, Culture and Heritage for the City of Johannesburg, in public addresses or discussions,

¹² This venture was entitled *Cape07*. The initial concept was to enliven the city of Cape Town by placing art exhibitions and cultural events in various venues around the greater Cape in a triangular geographic area stretching between Muizenberg, Stellenbosch and Khayelitsha. It was envisioned as an African exhibition that would feature forty-five African artists from the continent and the diaspora forming the main exhibition *The Lions of Africa*, thereby creating continent-wide dialogues. Lack of funding and problematic administration led to the original director, Gavin Jantjes, a South African artist residing in Norway, resigning. *Cape07*, and every one of my interviewees agreed, was a miserable failure.

¹³ www.capeafricapplatform.co.za

¹⁴ Interview, 25 March 2008, Thembinkosi Goniwe, Practicing South African curator, and lecturer at Wits School of Arts.

sometimes cites this as one of the reasons why the government seems to be weary of handing more money out to the arts: The money, they seem to be thinking, goes into the wrong hands.

Johan Myburgh¹⁵, a respondent to this study who writes for the Afrikaans newspaper, *Beeld*, made a similar point in relation to the Art Fair in our interview. As a result, partly, of heavy advertising budget from the sponsor for the Art Fair, allocated to this newspaper's lifestyle section *Die Naweek By*, Myburgh covered different aspects of the Fair throughout its lead-up, during and after the event and so got to know its workings from close range. He positioned the Art Fair as speaking simultaneously about an impatience with the slow process of transformation, and the rapid turn in the society towards consumption and not-too-subtle incarnations of capitalism. Myburgh said that he lived through the political struggle of the '80s and came out of that phase excited by the Freedom Charter, especially by the way it positioned South African society as non-racial. For him, where 'we' have arrived now is far removed from such an understanding and closer to 'racialism', or 'multi-racialism'. The other thing that the Freedom Charter spoke of that resonated with Myburgh was the possibilities for having a 'mixed economy'. South Africa, he opined, has failed to achieve this objective and has arrived at 'a form of fully-fledged capitalism'. He was of the opinion that if one would apply those two observations to the Art Fair, one would have to admit, regardless of his own excitement for the project, that both were at stake and exemplified. The Art Fair demonstrated for Myburgh 'how short' 'our' period of transformation lasted and inspires in him the feeling of 'let's get it over and done with, let's just get it over and move on'. He continued to explain that the field of art production is not concerned with transformation, and while he understands the constraints of corporate sponsorship, he insisted one would have to admit that on the face of it, it is an event that does not look back on the past of this country, but tries to imagine a new, and flawed, future.

Making a similar, more direct point, Sean O' Toole,¹⁶ editor for the *Art South Africa* magazine, spoke in our interview of transformation as something 'people tiptoe around', but which is always on the radar: 'With *Art South Africa*, it is seen as a white magazine about predominantly white artists and I often find myself thinking what is my quota of

¹⁵ Interview, 10 November 2008, Johan Myburgh, South African arts journalist, *Beeld*

¹⁶ Interview, 15 September 2008, Sean O'Toole, Editor *Art South Africa* and freelance journalist.

the year? ... and (I) do a kind of sad apartheid era sort of race-based count'. In the extract below, with which I conclude this discussion, O'Toole puts a radical spin on the issue of transformation. In doing so, he gives a name, rightly or wrongly, to some of what remained underlying in many of my interviews – the majority of which were with white individuals, reflecting again the demographics of the field close to the Joburg Art Fair. O'Toole's view is not that of this study, rather this study aims to unsettle ways of thinking that relies on binaries. It is inserted here, however, as an expression of a mood that is seldom spoken:

Yes look I mean it is difficult because I think what a lot of white people are realising is that as much as you hope for that transition, one has to factor in the very real thing that you won't be a participant of it and I think that is really hard to kind of accept, but, therefore, you keep it closer. I suppose it is the fact that we are custodians rather than people who are creating heirs, finite custodians but in a legal sense where you have custodianship to almost like x date I don't know it is also again too absolutist a reading I think that is part of the interesting thing about South Africa is that it is sort of so messily in-between.

O'Toole concedes that this impression might not allow for enough play and flux, yet it speaks of a country where many people sometimes struggle to imagine their futures.

Against this backdrop, how does one make sense of a phenomenon such as the Joburg Art Fair? It is an event that inserted itself into the landscape I briefly outlined, in ways that highlight frustrations and contradictions, the most immediate of which can be summarised in the following way: Despite the ubiquity of political discourse in contemporary South Africa, the Joburg Art Fair styled itself as an event unconcerned with the political. It mobilised notions of the 'normal', 'Western' metropolis, while, seemingly borrowing and appropriating what suited it from the 'African'. Through the persona of the director, it addressed a version of a 'joe-public', but did so using the highly codified practice of contemporary art. Its focus on patterns of consumption, coupled with its geographical positioning in the city, called for new readings of the public culture of middle-classness that connote familiarity with travel, luxury goods and social emulation. Yet, at the same time, while exuding a confidence, even an arrogance, in its celebration of internationalism, luxury and 'new-ness' – often flying in the face of the Department of Arts and Culture's focus on heritage, 'development' and craft, and

ignoring the call from the arts community for more inclusiveness and intellectual rigor – I did not find this event to be robust, but rather, tenuous, flighty and subject to a precariousness that prevail in the South Africa of the now. I also found its public to be multifaceted; not necessarily always loyal and difficult to address as group. Furthermore, while riding on hype and promise for a ‘normal’ city and cultural landscape, one that resonates with many South Africans, it remained at the mercy of social insecurity, political restructuring, corporate opportunism and a fractured art world, desperate for transformation, but at a loss as to how to achieve it. Yet, the Fair did display a resilience to these forces and while, when looking at the history of the local arts landscape, it can be read as ‘event’ in the historical sense of the term as used by Sewell, it also attempted to ‘occur’ as part of the everyday. In this way, regardless of its frustrations, it suggests new and unexplored categories and signs of the present and for thinking about contemporary living in South Africa. What this suggests together with an unpacking of the summary above, is a reading of the event as a symptom of the present moment that signals many aspects of the social beyond merely its structuring principle of contemporary art.

Theoretical positions

The theoretical location of this study then, is the ‘art world’ (with its relation to culture and aesthetics) as conjured by the Art Fair, and its connections and zones of intersection and overlap with ‘social worlds’ and ‘economic worlds’. As such it is located within the field of cultural studies in a broad and interdisciplinary way. Both in theory and in method, this study responds to a call from writers such as Couze Venn (2007) and English (2005) for researchers to consider the parametres of the field of cultural studies more broadly in order that it might speak to new notions of what it means to be ‘human’ in the contemporary moment (Venn, 2007: 49). As an approach to this field, this study is not unique in trying to bridge these different ‘worlds’ and I consider some examples below. Yet, despite a definite increase in breadth of the field, few studies have used ethnographic material to look at specific instances of such overlap. Venn articulates a contemporary situation in which ‘the theorization of culture, the economy, technology, identity, the environment, and the dynamic interrelationship between them’ calls for new theoretical tools and paradigms, less concerned with field-specific enquiry than with overlaps and mutual ‘interferences’. What this study specifically contributes to such an

approach is both the connections between fields and disciplines and the locatedness in a very specific local temporality through the use of ethnography.

The study by English (2005) on the cultural prize, as a way into understanding contemporary relations to culture, shares many attributes with this study of art fairs. Offering a more concrete criticism than Venn, he suggests that cultural studies seem to have focused either on the individual genius of one art work or artist positioned as synecdoche of a social world, or large cultural field studies that lack empirical evidence or grounding (English, 2005: 12). According to English, 'what's left out is the whole middle zone of cultural space, a space crowded not just with artists and consumers but with bureaucrats, functionaries, patrons, and administrators of culture' (English, 2005: 12). English is concerned that not enough cultural studies work positions itself in this 'middle zone' which is an important aspect of the area of overlap and interdisciplinarity that Venn speaks of. It is often in this zone that logistics, technologies, banal organisational structures, economics and overlooked 'managers' operate to enable, but crucially also *shape* cultural events. In this study, a specific section has been dedicated to analysing this social space and how it impacts on an event like the Joburg Art Fair

English's study of the cultural prize is one on the 'economics of cultural prestige' and involves 'fundamentally the question of art's relationship to money, to politics, to the social and the temporal' (2005: 3). Like the art fair, the 'prize' is routinely criticised for its 'compromising convergence with the dynamics of the market place' (English, 2005: 3). The prize, like the art fair, he states, involves at once a 'genuine' engagement with art and cultural achievement, and a 'sordid display of competitiveness and greed' (English, 2005: 7). English is interested in both the economics of culture and the social world that it then both reflects and creates, thereby allowing the study to be read *across fields*. English's analyses of the prize as mobilising different forms of 'capital' and different 'fields' is furthermore of particular interest to my study in its evocation of the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu. He states that each field has its own internal logic, yet 'every field may be understood as part of a general economy of practices' that intersect all the time (English, 2005: 8). As English suggests, the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu is some of the most dynamic in trying to understand the interrelatedness of 'fields' (English, 2005: 8). Bourdieu's formulation of 'field' and 'capital' has been widely referenced so as to almost become a trope for a specific approach to understanding the social world.

What is of particular interest to parts of this study is the manner in which different forms of capital defined by Bourdieu, such as economic capital, social capital and symbolic capital, are always actively involved in forms of what English describes as intraconversion – the conversion of and slippages between forms of capital, so as to render the ‘field’ a ‘game that is being played ... the entire field of cultural production a full contact marketplace or zone of intraconversion on which the (economic) instruments and practices of engagement keep getting more various and more complex’ (English, 2005: 11). It is in this way that the art fair is both market for buying and selling, and a marketplace for value construction.

In relation to the international model of an art fair, Bourdieu’s work on ‘distinction’ speak to this study in direct ways as I discuss below in more detail (Bourdieu, 1998). In this work, Bourdieu was concerned with understanding relations between class and cultural products. Art fairs, as explained earlier, had become *the* sites where expensive art works found glamorous owners, hence, prestige, in the way mentioned by English, plays a determining role. Bourdieu’s (1993) theory of the ‘field’ as explored in *The Field of Cultural Production* suggests that the social world consists of connected and overlapping fields within which ‘agents’ ‘strategise’ to achieve forms of ‘capital’ and positions of power (Bourdieu’s, 1993: 37). For Bourdieu an artwork is the result of the combined relations between agent, field, ‘habitus’ and capital and should be read and analysed as such. However, the implications of Bourdieu’s theories are less apparent and more troubled in the local context, suggesting some of the vast differences in the different social and economic make-up of the art worlds of the West, which English focuses on, and France in particular, in the case of Bourdieu. One of the most striking elements shown up by this fieldwork is the way in which an investigation into art publics, relations to artworks generally, and the manner in which art functions in society, lead to very different findings from that of Bourdieu. The South African social fabric, both historically, and specifically in the contemporary moment as it works through a trying transformation period, creates more scope for new and unformed art publics; for different social relations to events such as an art fair, and for rich readings of art works as objects. Thus, as the local middle class grows and changes; as some citizens are contemplating futures abroad in response to what they see as local difficulties; and as the market for African contemporary art grows, the Art Fair comes to stand for something quite different from the display of status and merely the ‘intraconversion’ of forms of

capital. It is a combination of historical relations to art, the history and legacy of local politics and the contemporary post-apartheid context that renders the place of art in this society both more complex and far less fixed than might be the case in the societies studied by Bourdieu and English. These findings are foremost in what this study adds to the literature within this field.

This study is also influenced by the 'sociology of art' tradition, such as the work done by Howard Becker (1982) in his seminal *Art Worlds*, although my findings are not situated in that tradition. Becker considers the ways in which art production interfaces with industry, thereby highlighting the interconnectivity of the work of art with the world in which it exists. By so doing, he places in question the traditional reading of the work of art as somehow free from the 'worldly', as object of pure signification created by the 'artist genius', rather than as a result of the combined efforts of many. Becker's work, which resonates with that of Bourdieu, bears upon this study as it considers works of art as situated in time and place through the Art Fair, while also providing a 'lay of the land' of the local art scene and players within it.

A further focus of this study is the local field of galleries and institutions that become involved in the Art Fair. The approach followed here brings to mind the 'economic anthropology' done by Stuart Plattner (1996: 11) in *High Art Down Home*. Plattner's¹⁷ study is a detailed account of the St Louis art world in America in all its facets, and so manages to shed light on a small art world that functions for the most part outside that of the larger, more well-theorised centres of New York and London. This study too looks at the very local ingredients of the market as it is represented by the Fair. The texts by Becker, Plattner and Bourdieu have different foci and intentions, yet converge upon a shared aim to bring to the fore the notion of art as embedded in its context – a context first of creating, and second of looking. The context of looking, termed by Mieke Bal (2003) 'visuality', is here that of the Fair which combines a 'global' connectedness and aspiration for the international, with a local pragmatism and history.

¹⁷ Plattner's volume is truly insightful in its close description of the everyday lives of artists that are not 'super stars'. In his own words: 'I describe the nature of a local contemporary art market the way a realist painter would depict a landscape. Like an artist, my goal is to represent reality by applying disciplinary methods through a personal focus' (1996: x). The book is useful in understanding not only the local that he seeks to highlight, but also the lives of many artists all over the world who are also teachers, or designers, not to mention parents and partners, and the struggle sometimes involved in not fitting into the shape of the genius that 'makes it' and gets swept into the bright lights, that one encounters in art history classes but engaged in the daily insecurities of cash flow and invoices.

In addition then to 'art worlds' and fields of cultural production, a further theoretical construct relevant to the aims of this study is that articulated by Appadurai and Breckenridge as 'public culture'. In relation to this study, this term is both evocative and contextualising: Evocative, in the ways that it suggests cultural practices, cultural identifications, and cultural productions that are constructed in the public realm, in sites of struggle and contestation, but shared and negotiated; and contextualising in that it specifically sees a breakdown in the long-held, more Marxist, divisions between high art and popular culture (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1988). The art fair is specifically located at such a juncture as it showcases high art, yet trades in the vocabulary of the popular through elements of lifestyle, 'brands' and consumption. In their *Afterword* to the volume *Johannesburg: Elusive Metropolis* (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2008), Appadurai and Breckenridge revisit, in the context of *Johannesburg*, some of their initial objectives for starting the journal *Public Culture*: 'With the founding of *Public Culture* in 1988, we proposed that the study of emerging sites of media, consumption, spectacle, and self-making, especially outside of the Euro-American world, were no longer understudies in the theater of modernity, waiting for some imagined Western place or actor to fall ill so that an eager aspirant could take her place' (2008: 351). They applaud the editors of *Johannesburg* for their impatience for a 'writing' of Africa that suggests: 'We will not wait, ... and we cannot afford to wait, to defer the writing of Africa until that day (perhaps some sort of Day of Judgment from the Hague, Geneva, or Davos), when the world shall declare that Africa has now officially been allowed the privilege of having an everyday, of having an urban life, of having lives worth studying and styles worth emulating' (353).

This essay by Appadurai and Breckenridge is highly suggestive for me in the way that it calls for the imagination and creativity to enter into social science and cultural studies discourses. It also demarcates as its 'field' areas outside of the Northern metropolises, and so allows for real engagement with places that have seen relatively little sustained attention from scholarship. Seen through this particular formulation of 'public culture', the Joburg Art Fair is specifically valuable as one of the few African art platforms from within the continent itself; not an exhibition of art works from this region travelling in other parts of the world to other publics.

I furthermore invoke 'public culture' to create a space within which to open up for critical scrutiny concepts such as the 'African' and 'African contemporary art' as well as the 'Global South' as it is mobilised and brought to bear upon certain aspects of the Joburg Art Fair. Those aspects are, perhaps, some of the richest conceptual elements within the Art Fair structure – suggesting a specific *theoretical* framing of the Fair – yet, at the same time, have some of the least significant impact on it as 'event'. What I mean to say is that the Fair signals different ways of grouping works of art and 'publics' through certain 'conceptual' measures that it deploys, such as a 'theming', and a 'curated show'. Yet, for the most part, that was where it remained. Very little debate resulted from these rich sources for thinking about the event or the 'now' in South Africa. The majority of the 'public' was not necessarily aware of or interested in this particular relation that the Fair attempted to animate.

Some critics, many, in fact, even suggested that the Fair had a glib relation to the canons and significations of bringing the 'African' and the 'Global South' into the constellation that makes up this event. This may be symptomatic in the sense that whilst the Fair's relationship to African contemporary art in some ways might be glib, it is also a result of the 'familiar' and the 'anti-exotic'. This is a key feature of this study in that it takes seriously the call by Appadurai and Breckenridge to place a sharp focus on instances of the 'local' as it exists in dialogue with, but also in a state of disconnection from, the larger, international worlds of art, theory and discourse. It is in that register that I use the word 'local' throughout this study: not so as to denote a parochialism in the first instance, but rather so that it becomes a writing of a world that is at once self contained, thereby invariably retaining elements of the parochial, but is also specifically connected to elsewhere and to other worlds. Furthermore bearing upon my approach is the fact that 'public culture' as framed by Appadurai and Breckenridge insists a simultaneous consideration of social and economic lenses, as well as an intersection between the global and the local to be brought to bear on such fields as aesthetics in order that locally specific phenomena might be read more productively.¹⁸

¹⁸ Local writing on the 'social world' of the contemporary, predominantly from the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies, is far more developed than writing on the 'art world'. The latter has seen almost no attention from local scholarship, perhaps because there are few outlets for scholars within this field, which in itself is comparatively small, and those that do exist are focused on art historical or art critical approaches. These approaches are discussed in the third part of this study. Within this context, the work of Rory Bester (2008) stands out as dealing with contemporary art in contemporary South Africa in a way that is interdisciplinary. In his essay 'Cities, Photography and Research', he looks at the art exhibition as 'a form of critical public address' (1) thereby evoking questions of how one speaks to a public, and who that public

Within the overriding aim of thinking of the Art Fair as ‘public culture’, an important concept to reconsider is that of modern-day consumption, especially as it pertains to works of art. Deborah Posel¹⁹ (2009) has suggested that much local writing on consumption, of which there is very little, is done through a Marxist or Weberian reading, and has not taken on board the insights suggested by Colin Campbell (1987) in his *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumption* which argues for understanding economic and consumption behaviour as inspired by emotions and social impulses. Posel’s suggestions for reading some of the social world of the local as influenced by what Campbell calls a ‘romantic ethic’ accurately captures aspects of the aim of the discussion here. As a result, this study also considers the importance of affect as an aspect of the production of the Art Fair and the various publics’ relation to artworks.

Ideas around consumption are generally of significance within the context of the Fair especially so considering the structure of the Fair as market and as an essentially public space with a variety of public interactions with consumable goods. In order to situate this aspect of the Fair it is necessary to consider ‘consumption’ as social act to suggest the ways in which consumption imbues with meaning the relations between things and people. For Baudrillard (1998), this is the most important consideration in an analysis of

might be. Bester also looks at the act of exhibiting (of photographic work specifically) as powerfully able to ‘make visible’ (2) forms of research, which could be instructive in urban studies of cities and city forms. Bester thus positions both the artwork and its exhibition context in dialogue with other disciplines, thereby extending the ambit of the analysis. Another example that takes an interdisciplinary approach is Jillian Carman’s (2006) work on the Johannesburg Art Gallery. This study is one of the few examples that traverses the fields of the social, the aesthetic and the economic, albeit through the lens of the historical. Her work, especially the manner in which art is positioned as objects that unlock different kinds of ‘exchange’, and bring together different social fields, have been influential to the approach taken in my own research. Local cultural studies focusing on the arts specifically, since 1994, have been principally concerned with exploring issues around ‘transformation’. This trend is perhaps best exemplified by the series, *Shifting Selves*, edited by Abebe Zegeye. The aim of the series is to understand shifts in ‘social identities’ of South Africans in the ‘new’ South Africa and the texts in these volumes draw from divergent fields. Recent work by Sarah Nuttall (2009) where she brings similar issues into a much more contemporary, sharper focus resonates more strongly with the manner in which this study aims to analyse its fieldwork. The volume of essays *Entanglement* is inspirational in the lens that it uses as well as in the aspects of life in post-apartheid South Africa that it chooses to look at. These include, specifically, the reading of ‘self-styling’ by young black South Africans, in which conceptions of the country’s past is ‘superseded’ (Nuttall, 2009: 108) by preoccupations with style and the future. This reading of aspects of ‘blackness’ appears in one chapter, as against another chapter which looks at autobiographies and ‘related narratives of the self written by whites from the mid-1990s onwards’ (Nuttall, 2009: 13) in which she explores the complex notion of ‘confronting complicity with an apartheid order and imaginary; with the secrets kept regarding the subjects’ whiteness; even the lies that have been told to the self and to others’ (Nuttall, 2009: 58). These are new ways of understanding subjecthood in post-apartheid South Africa that resonate powerfully with my findings during the course of my research.

¹⁹ Posel presented a working paper at the WISER Summer School Conference in June 2009 in Johannesburg. The paper explored the connection between politics and consumption by black people in South Africa.

consumption: 'Consumption is the virtual totaling of all the objects and messages ready constituted as a more or less coherent discourse. If it has any meaning at all, consumption means an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs (203)'. Baudrillard's view follows a school of thought that is dedicated to seeing consumption as anthropologically and sociologically interesting and worth studying, and so works to undo what many anthropologists consider the too narrow reading of consumption by economic studies. As Campbell (1987) puts it, economics view the 'phenomenon of consumption' predominantly through the theory of marginal utility (Campbell, 1987: 40). Marginal utility theory is premised on the assumption that the individual subject acts in a rational way to seek pleasure over pain and that the individual would want to satisfy her individual needs. Satisfaction is measured in 'utils' which has a declining value with each purchase, or 'use'. 'Marginal utility' has to do with the predictability created in the relation of cost of a product, consumer utilities and the diminishing marginal value, enabling economists to calculate an equilibrium between price and quantity (Clark *et al.*, 2003: 4,5). Apart from the fact that this theoretical formulation attempts to be true across the board to explain purchasing decisions, causing economists to perform ever more complex theoretical 'summersaults' (Clark *et al.*, 2003: 5), the main problem pointed out by Douglas and Isherwood (1996), is that it is mathematical and, therefore, highly abstracted. These authors conclude that utility theory is both 'powerful and useless', since 'economists themselves see its gears grinding away without meshing with reality' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 111).

Campbell's (1987) *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumption* is a key text here that brings to the fore the emotional aspects of consumption, within which much art buying would fall, through a reconsideration of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber's thesis considers the specific historical moment when a distinct movement from Catholicism to Calvinism coincided with the first mighty rise of capitalism. According to Campbell 'Weber's thesis is predicated on the assumption that the Industrial Revolution constituted the most significant upheaval in the system of producing manufactured goods that the world had ever witnessed, an upheaval linked to the emergence of modern capitalism' (Campbell, 1987: 6). Campbell is concerned with reading romantic, emotional impulses as part of the engine driving the 'consumerist revolution' of the 18th century, since, it would seem that the very same time that saw Weber's puritan ethic as 'producing' capitalism through production, a sizable rise in

consumption took place, leading him to suggest ‘... perhaps puritan and romantic might not be the stark cultural alternatives which sociologists generally took them to be’ (Campbell, 1987: 9). He then asks how it is that the puritan – ‘out of a basis in intense moral and religious concern, condemns all idleness, luxury and indulgence’ comes to overlap so strongly with the emergence of new leisure activities such as novel reading and dancing and the consumption of luxury items (Campbell, 1987: 31). Key to the cultural shift that Campbell aims to lay bare is ‘its character as an activity which involves an apparently endless pursuit of wants; the most characteristic feature of modern consumption being its insatiability’ (Campbell, 1987: 37) and points out that this is in strong contrast to non-literate, pre-industrial societies.

Following a similar thread, Douglas and Isherwood, in *The World of Goods* (1996), formed a theory of consumption that has as its point of departure not the ‘rational individual’ so powerfully placed at the heart of neoclassical economics, but collective behaviour and group solidarity as signals for consumer patterns. For them this is a new field that has as its aim the building of a bridge between anthropology and economics – a recasting of the economically active subject into the drama of a complex social structure of meaning creation – ‘the meaning of each in relation to the whole’ (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996: xiii). In a manner reminiscent of Campbell, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood argue that no sound theory of consumption exists. They reject the judgmental overtones of Thorstein Veblen’s ‘emulationist’ theory, which states that the rise in consumption was fuelled by the desire to emulate the class directly above you, suggesting that ‘wants’ are always slightly out of reach. While they conceded that Veblen’s account of conspicuous consumption for the display of status in society added a much-needed social dimension to the understanding of economic behaviour, both Campbell, and Douglas and Isherwood, point out that what the popularity of Veblen’s theory indicates is the ‘widespread bias in social science against luxury consumer behavior, and its taken for granted basis in ‘other-directed’ patterns of motivation’ (Campbell, 1987: 51). Douglas and Isherwood refer to Veblen’s attitude as ‘unqualified scorn of conspicuous consumption’ (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: vii). These authors hold the view that when one puts aside the functions of goods as physical and psychological need-providers, what they become are markers of the social – meaning-creating and exchanging devices between individuals and groups. Consumption for them ‘is the very

arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 37).

This social understanding and reading of consumption behaviour is meaningful for consideration of the behaviour of publics at the Art Fair. If one reads consumption as a constant process of meaning exchange, the Fair can be seen as a highly charged arena for message relaying amongst human beings. Not simply because art is an exceptionally individuated form of social coding, but furthermore the buying of a particular work of art relays a similarly individuated message about the buyer to her fellow members of society. One is left, not with the often stated, more negative picture of emulation and display, but with the impression of consumers buying coded commodities with which to align themselves and up the level of sharing of information about the self in an essentially referential manner – 'goods' they conclude 'are the visible part of culture' (44). The relation between the goods acquired during the narrative of a lifetime creates a web of message communication that can be *read* (49) and so comes to do the work of 'marking services': a wedding dress for marriage, a bunch of flowers for a birthday, et cetera.

What is central to this understanding of consumer and social behaviour are networks: 'We need goods to give marking services and to get marking services, that is, he has to be present at other people's rituals of consumption to be able to circulate his own judgment of the fitness of things ...' (56). They explain how consumption 'rituals' are used as barriers of entry into social groups leading to complex systems of inclusion and exclusion. This system of networking is closely contingent on the structure of society and within these structures, goods have the ability to become the very significations of restrictions of access. The authors mention that the top sphere of society enjoys privileged access to 'information' goods – that is, for example, creativity, but also politics and economic trends. It follows that the closer an individual is positioned to the top sphere, the more access she will have to relevant information of the day. This notion of 'information goods' has been formulated in an attempt to do away with the long-held distinction between luxury goods and goods of necessity – 'by dropping the term 'luxuries', we have fortunately lost the moral slur and also the heterogeneity in the concept of non staple consumption' (133). This formulation, however, clearly demarcates 'elite' behaviour, which I turn to later in this discussion. Mirroring the theories of

Douglas and Isherwood, as well as that of Baudrillard, Appadurai's seminal *Social Life of Things* (1986) adds the following to the analysis: 'I propose that we regard luxury goods not so much in contrast to necessities ..., (b)ut as goods whose principle use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs' (Appadurai, 1986: 30).

From this synopsis some key aspects of the art fair environment are illuminated. The most central would be what Campbell terms consumption's romantic, irrational side. Second, is the idea that objects become 'marking services' in the arena of consumption and more specifically 'information goods'. For this to come into play, networks between people are formed and strengthened through public interactions involving 'props' that communicate messages about people and situations. Another important function of marking services is control of access and information, of which 'creative practice' is situated close to the top of a society, conceived of in a pyramid structure. Two simultaneous forces are, thus, at work: one is a control of access between groups and networks; the other is the using of acts of consumption for communication. From this I would like to deduce that consumption encompasses one's very presence at a public event such as the Fair, and, therefore, does not necessarily imply having to consume the objects on display. In other words, forming part of that public for that time is also an act of consumption, here read positively as a social communicative experience. Yet, it is crucial to keep in mind when reading 'ideas' that publics have of each other that art is a vehicle for the control of access as well as some of the most complex message creation about the self.

Turning now to another concept often linked to the Fair and which stood out from the interview data, is that of 'elites' and art's relation to this 'grouping' within society. 'Elites' is a term with specific inflection in the South African historical context of racial privilege, and one which have gathered attention from international scholars in recent times. The editors of the volume *Remembering Elites* (2008) refer to the importance of studying elites against the phenomenon of a global 'regressive redistribution' of wealth over the past three decades (Savage and Williams, 2008: 9). Its editors, Savage and Williams aim to theorise money and those that have the power over money – their own, their country's and other people's. In their introduction to the volume they qualify their assumption that elites had been 'forgotten' by social scientists, by looking at trends in social science over the past three decades. They discover that at a certain historical point, 'elites slipped from

view' (2008: 3). The first reason they give for this phenomenon is the proliferation of the sample survey from the 1970s onwards. This happened in the form of a pincer movement: on the one hand, a new tradition of class analysis interested in stratification and social inequality, and, on the other, a form of 'anti-humanism' which they see as having been central to the structuralist movement from the 1960s. As a result of these two factors coming together, elite studies became 'deeply unfashionable from mid-1970s onwards' (2008: 4). The social survey method of studying society often renders invisible its elites – as they seem to duck these research methods with their bureaucratic instruments. This they refer to as a 'hegemonic means of studying ... social inequality' (2008: 5). According to them, in both structuralist and post-structuralist inflected modes of social science, elites are either seen as overly important on the level of the individual, who is understood within the framework of the cult of personality (this being mostly associated with a journalistic view) or portrayed as dehumanised forces that perpetuate the status quo. To counter these modes of studying the wealthy and the powerful in present-day society, especially in a contemporary society so heavily focused on financial sectors and financial services, they posit that a more descriptive account of elites is necessary.

One of the specific characteristics of contemporary South Africa is that its elite circles and elite formations are far less rigid and sedimented than they are in the societies described by *Remembering Elites*. What Laden (2001: 522) terms 'demographic mobility' does not imply a one-directional move from lower-class rankings to higher ones, but a moving in all directions by individuals and groups from various demographics, as well as complex performances of class. At different times in the country's history, different racial or ethnic groups have reaped the benefits of affirmative action and preferential treatment (Freund, 2008, Innes, 2007) implying that class and social standing are more fluid, and that often, networks are more important than embedded class structures. This does not mean to suggest that the society is not very regimented and that real barriers to class 'mobility' also exist, but rather that the fluid nature resulting from fairly frequent changes in ruling regimes allows for individuals to change their class status.

Bourdieu is often used as theorist on 'elites' in relation to both his theories on 'taste' espoused in *Distinction* (1998) and in his constructions of 'capital' elaborated on earlier. *Distinction* focuses specifically on France and the differences in taste and perceptions of

culture (such as eating, music, art) between the petty bourgeois and the upper classes. He makes the point that taste and aesthetic appreciation are en-cultured and learnt behaviour, rather than something relating to what Kant had called 'the pure gaze', which implies something natural that you either possess or don't (Bourdieu 1998: 3). He explains this as follows:

It should not be thought that the relationship of distinction (which may or may not imply the conscious intention of distinguishing oneself from common people) is only an incidental component in the aesthetic disposition. The pure gaze implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world, which, as such, is a social break (Bourdieu, 1998: 31).

Art appreciation is, thus, for Bourdieu first an en-cultured facet of individuation, second a tool for social, or class 'marking', and third a 'break' with the banality of social struggle. This formulation bears upon this study in two ways. First, it highlights the manner in which art, or perhaps merely being present at the Art Fair, signifies a particular kind of social positioning. Second, it draws the attention to art appreciation as a 'stage' in a progression of upward mobility. Both of these points can be said to be in relative flux in the local situation.

Bourdieu's other concept, the notion of different kinds of 'capital' at work, operates in the setting in which he deploys it, France, within very defined social stratifications then. It draws attention to the ability that social 'agents' have to accrue, trade in, and convert, forms of capital into each other. For example, 'economic capital', referring specifically to wealth, could be transformed into 'cultural capital' by becoming the patron of a museum, or perhaps might be cultural from the start, such as if a collection of art works is inherited, or if the wealthy person grew up with art in the family. It follows that the more sophisticated the agent becomes at the 'social' game, the more intricately interwoven forms of capital would become. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu is specifically concerned with forms of cultural capital and its relation to economic and social capital. In that study, Bourdieu is not concerned with how art is used to change a person's social 'ranking' or power, rather how it suggests a prior positioning based on education, wealth, and upbringing. It is this aspect that is less fixed within South Africa and by virtue of this fact leaves more scope for agents to use 'capital' to change their social positioning. Art has often in the past played the role of facilitating that conversion from one class or social positioning to another through the *conversion* of one form of capital to another. Jillian

Carman's (2006) and Michael Stevenson's (2002) studies of the behaviours of Randlords in the early days of Johannesburg both suggestively illustrate this process at work.²⁰ A descendant of such a Randlord, local artist Beezy Bailey²¹, grandson of Abe Bailey, has taken this element as 'business strategy' for his artistic career as he describes below:

... it was my father's words that art is the religion of the elite and I think he is absolutely right, worldwide you have these people they get bigger and bigger and richer and richer and what do you turn to? You go to art, what else have you got, you don't go to the church, you go to art galleries. But you know how I look at it, if you fly into a country or a town ... if you fly into San Francisco, and as you fly you see there is a section with mansions and swimming pools, and then there is the surrounding poor area, I always think, all those people in those houses could afford one of my paintings and you go across the whole world your potential market, I probably have, I don't know 50 million potential buyers of my work, at the prices that I am selling them.

The above extract places a particularly extreme spin on the appreciation of art, and, whilst having a bearing upon the Fair, does not capture it. 'Elites' as 'grouping' and as

²⁰ Carmen's (2006) *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine* and Michael Stevenson's (2002) *Art and Aspiration* are two closely linked projects. Both are concerned with the formation and stabilising years of Johannesburg and both are tales about the deployment of art as tool for social advancement. Together they shape a picture of the confluence of art, social networking, politics and financial manoeuvring in turn-of-the-century Johannesburg. Carman's project is centred on the establishment of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, while Stevenson looks more broadly at the collections of the Randlords, all of whom feature in Carman's drama. According to Stevenson, the Randlords of the time 'craved social acceptance and the status of recognition, and constructed upper-class identities to transcend their modest backgrounds. They systematically acquired and displayed properties and possessions that symbolized wealth and power in Europe. Arguably, their most symbolic expenditure was on art, which they bought with the same zeal they had devoted to trading in gold and diamonds in South Africa' (2002: 13). He continues, 'The Randlords formed a distinct group within the economic elite in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain because of their common South African past and similar class aspirations' (2002: 18). Carman adds to the notion of emulation of foreign tastes and cultures reigning in South Africa of the time when she speaks of the origins of museums in the country: 'The fine art museum was a foreign import. It gained independent stature and importance when the nature of the foreign import was endorsed by European custodians of aesthetic standards and when local influential persons not only considered this a sufficient stamp of approval, but also wished to ensure that such a collection became part of the civic infrastructure ... the successful inclusion (or imposition) of such a foreign import in local civil society presupposes an influential will and wealth to make it succeed, and that presupposes some powerful agendas that may have nothing to do with art' (2006: 31). And so in Lionel Phillip's book of 1905 one can trace 'two of the initial impulses which led to the founding of the Johannesburg Art Gallery: the wish to establish a stable civil society along British lines that would bolster the prosperity of the mining industry, and the wish to assert British cultural superiority' (2006: 51). Florence Phillips' goal was to model the JAG on the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (2006: 72–73). She had connections in England and actively worked to forge local connections in power. As such, this is a book about connections and networks. Florence worked furthermore to have locals donate their collections to the gallery – as she herself donated her embroidery and lace collections (Carman: 2006; Stevenson, 2002). Phillips placed pressure on the mine owners to 'give back' to the community. What might seem like a moral pressure to perform a version of the self that is magnanimous translates into powerful reserves of cultural and social capital that in turn could enhance real economic profitability.

²¹ Interview, 1 November 2008, Beezy Bailey, Practicing South African artist.

concept is important to this study; yet, it does not describe the Art Fair public, nor the reach of the event as project. Having said that, there is no denying that the Art Fair, like most trade fairs, operate within structures of exclusion, the most basic markers of which might be first, the opening night invite list, and thereafter the R100 ticket entry price. The Art Fair director²² admitted as much in one of our interviews: ‘... a very important part of the Joburg Art Fair was this idea of making art accessible. I am not talking about accessible to people who haven’t got 10 cents. If you can’t pay R100, you can’t buy a piece of art. R100 to me is not a huge obstacle, a movie costs R45, most students in this country can afford R100’. We are, thus, for the benefits of simplicity, in the presence of an ‘R100-is-not-a-huge-obstacle’ sector of society, which could be termed ‘elites’ in a broad way.

The guiding principles outlined in the theoretical frameworks above as particular understandings of ‘art worlds’, ‘public culture’, ‘consumption’ and ‘elites’ are all positioned so as to see the field studied as comprising simultaneously of aesthetic elements, social elements and economic elements. These are overlapping ways of seeing the world studied which I have placed particular focus on in my analyses of the Joburg Art Fair.

Structure of the study

By way of examining the 2008 and 2009 Joburg Art Fairs, the analysis, and this document, is divided into three parts, indicating three lenses through which to make sense of the event and its production. These are the ‘social’, which focuses in particular on the idea of ‘publics’; the ‘economic’, in which the relation between art and money is explored; and the ‘aesthetic’, which considers the Art Fair’s art objects. The decision to structure my findings in this way was not born out of an easy delineation between these three ‘fields’ or the notion of ‘pure lenses’. The most dynamic moments within the study are arguably those when the ‘lenses’ collapse into each other to become filtered and refracted, as some of the above mentioned theoretical frameworks indicate. Furthermore, principally amongst what I aim to illustrate is the manner in which these ways of reading the fieldwork are interrelated. It has, however, proved useful as structure as it enables the

²² Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

same phenomenon, the Art Fair, to be approached using different theoretical tools and terminologies and so illustrate for the reader three 'lives' of the event.

Part One considers the significance and function of the Joburg Art Fair as a public event in South Africa. In this section, different angles on the 'public' and 'the present' are explored. The Art Fair is read as instance of a public culture in the making that explores and exposes values and performances of identity within the ambit of the event. This section also poses questions about the publics that respond to such an event. Readings of 'the public' are guided by the information extracted from the survey questionnaires and interviews conducted during fieldwork, but also read off from the 'distant' and less immediately graspable publics suggested by the rubrics of African contemporary art and the 'Global South'. This section relies on a detailed description of the event as experienced by a visitor in order to draw the analysis close to the event itself and the ways in which it is simultaneously 'unexceptional' in its local incarnation and so part of an 'every day', but also displays characteristics of 'the festival' and the 'celebratory' that have come to be associated with large-scale international art events. Thus, Chapter One is a tour of the event designed to map both the Art Fair and the field of local art production through the galleries, their artists and the gallerists themselves. Chapters Two and Three are concerned with different readings of a 'public' first, in Chapter Two, as embodied at the event and then, in Chapter Three, as conceived of by the organisers.

In Part Two of this study, I look at the background to the Art Fair and the minutia of the everyday functioning of its organisation. This second reading is one that considers the nuts and bolts of the Fair and adopts a cultural-economic approach, which includes both the 'economics' of this cultural event, and the 'organisational culture' that is constructed in the running of a business. This section is constructed out of in-depth description and an analysis of the economic facets of the Fair, with specific focus on the organisational culture of Artlogic, the organising company, and First National Bank, the primary sponsor to the event. This section was born out of the realisation that much of the field work done in exploring the Joburg Art Fair had very little to do with works of art. I found myself in everyday interaction with the field more in contact with 'the work that art could do' and the stuff of running a business, than in conversations around art. In the process, I discovered a different angle on both the Fair and the contemporary moment – one that is perhaps more banal, but which might speak most directly to the politics of the

present, as it relates to the lives of South African citizens in the workplace, planning futures and constructing realities. Chapter Four, is about Artlogic, the company behind the event. It considers both how they would like to position their brand and how they operate in their field. Here the focus is on Artlogic as a workplace and a small business in the arts. Chapter Five looks closely at the sponsor, First National Bank and the staff members inside the bank with whom Artlogic interacted. In Chapter Six, what I call the ‘art-money relationship’, so prominent within the format and model of an art fair, is unpacked so as to reflect responses from the local press and interviewees, alongside a review of some global trends in arts sponsorship. The information on figures and number-crunching gathered during the fieldwork is accounted for in some detail in this chapter to anchor a discussion on what sustainability of arts events might mean and what it meant in the particular instance of the Joburg Art Fair.

Part Three asks questions of cultural production through its emphasis on contemporary works of art. It speaks back to the chapters that precede it in two distinct ways. First, it demonstrates how, in relation to Part One of the study, the art on display at the Fair works *against* the notion of the non-political or a-political nature of the Fair that the event and its organisers set up by forcefully reinserting and bringing to the fore the politics of living in South Africa. In this reading, the focus is on how this daily ‘politics’ is being articulated within selected art works in unique ways. Second, it departs from Part Two, where the focus had been on ‘the work that art can do for stakeholders’, to bring the attention back to the works of art as living markers of a time. Using the method of discourse analysis, it reads certain art works as texts, while making reference to some aspects of local art history to see the works as situated and imbedded in a temporality. It is also at this point that the discussion returns to key features of the post-apartheid revealed in other parts of the study. This is done, first, through, what could be termed an intellectual tour of the Fair where seven different works are discussed and read in Chapter Seven, and thereafter, in Chapter Eight, through an examination of some buyers of art and their personal ‘history of art’; thereafter, through a close reading of the work, *Security*, by South African artist Jane Alexander that was presented at the 2009 Joburg Art Fair in Chapter Nine. This work by Alexander is positioned so as to conclude the study as it speaks powerfully and provocatively to the different facets of the contemporary that this study is interested in analysing and so both draws together, and questions, the many different viewpoints explored in the preceding chapters.

PART 1

Art Publics: Event; Publics and Public Culture

Introduction

How is it that an event speaks to the emergent? How is it that larger claims can be extrapolated from its occurrence about the social world in which it is located? How, furthermore, does one start to understand why publics conglomerate and who those publics are?

These are questions that are central to my analyses of the Joburg Art Fair. To this end, this part of the work is concerned with questions on 'publics' and 'publicness' and the space/time positioning of the Fair. It, therefore, speaks of a moment, the significance of which, because of its proximity, is difficult to assess in historical terms. Sewell (2005), referenced in the previous chapter, understands the notion of 'event' as signifying a historical change and as a possible meeting point between history and sociology. I argue that the Joburg Art Fair is an 'event' in more than one usages of the term: as organised public gathering and as historically significant within its context. This part of the study looks at both these aspects.

Don Handelman's (1998) *Models and Mirrors* provides a framework for reading specifically the public event as mimetic of a social world. Handelman argues that what I have described as Sewell's two instances of the event – its incarnation and its discourse – often intersect in ways that make reading a social temporality possible. He explains:

Events of presentation (or events that present) are mirrors held up to social order, reflecting and expressing the compositions that their composers desire for society. Above all else, events of presentation are representational. Their form, fantasy, and power derive directly from social order. Their internal logic is to reflect the ongoing ways in which their composers imagine social order, regardless of whether these composers are politicians, ideologues, aestheticians, business people, advertising people, entrepreneurs, actors and so forth (1998: xxix).

Public events, Handelman seems to be saying, are imbued with a quality that distils the 'social', or the 'flow of living' as ways of 'representing' society to itself (Handelman,

1998:15). AbdouMaliq Simone (1999) makes a similar point in relation to culture. For him 'cultural practice in a broad sense refer to the efforts individuals made to infuse their bodies and activities with meaning and coherence, to produce representations of themselves which are intelligible in terms of their values and world' (Simone, 1999: 240). If one were to agree with Simone's theory of the 'work' that 'culture' does, it would follow that 'public events' are important for the reasons given by Handelman above, and 'because they constitute dense concentrations of symbols and their associations, that are of relevance to a particular people' (9). For Handelman, the key significance of studying public events is that they are 'phenomenally valid forms that mediate persons into collective abstractions by inducing action, knowledge and experience...' (Handelman, 1998: 15).²³

He suggests that the study of events relies on some basic assumptions, which he lays out as:

First, that the relative capacities of 'doing' – of making something happen – that an event has is related to its logic of composition. Second, that the logic of composition of an event is intimately related to its organization. Third, that in order to get at the above, one must take seriously that which an event communicates about itself, as well as, what an interpreter makes of this (Handelman, 1998: 17).

Looking at the basic 'order of composition' of an art fair, much can be learnt about what the event communicates about the world it inhabits as well as the place it aims to occupy in the public imaginary. Following Handelman, I proceed with a closer analysis of the art fair format to ask: In which ways can the format of the art fair be said to communicate its contemporary relation to culture and, at the same time, illuminate contemporary culture? Below, I begin to investigate some of its attributes.

Marc Augé (1995) coined the term 'non-places' to designate an aspect of hyper-modernity, which is seen as taking place in spaces that are designed to be neutral and

²³ Under the heading 'why study public events?' he elaborates on some reasons given by other sociologists, so providing a useful summary of ways of reading the public event: 'some, in a more Durkheimian vein, find in such occasions the reflections of collective understandings or of principles of social structure. Others stress that such occasions address, and perhaps redress, problems that are embedded in the social relationships or in the way of life of a people. Still others emphasize more the necessity for cognitive and emotional experience that can be known to a people only through the doing, the enactment, of dramatic performance. Yet others focus on the interpretive 'reading' of meaning that events provide or make accessible to their participants. Through these 'narratives', people interpret their order of things to themselves' (Handelman, 1998: 9).

impersonal. The airport and hotel are two such places and so is the international convention centre. This is the kind of space in which the Joburg Art Fair took place, in so doing, following the model for the international trade fair. International trade fairs are geared towards bringing international audiences together, not only for the showcasing of product, but also for networking and the important forming or maintaining of relationships within a given field. It is, thus, the kind of event that can be easily replicated and appropriated into different contexts. It is also acutely focused on the moment – on what is ‘hot’ right now. Exhibition events are slotted into the busy schedules of their venues between vastly divergent shows for vastly divergent publics. Very few international art fairs take place in specialised locations, Frieze Art Fair in London being the main exception with their custom-designed and built ‘tent’ structure in London’s Regent’s Park. Time, furthermore, is curiously contracted within these ventures, as the event typically only exists for between three and four days and the participants work very long hours setting up and then trading to the public, before either moving on to other fairs, or resuming life as usual in their shops.

On a very banal level then, the art fair fits into the mould of the MCE industry (Meetings, Conventions and Exhibitions), described by Bathelt and others as a practice whereby ‘business people and professionals regularly come together at conventions, congresses, conferences, trade fairs and exhibitions’ (Bathelt et al., 2004: 1). The authors explain that, once at the events, businesses display and reveal ‘their latest and most advanced findings, inventions and products’ to be ‘evaluated by peers and competitors, as well as by customers and suppliers’ (Bathelt et al., 2004: 1). They continue: ‘Organising or participating in such events are means to identify the current market frontier, take stock of relative competitive positions and form future plans’ (Bathelt et al., 2004: 1). Some of the primary reasons for partaking in such events would be to ‘exchange knowledge’, ‘build networks’ and ‘generate ideas’ (Bathelt et al., 2004: 1). Exhibition and events are chiefly important to Bathelt and his colleagues because of their capacity to generate knowledge exchanges that could have long-term international partnerships as a result; they refer to the partnerships that are enabled by the fair as ‘trans-local business relations’ (Bathelt et al., 2004: 18). When South African artist Karel Nel²⁴, quoted before, said the Joburg Art Fair presented a chance for the South African art market to be part

²⁴ Interview, 11 March 2008, Karel Nel, Practicing South African artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

of a global network, this perhaps was what he meant – the meeting, doing business and planning of future projects that happens in the short, animated space of a three-day fair.

According to James Goodwin's *Art Markets and Art Fairs* (2007), art fairs 'are the central plank in the symbiotic (sometimes antagonistic) relationship between artists, dealers, auctions houses, academics, critics, museums curators and buyers' (Goodwin, 2007: 3). His research showed that the majority of art fairs were established in the past twenty-five years, with the emerging markets joining in by the turn of the millennium (Goodwin, 2007: 6–7). He cites as the major art fairs in terms of press coverage received, TEFAF in Maastricht, Art Basel Miami Beach in Miami and Frieze in London. According to Goodwin, exhibitors at Art Basel reportedly generate between 30% and 40% of annual turnover at the fair. TEFAF is a ten-day fair where over 30,000 art pieces are exhibited; with a value of \$2 billion; from 218 dealers; from 15 countries; attracting 84,000 visitors (Goodwin, 2007: 7–8). In light of these numbers, one can understand the desperation by galleries to be represented at these events, should they be able to afford it. A Canadian report referenced by Burt (2000) on how to increase the art market in Canada for local galleries stresses the importance for galleries to participate in the international art fairs: 'Participation and exhibiting in international art fairs based in New York is a wonderful way to increase revenue, clientele and exposure for gallery artists. Curators, critics, collectors, dealers and other galleries are connected to the art fair scene as art fairs are a one-stop shopping centre of what is current and new in the art world'.

What the above points to is the ability of the trade fair, generally, to bring *places* closer together. It has allowed smaller players from far-away places in an industry to connect to the centre: a small company can take a stand at a large international trade fair and so be 'seen'. These qualities of the art fair model resonate with the experiences of art critics and gallerists interviewed for this study. Cape Town gallerist, Michael Stevenson,²⁵ frequents, amongst others, the Armory Show in New York, Artco in Spain and Fiac in Paris. For him art fairs 'are a sitting duck for success', since 'there is just now so much out there, that to cover the ground, the art fair is just heaven-sent'. He described the effects that art fairs have had on 'place' as 'the whole notion of "international" being continually teased out' and expanded as follows:

²⁵ Interview, 31 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, director and owner of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

What's happened in the art world is that there are no longer two or three primary places of production – New York, London, Paris, Berlin, or whatever, there are lots of places where amazing art is being made. For example, Kentridge can stay in Johannesburg and sustain a really incredible career. And there are amazing galleries in Lisbon and in Athens and all places where previously everything gravitated, filtered and distilled through New York, London

He commented that apart from allowing smaller galleries from 'smaller' places to be seen on a world stage, it is no longer necessary for a gallery outside of the large metropolises of the world, wanting an international outlet, to open a branch of their business in, for example, London and New York, since the fair provides international exposure.

Karel Ankerman²⁶ travelled to the first Joburg Art Fair as one of sixteen fairs that he reviews annually for the Financial Times in Holland. He made a similar point to that of Stevenson when he said, 'art fairs have become important for cities which used to be very isolated'. In Ankerman's opinion, art fairs, over the past five years 'have taken over from biennales'. Before, if one wanted to be in touch with art world trends, the big biennales, like that held in Venice, would be the place to find such information. This, he believes, has to do with the fact that contemporary art has become of interest to collectors, who want to buy work. Generally, work on a biennale is not for sale, and as he explained 'they (collectors) want to buy, they don't want to look'. These collectors are now in a position to 'influence trends' in both art making and art buying, whereas before, 'a small group of guys sitting in the North' used to 'decide what the price of contemporary art was going to be'.

Following then from Handelsman's insistence on understanding the 'form' or 'design' of the event (Handelman, 1998: 18, 19), a couple of key features can be identified that designate the art fair. First of these is the fact that the trade fair format has been standardised for optimum results with minor adjustments for the specific 'trade' in question. As a model, it, therefore, creates the effect of homogenising across industries, by fabricating a kind of mini-city inside the 'vessel' that is the non-place of an exhibition or convention centre. Within this form it is, at once, easily slotted into what has become an 'everyday', routine, pastime over weekends, while at the same time being highly

²⁶ Interview, 14 March 2008, Karel Ankerman, Financial Times Holland.

exceptional and energised. Its exceptional qualities are first the fact of the contraction of time, that is, sales and meetings escalate over a three-day period, making possible in those three days what would probably take a year or more to achieve without this 'coming together'; and, second, the artificiality of the situation, where walls are built as if to simulate retail outlets, complete with professionally done signage and often carpeting, so as to create, for those three days, the effect of permanency and stability. When Handelman speaks of the 'order' that 'events' attempt to create in the social structure, the version of order that can be read off the trade fair is one of both an exceptionally high degree of rigidity and regulation, *together with* a radical flexibility, in as far as the entire exhibition has to be 'pulled up and torn down' in a restricted amount of time and be able to fit into diverse contexts – in this, resembling a theatre production.

The 'logic of composition' of an art fair, in Handelman's terms, is a form that is at once about place in that it enabled an exponential increase in places that are of importance to a sector such as the arts in the experience of Stevenson and Ankerman, but at the same time, through the convention/exhibition format, negates, or un-does place, by taking place in a non-place. Following from this, the Joburg Art Fair could be understood as engaged in making an event that is un-exceptional and 'everyday', in doing so, as mentioned elsewhere in this study, working against a South African exceptionalism that has reigned for the past decade, while also attempting to put Johannesburg 'on the map' of world art fairs. The trade fair, and in a similar manner the art fair, then, is a container that encapsulates and tames, for a moment, an unruly and idiosyncratic industry. Outside, the convention centre resembles any of its international counterparts through its neutrality and inter-changeability; inside it is individuated and highly specific. The event can then be read to be pivoting on the meeting point between, or convergence of, the banal and the exceptional; the local and the international; the rigid and the flexible.

These 'traits' of the trade fair generally and the art fair specifically forms the background to the walk-through of the Joburg Art Fair presented in Chapter One. In Chapters Two and Three, the critical term deployed to build on the analysis of the 'event', is that of 'publics'. 'Publics' is a term that has been used frequently up to now, and one which is used fairly indiscriminately to connote different things in everyday life. Michael Warner attributes this general usage of the term to the fact that, first, we have an 'intuitive' sense of what the public is (2005: 11), and second, everyone is 'potentially addressable in

impersonal forms' as part of the public (2005: 8). The understanding of this term that I would like to emphasise and work with in this study follows Warner's rejection of hard boundaries between the 'private' and the 'public' (2005: 45). 'Publics', therefore, do not necessarily signify Jürgen Habermas' sphere that operates in mediation between 'private' matters of domestic, personal or business life, and the more 'arbitrary' power exerted over citizens by the state (Kellner 2000: 3).²⁷ Warner's volume, *Publics and Counterpublics*, investigates ways in which texts and events call 'publics' into being, thereby rendering the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' loose and fluid (2005: 8). He believes that one can, by studying the 'private', learn more about the 'public' (2005: 5).

Earlier, I made the claim that contemporary art has never enjoyed the attention of such a growing 'public' and I argue here that the Joburg Art Fair specifically illustrates this phenomenon in the local context. The concept 'publics' is meant to denote at least three different ways of understanding the general concepts of audience or group, but does not necessarily speak of a relationship to the state in the ways that 'public broadcast' or 'public liability' do (See Higgins, 2008). The first set of connotations denotes a space between the strictly private and the state. However, this understanding departs from Jürgen Habermas' formulation of the 'public sphere', as it references a space that is constructed so as to speak back to the state, thereby constituting and concerned with 'public opinion' (Habermas *et al.*, 1974: 49). Rather, 'publics' in this sense operate simply as that which is shared amongst a group in the public realm. The second connotation has to do specifically with 'identification' or shared interests and so takes the concept beyond a literal, countable number of people that might go to an event, to areas of 'speculative publics' and 'imaginary publics', as well as publics that share in the experience without being present together, as in the example of book readers or internet bloggers. The third connotation is suspended in a temporality where layers of publics, some regimented and some fluid with different degrees of access and power, are thrown into relief by a text or event to show society as at once mobile and stratified.

²⁷ The ideal of the 'public sphere' for Habermas was attained around 1700 in European salons and coffee houses. His concern with this version of the public sphere as 'an ideal' was exactly its 'transformation' from what he perceived as a space of 'rational debate' and 'open discussion of all issues of general concern' (Kellner 2000: 3) to one that is dominated by large corporations and the media. In this regard, Habermas' social writings dovetailed with concerns expressed by Adorno (1991) in *The Culture Industry* where in 'welfare state capitalism and mass democracy' public space had been turned into 'manipulative consumption and passivity' (4).

In order to suggest something of the temporality embedded within the concept of publics I would like to evoke Raymond Williams from a different context. Williams (1977) uses the terms 'dominant, residual and emergent' to theorise culture as composed of dynamic 'interrelation' horizontally between times and 'regimes' as much as moving along a vertical axis of 'variable processes' (119). I would like to apply these terms, which he uses to describe 'culture' here to publics to suggest a temporality at work. At the time of writing, Williams was attempting to bring his Marxist training and past work in line with new ways that he had come to see culture and cultural formation. Accordingly, the terms have powerful Marxist implications, and so share a lens with much humanities work that has been done on the South African context. I also specifically evoke the Marxist terminology to suggest that power structures are still very much embedded within contemporary South Africa even while the society is undergoing structural change.

The notion of the 'residual', he explains 'has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present' (122). Fine art, and the buying of art, has not traditionally in South Africa been associated with a cutting edge or new-ness. Chapter Six explains that the gallery system for contemporary art in this country, in its current form, is virtually brand new. Thus here, more so than other parts of the world, an interest in buying art has drawn a public that displays, what might be called, 'traditional' values. This is a public that makes up to 80% of the local auction house buying market. Similarly, the decision-making levels of the South African corporate system, still now in the midst of racial transformation, has for a long time been occupied by members of an elite, either Jewish, (white) Afrikaans or Anglo Saxon, which now remain within these institutions as residual of that time. These are two, sometimes overlapping, publics that come to the art event either through an interest in art or through corporate connections. While both these publics are primarily conservative in taste, they remain vital to the existence of the Fair and are made to feel as if they belong there. It illustrates for me a 'residual' temporality at play within this public specific to the local context.

The dominant culture, within the Marxist paradigm, denotes the 'popular', 'industries of culture' and generally shared capitalist values. The Art Fair, I would argue lies on the periphery of such a concept as it does speak the language of the dominant public through what Williams would call the 'practical' (151) (as opposed to the 'magical' of the

aesthetic) under which he would count consumption. Needless to say the 'dominant' is a large and variegated field of culture which might incorporate, depending on relationality, interior decorators, Sunday painters, school teachers and the vast majority of the corporate sector. The Fair aimed to speak to such an audience, yet art fairs will probably never be very high on the list of things to do for a generally conceived 'dominant' public. What is of more significance to this study is how he positions the 'emergent'. The emergent, he explains, in Marxist theory denotes a new class coming into existence accompanied by new cultural formations (124). The process of 'emergence' is both one of posing an alternative and opposition to the dominant and the residual, but immediately sets in place that of incorporation, as elements of the emergent become the dominant and eventually the residual.

South Africa, I argue in Chapter Two, is in the midst of a transformation that can certainly be described as an 'emergence' of a new class and social structure and this affects cultural formations as well as cultural production, which I look at in Part Three of this study. When the discussion turns to that of publics later on in this section of the study, this temporality should be kept in mind as a way of understanding the South African public sphere.

PART 1

Chapter 1. The Public Event: The Joburg Art Fair Experience

The three-day events of the Joburg Art Fairs in March 2008 and April 2009 are nodal points from which this study expands in analysing a time and a space; upon which it builds; and through which it reads elements of the contemporary moment. The analyses offered in this study are, thus, crucially anchored inside the events themselves.

Accordingly it is necessary to recreate the Joburg Art Fair experience in narrative form and demonstrate the way in which the Art Fair may be seen as a neatly packaged and highly simplified way of looking at a larger, much more idiosyncratic and disorganised industry and landscape of cultural production. The manner in which the Joburg Art Fair experience is rendered in the study, is by way of a 'tour' of the Fair that describes elements of what one might have seen, alongside with contextualising comments. Reading through this chapter requires a stamina that almost matches a physical walk-through; yet I believe it is likely to be rewarding. For it is in this narrative that one encounters not only the Fair, but also meets the gallerists and other personalities from the 'art world'. I elaborate on how they see their own roles, as well as the way they see the market, their artists and their art buyers. I also focus on the personas that recur in other parts of the study, but attempt to describe the entire Fair as a visitor might have experienced it. The specific art works that I mention and describe, I either return to later in the study to discuss in more detail, or mention here as connected to particularly significant artists or buyers discussed elsewhere.

Useful as model for mentally recreating physical spaces, is Certeau's (1984) analyses of descriptions by individuals of the interiors of their New York apartments in the work of Linde and Labov. For him, there are structural differences between ways of describing that point to 'symbolic and anthropological languages'. He is specifically concerned with the differences between the 'tour' and the 'map' (119). The tour, or itinerary, he defines as a 'discursive series of operations', whereas the map is 'a place projection totalizing observations' (119). He is, thus, suggesting that when attempting to 'recreate' a space for

another person who has not seen it, one could either draw a schematic outline of the various spaces and how they relate, with perhaps headings that signify their functions, *or*, one could describe, in more narrative form a walk through along the lines of, ‘after turning into the corridor, the bathroom with the pink towels will be on your right’, et cetera. The different approaches to space, then, denote different analytical operations.

The Art Fair was structured around a grid-like map, a blue print of the floor plan, which functioned as mimetic for the art world that the Fair represented. It was a flat surface onto which galleries were placed relationally that aimed to be ‘totalising’ in the manner observed by Certeau. This map worked well as an overview and to orientate oneself as a person in a space. With the map in hand though, a deepened understanding could be obtained by going on a ‘guided tour’ of the galleries represented by the abstract booth numbers, and an even more profound knowledge could be gained from spending time in the art world and speaking to the people who enlivened those booth numbers. The process of going from map to tour is, thus, one of intense layering of ‘fact’, observation, history and personal encounter. Much like the residents of the New York apartments mentioned by Certeau, some of the information given on the tour here is structural, and tells of where galleries were positioned on the map, but the bulk of it is either experiential or draws from the information gained in the field. To this end, the tour is clearly directed to move around the entire floor of the first Art Fair as a determined visitor might have done, to learn, primarily, about ‘positioning’ of people and institutions both on the map and in the historical trajectory that is the art landscape in question. This information should form the backing board onto and into which the rest of the analyses in this study is built and layered.

At the Joburg Art Fair

If, as a visitor, you would have arrived at the first Joburg Art Fair, the Friday after the opening night in March 2008, you would have found your way to the ‘basement’ floor of the Sandton Convention Centre in the central business district of Sandton. It might well have been your first visit to the Convention Centre,²⁸ as it is one of those post-apartheid

²⁸ The Sandton Convention Centre came about to balance Tsogo Sun’s casino as part of its bid commitment to the Gauteng Gambling Board Tsogo Sun invested R400 million in the construction of a world-class convention centre in Sandton. As such the building arrived as part of the dealings and trades of the post-apartheid South Africa, and, of course, part of the changes that the landscape undertook to be

additions to the local landscape which only opened its large and ornate doors to the public in 2000, around the same time as two other 'international' convention/exhibition centres in the country; one in Durban and one in Cape Town. If this was not your first time, you would have remembered perhaps coming to the Sanlam Fashion Week on the entrance level; or the FNB Whiskey Live Festival; perhaps Rooms on View, the South African interior decorating show, JeweleX, the Antiques Fair or a number of mining, building or development-focused trade shows. You would have found parking in one of the many lots that subterraneously or via sky-bridge connect the Sandton City mall with Sandton Square and the Sandton Convention Centre, and either entered from the dark, lower-level parking lot beneath the exhibition halls, having to take stairs up to the 'basement floor', or from street level into the lofty, several-volumes-high foyer of the convention centre; if this had been your route you would have had to make your way pass a series of African artefacts and some artworks displayed along the marbled walls, to the extreme right-hand side of the building; down two sets of escalators to arrive at 'Exhibition Hall 2'.

Upon entering the 'hall' it might have seemed slightly gloomy, as you would have been under a mezzanine level first to purchase a ticket for R100. The Mezzanine flanked the one side of the Hall. You would have noticed that all the signage had been specially produced for the event in large scale. The logo in the entrance area announced 'Joburg Art Fair' in what might have seemed like an old version of a 'New Times Roman' font, black on white, connected to another logo that read 'First National Bank'. Behind the many ticket desks, lined up as you entered, hung a big 'Joburg Art Fair' banner with ticket prices and a standard disclaimer stating that should anything happen to you while looking at art, the organisers would not take responsibility. Once you had bought your

representative of the change. In fact, all three of South Africa's big conference facilities, in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, are post-apartheid phenomena. From the website: Situated at the heart of Sandton Central, the Sandton Convention Centre, which opened in 2000, is close to all the important financial and industrial concerns in the country. The centre boasts the latest state-of-the-art facilities with in-house technology partners offering infra-red simultaneous translation systems, ISDN, asynchronous digital subscriber lines (ADSL) and wireless Internet broadband connectivity (Wi-Fi) as well as satellite broadcasting and conferencing facilities. The 12-storey building has more than 22,000 sq.m of meeting, exhibition and special-event space. Multiple events can be staged simultaneously on four levels and up to 10,000 visitors can be accommodated at any one time. Room capacities range from a 10-seat function room to the Pavilion, which can cater for 4,500 cocktail guests. There are twenty-six escalators in the two escalator wells of the centre, so delegates can enter and exit the building quickly and efficiently. The Sandton Convention Centre is surrounded by nearly 11,000 parking bays, situated in three big parking arcades. The security system is such that the building can be evacuated in a matter of minutes, should the alarm system go off. (http://tsogosungaming.tsogosun.co.za/live/content.php?Item_ID=2611).

ticket you would have been ushered by security guards to the left where after walking for about five metres, you would have passed an information desk manned by young art students where you would perhaps have decided to purchase a catalogue for R200. Five paces later, the space would have suddenly opened up, as you came out from under the mezzanine level to a triple volume, brightly lit, almost factory-style space.

Adding to the sense of being in a factory would have been the exposed nature of services – lighting trusses and electricity overhead and the raw, polished concrete floor. Unlike, perhaps every single other trade show that you might have attended at the Sandton Convention Centre, you would not have been standing on squares of industrial carpeting, nor would you have been faced with what would be a very familiar, standard ‘shell scheme’ of walling, that bears the look of easy assembly. The walls in this space you would have noticed, were taller, much more sturdy looking and very white. If you had been reading the press material leading up to this event, you would have been told that these walls had been custom-designed and built for this event. The press might also have told you that this is standard for most art fairs – the exhibition shell-scheme structure cannot carry the weight of large art works – yet most art fairs use a dry-walling structure that is destroyed after each year’s event. These walls however, had been designed to be dismantlable, stored and re-used, for reasons of environmental concern, more so than cost. You would also have noticed wide corridors and a general feeling of spaciousness as you would now have been in a 5000 sq.m space – the size of a football field. You might have longed for the cozyness of the Antiques’ Fair, or perhaps that of ‘Winex’, while feeling exposed under the bright white light on cold concrete, but had you been to recently built museums around the world like the Tate Modern you would have recognised everything around you, from the big bright, clean signage of the Joburg Art Fair logo, to the concrete floor, white walls and exposed ‘services’, as the ingredients of a contemporary style.

Directly in front of you would have been an enormous black wall with mounted video monitors. After a quick panoramic glance from left to right, you would have noticed that the black wall was one of the four outside walls of a giant black room. If general visitor reaction is anything to go by, you would not have known what to make of the seven-screen display in front of you, on which black, impoverished-looking people were running away from burning shacks. Perhaps, like some members of the press you would

have assumed that this was the corporate sponsor's social responsibility message – as a South African you would be used to these images of the suffering of the poor, edited together to convey some message. If perhaps there were someone in the vicinity whom you could have accosted for some information, you would have been told that it was a video installation work by an ex-South African, Jerry Fox. Fox's father owned OK Bazaars and sold it during the days of apartheid after which he moved to London, where his son now makes BBC documentaries of famous artists. This then was his first attempt at video art based on the chance occurrence of having his camera equipment handy when a fire broke out amongst the informal housing in the Cape Town township of Kayalitsha on his last visit to his home country. Some of the screens portrayed the rebuilding of local schools in the days that followed, which he had paid for. He is an acquaintance of the Art Fair director. As the first art work one saw upon entering it was highly contextualising in as far as it followed the style of actual documentaries of South Africa, yet might well have been puzzling as the introduction to a contemporary art exhibition.

At this point you could have turned either left or right – you would have been standing at a T-junction. Let's assume you would have turned right first to make your way around the far boundary walls of the exhibition space. You would have encountered, first, stand number nineteen belonging to Monna Makoena, of Gallery Momo. Momo occupied a large space of 90 sq.m (most of the booths were far larger than those one might find in other international art fairs). It was clean and reminiscent of this gallery's carefully renovated house-turned-gallery space in Johannesburg's suburb of Parkhurst where they have been operating from since 2003. Amongst the artworks were Danish and mid-twentieth century furniture that added to the 'designed' aspect of the gallery. Mokoena, one would have noticed, fitted into the space as if himself a design element. With his tall slim frame, pointy shoes and immaculate contemporary dress sense, many have commented, he has added more style to the local industry than anyone else had managed for some time.

Apart from running the gallery, Mokoena²⁹ is active in urban regeneration projects that include public art and art performances as well as engaging in a dynamic residency programme at his gallery for visitors from abroad. His gallery represents a spectrum of

²⁹ Interview, 24 April 2008, Monna, Mokoena, Owner and director of Gallery Momo, Johannesburg.

artists from young, new-comers, to older established names of great importance to local art history. In our interview, Mokoena expressed passionately the need for a reform within institutions and academies that teach art to a new generation. He referred to 'dead woods' who have had their positions 'forever' who are not committed to redesigning curricula to fit better with the post-apartheid. He was one of the few gallerists that I managed to interview before the first Art Fair. At that time, he described the Fair as 'something positive' that South Africans could go to – 'people are depressed at the moment and are looking for positive things', he said.

On the walls of his booth were art works by Sharlene Khan and Johannes Phokela, amongst others. Both of these artists insert themselves into the post-colonial paradigm in ways that are unique yet forceful. Kahn's³⁰ work on the Fair was of Johannesburg street vendors. According to her, her gallerist did not consult her as to what she would like to display, and that she would probably have chosen different works had she been given a choice. For her, the Art Fair is an international showcase, 'and you never know what might come of it – you should always show only your best work'. Apart from stating how seriously many artists regard the Art Fair as platform, this comment accurately captures one of the fundamental organising principles of an Art Fair. Art Fairs are composed of galleries, not of artists, and galleries operate completely independently of the Fair organisers in constructing their spaces. For the most part, galleries make decisions as to whose works to bring to the Fair; which works to bring; and how to present it. Many galleries expressed in our discussions that this was especially hard and often emotionally taxing for the artist/gallery relationship.

Phokela works from London. His works are mostly oils on canvas depicting reworked Flemish oil paintings to defamiliarise the scene for his viewer. In front of these works were two sculptures that evoked blown-up versions of Japanese Manga figurines, by Theresa-Anne Mackintosh. These added a playful, seemingly commercial slant to the more politically oriented work of Kahn, Phokela, and amongst them, the black and white photographs of Santu Mofokeng and Andrew Tshabangu. Both of the latter artists' work on display there took as subject matter the streets of a city populated with black, working-class citizens. The work in this booth would have left you with a strong sense of

³⁰ Interview, 11 March 2008, Sharlene Khan, practicing South African artist.

being in South Africa and in the realm of the political, especially should you have recognised the works by Dumile Feni, much of which the family of the artist consigned to Mokoena to sell after his death.

Moving on, next door, you would have encountered the closed-off booth of the Bell-Roberts Gallery from Cape Town. You might note that all the artists represented were Cape Town-based and reading the name tags you might have been struck that in comparison to Momo where you had just been, the names were all those of white artists. This booth was cluttered with lots of small works, some multiples, as well as some ceramic works. A table at the centre of the booth displayed many brochures that would have given an indication that the other leg of this business is publishing. The owners of the Bell-Roberts gallery are behind the only local arts magazine, *Art South Africa* as well as other contemporary periodicals such as *Itch*, which focuses on photography. This gallery barely made it to the second art fair amongst rumours of bankruptcy and looming court cases from their artists. They were snuck into a small space at the last minute, yet, right after the 2009 Fair, in the midst of the global financial recession, declared bankruptcy and closed the gallery-leg of the business.

In a very small space of 25 sq.m to the right, in booth number sixteen, you would have found Galerie Ames d'Afrique from Strasbourg. The art in this booth was all very brightly coloured – it had an 'African look' about it as one of the staff members explained to me in a mixture of broken English and French. It would have been noticeable that presentation quality of this work was far inferior to the galleries that flanked booth 16 on either side, yet on closer inspection, the strange bricolage of worked and re-worked surfaces, metal, nails, paper, fabric and drawing could have reminded one of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat or even Robert Rauschenberg. Gallery-owner Jeanne Ngo-Njami-Auscher and her staff described the Fair as a wonderful way of meeting people and feeling part of the African contemporary.

Then you would have arrived at a booth that spanned three stalls, from numbers thirteen to fifteen, which would have taken you to the far left side of Hall 2 and around the far back corner. The Goodman Gallery booth occupied 200 sq.m, all of which were enclosed to the corridor, forcing the visitor to enter on the one side of the booth, to move all the way through, and exit on the other side. Inside this space were works by

older artists, like Norman Catherine, alongside new ones like the Essop brothers – a Cape Town team of twin brothers making international waves with digitally altered photographic work into which they insert their own bodies in multiple. Consulting the catalogue for some context, you would have noticed that the section for the Goodman Gallery deviated from a clear formula applied to all the other galleries that consist of images with captions together with a gallery logo, address and contact details. The Goodman pages read as a narrative and told the story of the gallery over the past four decades through pictures, starting with a black and white photograph of a younger Linda Givon, gallery owner. Unlike the other gallery spreads, each artwork in the subsequent pages was accompanied by a photograph of the artist. One might have read this as a nostalgic ‘looking back’ over the years of the gallery under the reign of Givon, as she was at the time on the brink of handing the entire empire over (selling) to a much younger art enthusiast, Liza Essers.

Linda Givon³¹ had been attending international art fairs like Basel in Switzerland since the ‘80s, at which time, she explained, in order to contravene the international sanctions against South Africa, she had to be ‘cleansed’ by the ANC cultural desk. Only then was she allowed to take cultural products outside of the country. Givon is a notoriously difficult character, a fact often mentioned by members of the art community and especially other gallerists. Her gallery assistant, Kirsty Wesson’s³² description of her long-time boss and mentor below is cautious yet displays a high level of respect. I position it here to introduce this formidable figure in the local art landscape from an insider’s perspective:

You know I think she has always been someone who has had such a passion, she has never had to work because she needed to make money to put bread on the table, so in a way it has always been an absolute passion and an absolute love for her. So she has always been willing to put literally heart and soul in for any artist, for any project, you know for her gallery, and really just put herself on the line a lot of the times. And she has been a bit aggressive in some ways, but you know, like any big museum or gallery overseas, and it is a passion, she really kind of stands up for what she believes in. She was the only person who was showing any black artists in the ‘60s, she was arrested by the security police and did all sorts of things. And I mean if it wasn’t for her, the art world, or the landscape could be

³¹ Interview, 25 November 2008, Linda Givon, Former owner and director of Goodman Gallery.

³² Interview, 16 August 2008, Kirsty Wesson, assistant curator at Goodman Gallery Johannesburg.

very different. I really think it would have been, because she started in mid-1960s when she opened her gallery in Hyde Square and it was like a shoebox, and she did a lot of work with the Picasso Foundation, and the international market. There was a very specific group of clients then who would buy the international work, and that helped her make her gallery. And from that she was able to really push the artists that weren't being exposed and weren't allowed to be exposed for political reasons. She has done amazing things for Mikhael (Subotzky) and with Francis (Goodman) and with Lolo (Veleko), she kind of has the knack of chatting with someone when they are still quite young and helping them to grow. And yes, being aggressive in certain instances and quite difficult to have to deal with for a lot of people but, on the other hand, very generous and very giving. She kind of totally believed in what she did. But (now that she is leaving) at least she does not have the stress and strain of the business hanging over you, at 73 you want to enjoy, you know, your grand kids, she has a beautiful house down in Cape Town

Local artist Penny Siopis³³ commented in our interview that for a long time in South Africa, 'making it' as an artist meant showing with the Goodman Gallery. Their Johannesburg gallery is situated on a busy traffic intersection onto which, through panoramic display windows, they often showcase large and irreverent art works. Their location has become the anchor of an 'art strip' of recent times as more and more smaller galleries have clustered around them. Gallerist Warren Siebrits³⁴ explained 'the big nucleus is still the Goodman, that is the mothership in a way'.

Hung on the outside wall of this large booth, facing the corridor, were signature works by three of South Africa's most successful and influential artists: a large William Kentridge tapestry; an equally large Sam Nhlengethwa 'Jazz' diptych and a David Goldblatt South African landscape photograph – for any passerby, these works would have announced, not only the Goodman Gallery's muscle in the art world, but the top of South African art in local and international terms. While looking at these works, you might have overheard, as I had, that the Kentridge and Nhlengethwa pieces were sold on the opening night of the fair, for just under R500,000 each.

The booth to the immediate right of the Goodman Gallery had also closed itself off to the corridor, hanging some works on the 'outside' and forcing the visitor to 'enter' their

³³ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African Artist and Professor at the Wits School of Arts.

³⁴ Interview, 25 March 2009, Warren Siebrits, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary, Johannesburg, co-owner and director.

booth to view the rest. This was the booth of Rooke Gallery, a relative newcomer to the local art scene. Rooke Gallery, under the leadership of digital advertising man Gavin Rooke³⁵, at the time only worked with three, young, white, male artists and the wall-space in the booth had been divided accordingly. one for each of them. The manner of display was playful and in heavy contrast to the symmetrical, evenly-spaced hanging style of Gallery Momo and the Goodman Gallery. The choices made by Rooke in his gallery booth, carefully represented his meticulously thought out gallery strategy and business plan. In our interview, he used terms like 'from a market point of view' and 'there were a lot of inefficiencies in the market', betraying his day-job of running his internet advertising agency, 'Trigger'. Before embarking on his gallery enterprise in 2006, he carefully studied the local and international art gallery models and crafted one that he is convinced is the most sustainable in the long run. His reel of opinions was delivered without pause and resists easy paraphrasing, but is helpful here for sketching a view of the market:

My view is that there is a very interesting continuum to the art market: on the far left hand side there is shopping mall art, and on the very far right hand side you've got that 000.1% of highly successful galleries. And those guys are making good money and these guys are making good money. And the guys in between, are haemorrhaging, it is just my view, that it is just a very difficult market to be in. You don't want to be selling mediocre art to a mediocre audience you want to be selling either crap art to anybody who gets to put it into their new Lonehill, Fourways place and that is fine there is nothing wrong with that. Or you need to be at a kind of white cube level.

A 'classic' gallery in Rooke's opinions has to buy products that it can sell to make a margin on expenses that include 'a person who is a curator; a logistics management person, someone who manages the finances, probably outsourced, a bit of rent'. In order to make this margin, one needs a 'fairly rigorous schedule' of keeping the gallery full with 'fresh work on the walls' which are 'flipped over' to show new and fresher works. This does not equate, in the eyes of Rooke, to 'dedication to one's gallery' by artists: 'They will come to you if they can see that there is a space where they can get a foot in the door. And they might even come back to you if they have had some success'. This model is, however, geared towards covering costs, and doing whatever it takes to walk home with a 50%

³⁵ Interview, 18 September 2008, Gavin Rooke, Part-owner and director of Rooke Gallery, Johannesburg.

commission on sales. Says Rooke: 'You are not building long-term value into those artists; that is not your objective. Your objective is to get as many of those artists through. And the only thing that stops you from doing more is how many artists you can actually squeeze through a space in a certain amount of time'. His model, in apparent contrast to this one, comprises of collecting the 'world's best artists, and I mean that, it has to be the world's best artists but no one knows it yet', years of dedicated nurturing to 'give them a foundational platform through which the true skill that they have comes out and if you can do that and you can do that in a sustainable way, you will add long-term value'. In summary, he explained: 'I don't care about selling a print for R2500 and try to get 50 of them sold. I care about a guy who, when he or she comes here, the market will value R2500, and within four or five years that print will be worth R3500, R4500, R500,000. Because that is what he is worth. How I get to that point requires a different approach to just putting on a show every year'.

Rooke's model is to pay his three artists a 'retainer' type salary, which 'is at a risk obviously because it is set off against work that we hope he will sell, but it is at my risk'. This model could enable his artists to focus purely on producing art, rather than 'work by day in an agency flipping out designs and then by night make some 'majorly' conceptual work'. Michael Stevenson has a similar financial relation with his artists. Most other galleries pay the artists as sales occur.

Back in the Rooke booth at the Fair, had you entered, right in front of you, you would have seen the Zander Blom wall. It consisted of black and white patterned shapes stuck directly onto the wall and some of Blom's abstract, shape-oriented photographs. On the left side wall were the photographs of Liam Lynch displaying his by now signature subject matter of white rock bands performing to punk-looking youngsters. To the right and on the wall that would have been behind you, you would have noticed Rooke's trophy pieces for this particular fair: large, thickly painted oils reminiscent of renaissance landscapes with antiquated rulers stuck directly onto the canvas. These had a dreamy quality to them and even if you had recognised some of the landscape places as the 'farm you grew up on in the Free State' as many visitors apparently did, you would have been mistaken; these were landscapes of his imagination. Olaf Bisschoff³⁶ is interested in the

³⁶ Interview, 18 September 2008, Olaf Bisschoff, practicing South African artist.

fine line between recognition and the completely imaginary, combined with what he terms the 'background' to renaissance paintings – 'not the Mona Lisa herself, but what is going on behind her'. These painting were enormously popular at this Art Fair.

Rooke admitted to having chosen his three artists for the audiences, or perhaps more accurately the 'markets' they would attract and this was a drama constantly at play within his 30 sq.m booth: Zander Blom, he believes, is highly conceptual, therefore, speaking to international curators and is a very 'tough sell in this country'; 'Liam's market is a very important market, because, it creates a hype, it creates a knowledge of the gallery to a very certain type of market, which would be the 'influencers'. And lastly, 'Olaf, old ladies fall in love with his work, corporate art buyers can't get enough of his work. And then at the same time, I have very, very discerning buyers who are very fond of him' – 'a painterly audience'. This kind of work, Rooke believes is perfect for the kind of fair that the Joburg Art Fair embodies – a classic fair for a classic audience. Olaf Bisschoff, in fact, was one of the success stories of the fair, selling all his paintings and walking away with orders for more. Rumour circulated after the event amongst the young artists, that Bisschoff sold so well at the Joburg Art Fair, he was able to build himself a house. I found out when I drove out to the far North of Gauteng to Hartebeespoortdam to interview him, Bisschoff lived with his parents and had built himself a one-car garage-sized brick structure in which he now lives and works on their property. His introduction to Gavin Rooke was at one of the corporate art prizes which he had won twice before without anything 'coming of it' – for him, Gavin Rooke and the Rooke Gallery in an industrial side of Johannesburg's Newtown, was a 'life saver'.

The husband and wife team from Gallery Art On Paper next door, Alet Vorster³⁷ and Wilhelm van Rensburg, have very different reasons for being in the art world from those of Gavin Rooke. Vorster lacks Rooke's marketing talk and believes the 'art audience', as far as she experiences it at her Johannesburg gallery, has no interest in 'investment' and is certainly far removed from an 'interior decorating' crowd, for them 'art is a matter of life or death' – they simply cannot live without art and that is what keeps them coming to the gallery and turns them into loyal buyers. Colin Richards³⁸, an artist, curator and academic and one of the respondents to this study, exhibits with Alet Vorster; he believes there

³⁷ Interview, 27 March 2008, Alet Vorster, owner and director Gallery Art On Paper.

³⁸ Interview, 15 August 2008, Colin Richards, Practicing South African artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

exists an affinity between them from a shared background on Johannesburg's Westrand, Krugersdorp – a mining town. Both of them spoke to me of art's ability to bring a sense of creativity back to mundane lives, which Richard articulated in relation to Marx's notion of 'alienation'. Vorster explained how initially she was incredibly anxious about what she imagined would be an aggressive, competitive environment amongst galleries at the Art Fair, at odds with her 'shy' and 'private' nature, yet was very surprised to find it 'friendly' and 'positive'. For Vorster, who specialises in hand-printed, limited edition artworks, drawing and some sculpture, her 50 sq.m space was a sizable financial burden. She surprised herself and many others, however, by selling far above expectations, running out of a book of invoices that she had prepared in advance for the Fair. Her works were priced from as low as R2000 and so catered for an entry-market, or first-time buyers. However, the more established artists such as Robert Hodgins and Colin Richards demanded prices that might have been out of the range of that sector of the market. This booth was often described as more quiet, introspective and contemplative. The works were small to medium-sized, professionally framed and neatly hung at rhythmic intervals along the back walls of the booth.

Moving along the far back wall of the exhibition space, you would have arrived at KZNSA Gallery. This was the only local gallery not from Johannesburg or Cape Town, as the name suggests, it is located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), in the city of Durban.³⁹ This space might have struck one as slightly crowded yet housing generally pleasing and benign, saleable works. In contrast, the booth next door, that of German gallerist Peter Herrman, proved controversial and many survey respondents spontaneously singled this space out as offensive to Christians, Muslims and viewers generally sensitive to sexually explicit material. Upon coming round the corner from KZNSA, you were confronted by a large, 150 x 200 cm oil on canvas depiction of two figures forming a diagonal line across the canvas on an intensely red background; floating

³⁹ This is a hybrid space between that of museum and experimental, yet commercial gallery – it is member-run as are many art museums, yet lately have focused on showing young artists. Also a small booth of 30 sq.m, this Durban-based gallery chose to show mid-career artists like Andrew Verster and Andries Botha, both of whom have well-established, local followings and so managed to sell very well at this Fair. A visitor might be struck by the focus on hand craft, similar to that found in Gallery Art on Paper, but here, much larger, bolder colours and incorporating the oil on canvas works by another local mid-career artist, Wayne Barker. Barker is notorious for behaving outrageously at public openings, yet has been working systematically for decades and have works represented in all large corporate art collections in the country. For the Art Fair he unveiled a new series of carefully crafted oil paintings of female nudes which where, apparently incredibly well received by the Art Fair public.

in this red space in the sexual act. This was by Louzla Darabi, who has the following to say about this particular work:

That work, painted in the year 2003, belongs to a series of paintings, drawings and poems through which I tried to deal with the world of spirituality in an unconventional way, ... a strong intimate intuition which was reinforced by examining thoroughly my cultural roots, namely, a Northern African and therefore Muslim background, the story of my own life, but also my reading and knowledge. If a fragment of the Koran can be read across the portrait of a nude woman enjoying the intense pleasure afforded to her by a man's love, it is obviously not pure coincidence. It can be read as an answer to the hypocrisy of Muslim culture with regards to sexuality and above all woman's sexuality.⁴⁰

The commentary and conceptual framing of this piece represents much of what artists whose work Pieter Hermann brought to the first Art Fair were interested in exploring. Next to Darabi's⁴¹ work was a similarly sized, much more roughly depicted Christ-figure hanging from a cross with syringes and pharmaceutical boxes arranged onto and around the figure. Gallerie Peter Herrmann displayed an attraction to 'social issues' of exploitation, religion, and sexuality. It was the only space in which reference was made to the international politics of Osama Bin-Laden, George, W. Bush and Nicolas Sarkozy – each in its own heavily satirised, mixed-media, portrait. I found Herrman's space to be a counterpoint to many other gallery spaces in that it brought an interest in international

⁴⁰ http://galerie-herrmann.com/arts/darabi/Answers_Louzla_Darabi.htm

⁴¹ Another one of Darabi's submitted by Gallerie Peter Herrmann for a marketing campaign ran by the organisers leading up to the Fair caused momentary panic for Artlogic and the sponsor. The 'postcard campaign' was collaboration with Vida e café coffee shops in Johannesburg. Artlogic requested each gallery to submit two images which they would print on postcards with Joburg Art Fair branding together with the name of gallery logo and caption for the work on the back of the postcard, as one of their marketing campaigns leading up to the fair. These were distributed in Vida coffee shops and were handed out as flyers. Artlogic did not censor images or make suggestions to galleries which images might be suitable. When a letter arrived from the Council of Muslim Theologians, also sent to FNB, and Artlogic's press office in Berlin, they suddenly took note of the fact that Peter Herrmann had submitted an image entitled *Les 99 noms d'Allah* (2004), an oil on canvas work by Louzla Darabi. The letter read as follows: 'We are in possession of a postcard announcing a forthcoming Art Fair to be held at Sandton Convention Centre from 13 to 16 March 2008. Of concern to us has been the artwork which has been used on the said postcard which depicts an image of a woman superimposed on an oil canvas by Louzla Darabi entitled *Les 99 noms d'Allah*. Please note that the Names of the Almighty as on the canvas are His attributes which are sacred to Muslims. The handling of any media which carries the Names of Allah and His attributes has to be according to the respect Muslims have for any sacred text. Furthermore, Islamic teachings of modesty detest the use of women as objects of publicity. It follows then that we are alarmed at this postcard whose creativity in design, we believe, has been conceived in unpleasant taste. At the least, we ask you to stop printing and withdraw these postcards from further circulation. Please also note that whenever consulted, as a Council of Muslim Theologians, we would be in a position to advice on appropriateness of the use of the symbols of Islam such as the names of the Almighty on the canvas.' Artlogic replied saying, while they do not have jurisdiction over which art works are allowed to be submitted by galleries for marketing purposes they would remove this postcard from circulation 'with immediate effect'.

politics strangely absent from most South African and other African artists' work at the Fair.

Regardless of this in-your-face nature of Herrmann's artists, none of the press seemed to find this subject matter newsworthy. It was the booth to the right of Herrmann that drew the attention of all the arts-oriented writers. Indeed, this space was so arranged to stop a passer-by in his or her tracks by being radically 'other' to what one would have seen emerging as a pattern of artworks carefully arranged on the walls of the booth with small name tags somewhere near to each work. Here the wall itself had been covered with imagery making it hard to identify 'single' art works, where they started and stopped, or fitting into genres such as 'photography', 'painting', 'drawing' or 'sculpture'. The booth was divided into two halves. On the left side, Julia Rosa Clark, a Cape Town-based artist had done an installation work consisting of pieces of newspaper clippings covering the wall, masking-tape patterns covering the floor, connected to photographs on the wall and more photographs amongst packing boxes on the floor. Clark has exhibited similar installations at other venues that speak of the opulence of consumer culture. On the other side of the space were three suspended fax machines hanging in mid air with reels of paper cascading from one to the other and then down to the floor, by another young Cape Town-based artist, Rowan Smith. Unlike other spaces where works were taken down and swapped either as they sold, or if they remained stubbornly unsold, Whatiftheworld had three exhibitions carefully planned, one for each day.

Some galleries are built around the personas of the gallery directors or curators. Whatiftheworld is such a space, as are the local examples of the Goodman Gallery, Warren Siebrits, Gallery MOMO and the Michael Stevenson Gallery. Front men to Whatiftheworld are 28-year-old Justin Rhodes⁴² and to a lesser extent his partner Cameron Munro. Rhodes' accent betrays his New York origins where he lived and did a university degree in international politics and business at Hunters University, a senior college of the City University of New York. Rhodes moved to South Africa in 2004 'for love'. Since then he and Munro had established a hub around the gallery attracting initially mostly students but by the second Art Fair was having conversations with much more established artists such as Bridget Baker to join his stable of artists. At the first Art Fair, Rhodes' ambition was to create a band of art buyers of the same age group as the artists that he showed. He expressed particular interest in the notion of a peer group

⁴² Interview, 5 April 2009, Justin Rhodes, Whatiftheworld Gallery, Cape Town, co-owner and director.

interested in each other because they speak 'the same language'. This remained one of his business strategies, yet by the second Art Fair, he came across as much more forceful in his ambitions to 'make a powerhouse' of his gallery business. He explained:

... we don't want to do this to fuck around. I always feel you go bigger or you go home. And that is what we decided after spending a year selling little original drawings for R500 we did a year of that and then said you know what, if we are going to do this let's up the game, let's make it serious ... we started out as being an affordable art gallery type of thing but then we really wanted to ... we did a year of that, we don't want to get pegged in, because if you are the affordable art gallery it means you can never sell anything above R2000 because that is where people put you. So we just decided very early on, if we are going to do this ... yes we may have started out by doing that, and yes I still think if you want to look at affordability you can walk into our booth and we probably have some of the most reasonably priced works on the whole fair that doesn't mean that that is where we want to position ourselves necessarily. It just means because we show younger artists they command lower prices and we are also very careful about that. I think that was a very important decision for us early on was to say right we want to take this to a high level and I am quite ambitious when it comes to that.

Rhodes has positioned the gallery 'as showing the next generation of artists' which resonates with the fact that he sees their enterprise as the 'next generation of gallery'. He assured me, however, that barriers to entry in the art market on the level that he aspires to, are very high:

No, it is insane and you know it is really expensive running a gallery and having people come and say what a fun job and what a nice idea, but you have no idea it is an insanely expensive operation. I think you will probably find that even someone like Gavin Rooke, I mean he owns an ad agency and funds the gallery through that, the gallery is a hobby for him. But when you start out you sort of have to have buckets of cash to throw at it, if you are going in on the market on a secondary level and you are selling Kentridge prints or whatever you maybe don't have to do that, but if you are starting off by selling young artists where you are maybe making 2 or 3 grand on a sale, it is nothing and we still have that, and it is cool, but then we have also worked it up to a point where we have bigger items and it has to be ... we always sort of said after 2 or 3 years the gallery has to be paying for itself

He and Munro also owns and runs a weekly food market which he said initially paid for the gallery expenses, yet now the gallery manages to exist on its own turnover.

In the Saturday version of the daily newspaper at the Art Fair, the *Daily Artheat*, one could read: 'I finally managed to speak to Justin and Cameron, the directors of Whatiftheworld late last night, after considerable interest in their artists, particularly Rowan Smith, and pretty good sales. In response to my question as to why take the risk of putting non-sellable work in their space, Justin replied 'Not everyone is only interested in money, Linda. We also like the art'.⁴³ One of their artists, Lizza Littlewort⁴⁴ explained that their strategy was to 'make people think about the art, rather than really try to make some money'. By the last day of the Fair, they admitted to the Fair director that they had sold between R230,000 and R300,000, worth of art and that they would definitely be interested in returning the following year.

Arriving now at the last booth against the back wall of the exhibition space, you would encounter another Cape Town-based gallery of long-standing reputé, the Joao Ferreira Gallery. A look at the map in your catalogue would have let you know that you were now roughly half way through the floor plan. Here order would have returned from the wild distractions of Whatiftheworld into an open space with large photographs and paintings that lined the three interior walls. The Joao Ferreira artists were all from Cape Town. To the far side were a group of small paintings, childhood scenes it would seem, of girls eating watermelons; groups of children huddled together, depicted in a realist way, but floating on flat surfaces of colour: pinks, lemon yellows and soft blues. Stephen Inng's monochrome prints of the objects of the everyday, seen alongside these psychologically loaded paintings, gave the impression of being absorbed in one's own life and memories. These works were singled out and described to me by one of the buyers I discuss in Chapter Eight, Alex Dodd. Perhaps it was this quality of interiority of the works, or perhaps something entirely different that resulted in Joao Ferreira Gallery being the only gallery not making a profit off the first Art Fair.

In the far right corner you would then have found the October Gallery. Directly in front as you entered was a mini lounge suite in dark wicker with beige cushioning, in front of which a coffee table, displaying a lot of brochures and books. This little scene, you might have noted, went surprisingly well with the geometric shapes and wooden, crafted

⁴³ Linda Stupart, 'Hold on to that, it will be worth something one day.' March 14, 2008, *Daily Artheat*.

⁴⁴ Interview, 19 November 2008, Lizza Littlewort, practicing South African artist and art cartoonist.

objects on display directly behind it and was, on the whole, extremely welcoming. Most South Africans however might well have been shocked at the very high prices in pounds. The October Gallery came to South Africa from London where they are situated in close proximity to the British Museum with whom they do a lot of work. Many of their artists are from the African continent and have had major shows at the British Museum and elsewhere. Displayed most prominently in their booth were two very large-scale works by Ghanaian artist, Owusu-Ankomah, measuring 180 by 220 cm each. At first the surface would seem to be have been made up of large black and white geometric patterning, carefully painted in oils and resembling ancient African symbol script or North African decorative arts. On prolonged inspection two figures emerged out of the patterning, themselves covered with patterns with only the break in the patterning delineating their forms. The catalogue explained these were: 'geographically and historically diverse visual references from Saharan rock painting and Italian Renaissance sculpture, to Ghanaian textile design, Chinese calligraphy and New York graffiti' (2008: 122a). These works were both sold on the opening night for just under half a million South African Rands: one to FirstRand CE, Paul Harris, for his private collection, and one to his bank's corporate buyer, Steve Bailes, for the bank's collection. A work by this artist was chosen as a motif to print onto the Art Fair bags handed free to ticket purchasers for the second Joburg Art Fair. It has, thus, become somewhat iconic of the two Art Fairs. Many of the October Gallery artists live in the diaspora and are exhibiting internationally, but are not all from Africa.

Moving now along the far right wall of the exhibition hall, booth six would have been the next one down, belonging to Erdmann Contemporary. A small booth with large paintings and photographs and in the middle boxes of prints with white gloves ready to be used for handling sensitive works on paper. This Cape Town gallery fell slightly between the cracks of all the more focused and established players around them as they share a lot of artists with other galleries.

In stark contrast would have been the very distinct and subjective curation found next door in the Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary booth. Here was presented a carefully chosen selection of a handful of artists which the gallery represents and exhibits on a long-term basis. Their 60 sq.m booth had been structured into a u-shaped passage by inserting an extra wall in the middle, along the front boundary of the booth facing the corridor. These extra walls could be rented from the Art Fair along with any special

lighting the gallery might require as an 'extra'. On this middle wall, confronting one immediately as one approached was a large photographic print by British feminist artist, Vanessa Beecroft— one of the few international artists showcased by a local gallery. Beecroft's work of a certain period is characterised by the fact that she routinely stages an elaborate setting in which she places an army of naked woman in high heels – this particular one had two naked woman sitting on the ground and one standing in the far right-hand corner with her back towards the camera. Next to this piece was placed a very large, wooden Stephanus Rademeyer sculpture. This work had no title anywhere near it on the wall, so you would have had to attract the attention of the gallery assistant for information. In fact, up to now in the route around galleries, you would have noticed almost no pricing next to works. This information had to be elicited from the staff by asking. If you found this frustrating, alienating, or embarrassing, you would be in the company of 4,9% of survey respondents who mentioned this fact spontaneously as something they 'disliked' about the Art Fair.

Warren Siebrits⁴⁵ worked for the Everard Read gallery and South Africa's Stephan Welz & Co, in association with Sotheby's, before deciding to open his own gallery in Johannesburg's Jan Smuts Avenue in Rosebank in 2002. His opening exhibition at the time, *States of Emergency*, presented one of the most comprehensive overviews of 'political' art between 1960 and 1990. The gallery has a robust publishing policy, an aspect of the business they chose to highlight in the Joburg Art Fair catalogue, showing only the covers of their catalogues and none of their artists' works. The element of history, of the country, of art, and of an artists' career is one of the two things that provide conceptual backing to the gallery. On the one hand, Siebrits prides himself in knowing 'very unusual facts or certain information of how artists came to make things, or what a work means', and on the other, especially with his contemporary artists, he looks for:

craft and craftsmanship ... so that dictates who I work with, people like Stephanus Rademeyer. He works with his hands and he is very accurate in making things and he makes things with wood and very interesting materials and the same with Gerhard Marx, I love the processes of how he teaches himself to draw with roots and how he teaches himself to draw with map fragments and how he works with paper, only he could make the works he makes, that is the kind of thing that I am interested in. Like Deborah Poynton, I like her work not just formally I love it intellectually

⁴⁵ Interview, 25 March 2009, Warren Siebrits, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary, Johannesburg, co-owner and director.

because they are actually composite paintings made up of hundreds of fragments that are joined together, I can admire what she does.

This level of attention to history and craft, Siebrits told me, attracts a very specific and loyal market and collector-base to this gallery. In all his time of showcasing art on a busy street in Johannesburg, he has never once had 'passing trade', 'like someone comes in and says those colours are wonderful, when was he born, what is it, how much is it and then buys it, no never', which is why he sees the Art Fair as a valuable access to a new public. However, Siebrits maintains that at the first Art Fair, he did not sell to one new client and that every single person he did sell to had been known to the gallery from previous transactions. They did nonetheless manage to cover their costs and make a profit.

After taking all the information captured in Siebrits' booth in, you would then have arrived at the last of the four corner booths that formed the circumference of the Fair exhibition space. This one was occupied by New York gallery, Jack Shainman. Much was made of this particular participant in press leading up to the fair. Director Ross Douglas admitted to a journalist⁴⁶ in the *Business Day Arts* supplement that it was artist, Zwelethu Mthethwa, who 'swung it' and convinced his New York gallerist to make the trip to South Africa. Jack Shainman is generally known to show art from the 'other', non-Western parts of the world to a Western audience at his gallery in New York and at the many fairs he attends. His presence in South Africa in the large 100 sq.m booth was thanks to the Fair granting him a free space. According to the gallery staff, most visitors were appalled by their high US dollar prices, especially for the South African works of Claudette Schreuders and Mthethwa. Schreuders' work could also be found at the Michael Stevenson Gallery, but the Mthethwa photographs of, for example, KwaZulu-Natal sugarcane workers, were not shown by anyone in South Africa – Mthethwa, at the time, deemed only his pastel drawings of rural scenes suitable for a local buying audience. Gallerist Michael Stevenson⁴⁷ in interview described this phenomenon as an example of a 'deeply schizophrenic' relationship that South African artists maintain with their international, versus their local audiences.

⁴⁶ Daniel Browde, 'International flirtations'. March 2008, *Business Day Arts Supplement*.

⁴⁷ Interview, Michael Stevenson, 1 May 2008, director Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

The bronze-casted sculpture by Claudette Schreuders formed a centre-piece to this booth. Schreuders is well known for her short human figures carved out of Jacaranda wood and my fieldwork indicated a very loyal South African following. The piece at the Jack Shainman booth was a bronze cast of a woman in brown, medium-height shoes and a mustard-coloured dress, holding up a baby. This piece has four additions, one of which sold to the Standard Bank Gallery corporate collection for R250,000. Mandy van der Spuy⁴⁸, member of the buying committee for this bank, explained that it was too late to find a more affordable work by Schreuders, one should have bought her work about five years ago. Jack Shainman was not impressed with his sales results, nor the ‘nightmare’ of shipping and customs to South Africa and did not return for the 2009 Fair.

The next two booths along were both from the African continent and operate as ‘not-for-profit spaces’. Both were given a free space at the Fair, but had to pay for their shipping, transport and accommodation. This first was L’Appartement22 from Morocco manned by Adbellah Karroum. Karroum is an international art man that appears as curator on many international, Africa-focused exhibitions – L’Appartement22 was the address of his own house in Rabat until he got funding and turned it into an art space. For the Fair he commissioned an ‘independent curator based in Paris,’⁴⁹ Cecile Bourne-Farrell, ‘to select artists according to their relationship with Africa’. Her rationale reads as follows: ‘The exhibited works are connected and tackling issues constitutive of our daily relations and contradictions with this huge continent’. The artists, then, were not from Morocco, as many had hoped,⁵⁰ but from all over the world and continent, including South African sound artist, James Webb. This small space of 25 sq.m was used primarily as video screening booth. Chris Spring⁵¹, curator of the African section of the British Museum, one of the Fair’s key-note speakers noted the work by Barthelemy Toguo as his favourite piece at the Fair. This video work showed a black man reclining on a sofa in comfortable clothes, eating a banana and singing the Michael Jackson hit song ‘We are the world, we are the children’. Spring found this hilarious. The Townhouse Gallery next door was run by American, William Wells, and situated in Cairo. The gallery website tells one that since its inception in 1998, the Townhouse Gallery has established itself as one

⁴⁸ Interview, 4 April 2008, Mandy Van Der Spuy, Standard Bank Art Sponsorship

⁴⁹ From the L’Appartement22 press release for the *This is now 1* exhibition.

⁵⁰ Many of my respondents interviewed before the Fair expressed excitement to see ‘what is coming out of Morocco’.

⁵¹ Interview 15 March 2008, Chris Spring, Curator, Northeast, East and South Africa, British Museum, London.

of the region's leading contemporary art spaces, extending itself to incorporate visual and performative arts, and community projects. Wells brought all the artworks he intended to show at the Fair in his suitcase, which made the 50 sq.m booth seem bare against the much more opulent-looking, South African spaces that surrounded it. He showed photographs mostly, none of the work on the Fair was presented in his catalogue-entry due to his 'transport' constraints. The Townhouse Gallery was very popular with visitors and members of the press and so it was a disappointment when they pulled out of the second Joburg Art Fair weeks before the event. Wells stated the global economic recession as reason for having to cancel his participation.

The last booth to the right before coming to one of the exits was that by Art Extra. David Brodie⁵² opened this gallery a few months before the first Art Fair in Johannesburg's Randburg area. It was an exciting addition to the gallery circuit, as Brodie is younger than all the other gallerists and demonstrated a commitment to younger, edgier artists. Brodie was employed as Curator by the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Goodman Gallery for many years before making this move to open his own space and so was well known to most local art world members. In his space you would have first been confronted by a life-sized, zombie-looking, human figure covered in a frock made of long grasses. This work by Michael MacGarry, entitled 'The Master' was one of the first works to exemplify his 'overarching concern with the machinations of imperialism in Africa.'⁵³ You would also have found black and green paintings by Mary Wafer, abstract and painterly, and quilts by Lawrence Lanoana. While Wafer's edge connected to a 'politics of painting' that rages for the most part outside of South Africa in international art circuits, Lanoana takes South African politics of state-and-citizen as his subject matter. Most striking on this stand was his large, pink tapestry, spanning roughly 2 x 2 m. Onto a peach-coloured floral fabric had been sewn several figures in a triangular formation, (reminiscent of other works he had done of rugby players posing for a team photograph). The formation was constructed out of several men dressed and styled uniformly, some in kneeling position, some standing. All these figures looked toward a central figure, a black person in a dance pose. It is a strange and unique work where the human body is at once abstracted and softened, an effect of the quilting, while seeming to evoke the more threatening aspects of propaganda posters. These works were

⁵² Interview, 28 April 2008, David Brodie, director Brodie Stevenson Gallery.

⁵³ <http://www.brodiestevenson.com/exhibitions/mcgarry/index.htm>

testimony to Brodie's interest in engaging in the present in ways that are not always 'easy sales' but, much like Rhodes' agenda, is about giving young artists a professional platform for showcasing their work.

At this point in the tour, you would have had to back-track slightly to enter an island of galleries in the middle of the Fair, the back wall to these spaces were in front of Art Extra, sporting a giant Joburg Art Fair logo and the Fair's signature brightly coloured stripes. It might now have been necessary to take pause, perhaps sit down on one of the benches provided on the opposite side of the corridor, because while you would have taken in an enormous amount of information up to this point, the Michael Stevenson Gallery from Cape Town in front of you spanned three booths, or 200 sq.m and deserved some fresh attention.

Directly in front of you were a series of waste-high, black boxes with wooden objects inside them, but covered with a plaque with Braille writing on it. This was the letter E of South African artist, Willem Boshoff's famous *Blind Alphabet*. This work according to Ivan Vladislavic 'marks Boshoff's rise to prominence as an artist ... it draws together so completely and satisfyingly so many of his long-standing themes ... it is a work of 'readable wood', a book – a dictionary – which simultaneously reveals and conceals its contents' (2005: 54). Having access to this information and the way in which it makes the work understandable, one can sympathise with visitors who expressed frustration at the general lack of information on artists and artworks on offer at the 2008 Art Fair. This complaint came so clearly from the 2008 batch of survey questionnaires that the Art Fair decided to introduce 'artist talks' into the fair space in 2009.

Boshoff⁵⁴ is not 'in the stable' of any one gallerist and prefers to sell his work from his house, a process he describes as very 'strange' and not 'good advice' for any younger artist. To show Boshoff's work, you have to go visit him, 'have tea', 'show an interest and sit down with (him) and talk' and then 'maybe something will come of it'. Regardless of this eccentricity, Boshoff has an incredibly loyal collector base of his work, resulting in a situation which he describes as 'everything I ever made has sold'. Stevenson had made this effort and had a show of Boshoffs work at his gallery prior to the Fair; this work had not sold on that occasion, but Stevenson had the right, according to their agreement to

⁵⁴ Interview, 14 October 2008, Willem Boshoff, Practicing South African artist.

exhibit the work thereafter wherever he wanted. Behind the *Blind Alphabet* were two other Boshoff works, one with cassettes and the other made out of ties – each an index, or dictionary of Boshoff's creation.

To the right of the booth, Conrad Bothes had painted in his characteristic illustration style directly onto the art fair wall a dream-scape of skulls, bibles, penises and many-eyed demons. On the opposite wall were Zanele Muholi's black and white photographs of what gallerist Michael Stevenson describes as 'her community of fellow black, South African lesbian' subjects. According to Stevenson, these individuals allow her to photograph them in ways that no one else would be able to, and it is in this intimacy, rather than her, 'sometimes dubious, technical expertise', that her 'genius' lies. Across the passage hung the *Miss D'Vine* series that featured so prominently on the Joburg Art Fair 2008 website and to which I return in Chapter Seven.

Wim Botha had installed his *Small God Vitrine* from the roof trusses of the Fair as he often does with his works, inside the Michael Stevenson booth. It is a wooden, roughly-carved and highly varnished bust, placed into an elongated hexagonal-shaped, floating pedestal, each of the five sides being filled in with a mirror; behind the head was a golden star-like formation, giving the impression of a light radiating out from the back of the head. As is apparent from this description, Botha's work is highly idiosyncratic, often drawing on religious iconography, with a vocabulary built up within his oeuvre over the decade and half that he has been producing work. Botha⁵⁵ did not sell this work at the fair, nor did this come to him as a surprise. For him, an art fair is not a place of contemplation, a condition which his work demands, but a place for buying, on the spot, desirable objects of easy appeal. Michael Roets,⁵⁶ a young private buyer, bought his first Botha piece directly after the Fair from the Michael Stevenson Gallery. He described Wim Botha as 'a rock star, he is just amazing, there is so much thought that goes into his work and for me it is the real thing'.

Michael Stevenson⁵⁷ has, on many different occasions described his business as a shipping agent, indicating he sells most of his work to foreigners who either come through

⁵⁵ Interview, 16 September 2008, Wim Botha, Practicing South African artist.

⁵⁶ Interview, 1 October 2008, Michael Roets, co-owner of Acceleration Advertising and private buyer.

⁵⁷ Interview, 31 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, director and owner of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

Cape Town, or who see the work by his artists on some of the international fairs that he attends. In relation to David Goldblatt, a very established South African artist, and much younger Nandipha Mntambo and Nicholas Hlobo, he described the South African audience reaction as follows:

South Africans don't get it. They just don't get Goldblatt. They are getting more of it, but when they get it they still get it only in terms of a narrative. They look at it and they see a narrative. The moment he does something that doesn't have a very direct narrative in it, they just don't get it. They don't have the history of photography and the language of that in their minds. In the last show that we did there was that wonderful picture of the grass and the sea beyond and it sold really well internationally. People were seeing amazing things in it: references to seventeenth century Dutch painting. It is just extraordinary what they brought to that photograph. Here, people look at it and say: Where is the monument? What are you photographing? He is looking far beyond that.

Similarly, according to Stevenson, young artist Nandipha Mntambo's work is routinely pigeon-holed by local scholars to 'speak of' its South African context:

Nandipha is a very interesting case. South Africans, of course, shut it down, by seeing it in terms of ethnicity, in terms of Nguni cow skins. She sees it in terms of Picasso's *Minotaur* series, the whole bullfight tradition that you see in Bacon and many other things, the Greek. This new work that we have at the opening show is called 'Europa' and 'the Rape of Europa.' She sees it all in relation to that and the next work she is doing is she has found this old bull ring in Maputo and she is going to stage the bullfight herself. In the first part she will be both, the bull and the matador, the subject and the object, the sculptor and the performer. And we look at it and just put this narrative onto it. We are not familiar enough with Greek mythology.

When listening to Stevenson speak about his gallery and the Art Fair (and watch him roll his eyes), it is hard to understand why he takes the trouble to come to the Joburg Art Fair, which he refers to as an 'art bazaar'. On the one hand, he has disdain for the South African public as illustrated in the extract above, and makes it clear that he has no intention of selling his work to hang in a 'Johannesburg drawing room', but, on the other, he expressed the need for a small, contained fair where the world can quell its desperate thirst for African contemporary work ('they are desperate to know'). Stevenson runs a rigorous publishing regime of catalogues for each exhibition in his gallery and is

arguably the most astute gallerist when it comes to contributing to a local archive of knowledge⁵⁸.

The booth housing David Krut Projects was to the right of Michael Stevenson, occupying a far smaller space of 40 sq.m. The walls were covered, top to bottom, with print works on paper of all sizes. Some of the artists were very well known, such as William Kentridge, Robert Hodgins and Deborah Bell – whose work you would have seen in other booths already. David Krut will handle some of their print sales, but also deals in the secondary market. The David Krut Project Space gives younger artists the opportunity to exhibit works while the printing studio provide more established artists with the means to experiment perhaps outside of their usual medium. This gallery on Jan Smuts in Johannesburg is very dynamic with outreach projects, publishing, printing and the running of the Project Space, which might give an indication as to why at any given time there are so many young women willing to assist you in this booth. The institution is, perhaps, best known for its publishing side, which has contributed a veritable library of information on the South African art landscape through its *Taxi Series* of monographs on South African artists (the quotation above from Vladislavic on Boshoff is from one such a book by David Krut Publishing). Should you be a first time buyer, this was one of the booths that catered to the very entry-level of this section of the market.

Walking around the island to the other side now, where you would have started first and turned towards Gallery Momo, directly in front of you, was the SMAC gallery from Stellenbosch. This was a very recently formed gallery, which might be why, looking at the selection of works on show, it was tough to elicit a sense of their conceptual or stylistic framing. The booth was filled to the brink with works of very different kinds – some paper works by South African artist, Kay Hassan, who frequently exhibits internationally; some smaller sculptures similar to the comic style Theresa-Anne Mackintosh at Momo's across the passage; some works from the Isolationist years by Peter Clarke; some large black and white oil paintings by Italian artist, Jonathan Guaitamacchi. These works by Guaitamacchi particularly caught the eye of the assistant to international art publisher, Louise Blouin-MacBain. MacBain travelled to South Africa for one day from New York in her private plane to give a key-note address for the Art Fair on her ArtInfo online

⁵⁸ My interview with Michael Stevenson stands out as one of the most interesting, provocative and rewarding ones I did. He was remarkably forthcoming with his time and seemed genuinely interested in the academic project of research.

publishing site and to promote her social networking site for the arts MyArtInfo.com. Ashley Elridge Ford⁵⁹ had been active in the London and New York art world for a long time before becoming an assistant to MacBain, but had never bought an art work for herself before. As someone who frequents the big international art fairs, she ascribed the fact of her first purchase to the manageability of the Joburg Art Fair. International art fairs, like Basel in Switzerland or Frieze in London can show up to 300 galleries which gives the visitor, according to Elridge Ford, very little space for contemplation. She admitted to having had a long conversation with gallery owner, Baylon Sandri, and that he eventually gave her a 'very good price' for the work, perhaps because she 'saw so much in the work and he liked what I saw', but perhaps also because McBain bought the much larger Guatamachi work which Elridge Ford initially wanted 'really badly', but could not afford.

Gallery owner Baylon Sandri⁶⁰ was unequivocal about the impact the Art Fair has on his gallery:

Well, number one, being from Stellenbosch it is absolutely essential for us to be there, because we get to interface with people from our gallery, we don't meet them face to face, you know. Because they just don't get to Stellenbosch, and once you meet someone face to face it is a whole different story. Secondly you meet everybody in the art world so you make friends up there and many of the friends we made have translated into projects, exhibitions, et cetera, for the future. And obviously the buyers, you know we have, ... just the sales that have come as a result of indirectly that contact that was made at the Joburg Art Fair, or the fact that people saw us from there and then contacted later, definitely, I would say took us from, you know here to, ... took us from I can't put a percentage on it, but 50%, at least 60% of sales is a direct result of the Joburg Art Fair, the business that was done in the year.

Sandri is an international man and his gallery services the tourist industry, as do his two family-owned and -run restaurants, La Perla in Sea Point, Cape Town and Die Wijnhuis in Stellenbosch. Sandri can tell many stories of tourists from Italy or Singapore expressing exasperation at the difficulty they find in navigating the local art scene. He expressed having longed for a 'conglomeration' of the art market in South Africa and sees the Art Fair as such an element:

⁵⁹ Interview, 20 March 2008, Ashley Elridge Ford, Assistant to Louise Blouin MacBain

⁶⁰ Interview, 1 November 2008, Baylon Sandri, director SMAC Gallery.

Because, I have been interested in art my whole life and so is my father and you can gallery hop a little bit when you travel; go to Chelsea in NY go down to the Ruba art centre in Paris, go round the galleries in London and et cetera, and read all the magazines, but in reality you always try to make it coincide with Basel or Frieze or something. You cannot, ... no one has the time or the, in fact, if I want to know what is going on in the art world in, you know, Europe, for example, I click on an art fair website, and then via that I go to the galleries, even long after the art fair is over. Because that is your reference point, that is your summary. So, it is the one-stop shop, it is what is happening in South Africa, hopefully they will say what is happening with contemporary Africa, now. Go to the Joburg Art Fair for three days and you will walk away with everything you need to know, that is how the art world works, that is why some people go to Basel. Then they do not have to go to Europe, London, NY, because the average art collector can't do that, there is no time, there is no, it is like every other industry. And every industry has its fair.

By the time of the 2009 Art Fair, the gallery appeared much clearer about its strategy as a business. In 2009, they chose to focus on artists from what has been termed the Isolationist years, that being the years of sanctions against the country and late South African modernism. These are works, often of medium scale that uses the vocabulary of international modernism, such as cubism, flat planes of colour and abstraction that has seen very little attention in South Africa, mostly, according to Sandri, because much of this work coincides with work produced in service of the 'struggle'. SMAC is committed to airing these artists, by so doing aiming to create a more accurate timeline of art history in South Africa. Together with these works, the large, thickly painted, Lucian Freud-like nudes by Johann Louw, left one with the impression that this gallery is interested in traditional mediums and art history, more so than the cutting-edge contemporary, seen, for example, in the Michael Stevenson booth.

Moving now to the last gallery on the map, you were confronted by two giant, human figures, one crouching, one standing, suitably titled *Sit en Staar* by Angus Taylor, announcing you have arrived at the Everard Read stand. This 100-year-old gallery had been passed down from father, Everard, to son, Mark.⁶¹ The Everard Read Gallery's inclusion into an art fair that supposedly looks at contemporary art was frowned upon, not without a share of bias, by some members of the art world. One young artist that I

⁶¹ Interview, 14 August 2008, Mark Read, Co-owner and director of Everard Read galleries Johannesburg and Cape Town. All quotes in this section is form this interview with Mark Read.

interviewed explained: 'You don't expect anything critical from Everard Read.' According to one of the Art Fair's internal documents, contemporary art is defined as having 'two connotations: one being art produced at the present moment in history, but also more specifically art that is brought into a public discussion or platform by curators, critics and the larger world of art. It can be said to be an art 'movement' of the now'. This definition implies that the artists would be critically acclaimed or would enjoy the benefit of a dialogue about their art in the art critical discourse. These things are not that easy to measure, but it is true that the Everard Read 'openings' receive far less critical attention in the local press and the only local art magazine, *Art South Africa*. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that they include in their exhibition programme works that fall in the category of 'fine art'. The gallery space itself in Johannesburg's Rosebank, according to one gallerist, looks like a 'corporate boardroom' or as someone else had described it to me, 'an up-market game lodge'. Mark Read, however, is a force to be reckoned with in the art world, least of all as the very existence of the Joburg Art Fair can be traced back to his opulent, English-gentleman's club-like office. FirstRand CE, Paul Harris, bought into the Everard Read Gallery a couple of years ago and it is in his direction that Read gently nudged Douglas⁶² when he wanted to see his idea of a South African art fair being realised. Douglas admits that the 'idea' of an art fair is not at all a novel one, and that it was Read who suggested he 'looked into producing one'.

One of Read's artists is Ross Douglas' brother-in-law, Beezy Bailey⁶³, who made the initial introduction between Douglas and Read. Bailey, having exhibited with the Everard Read Gallery for years, described Read to me as the 'best salesman in South Africa' and he quoted another one of the Read stable artists, John Meyer, as saying, Read 'awards' paintings. Bailey, however, suggested a couple of negative aspects to Read as a gallerist, one of which is the fact that they have almost no international exposure, but the biggest problem with Mark Read in his opinion is the fact that his real interest is paleoanthropology. Read is current head of the South African wing of the World Wildlife Fund and was instrumental in the Wits Origins Centre being financed and built. The Everard Read gallery is a nodal point of expensive art, successful business, and international environmental philanthropy – in short, he is very, very 'connected' and that might well be why he is seen as contributing something of worth to the Joburg Art Fair,

⁶² Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

⁶³ Interview, 1 November 2008, Beezy Bailey, Practicing South African artist.

much to the disdain of more contemporary gallerists such as Michael Stevenson, mentioned above.

Like some of the other gallerists I have quoted in this section, Read is wonderfully eloquent about the art that he likes and sells on a daily basis:

I am fascinated with good old fashioned paint, love the smeared mark, I can't get enough of it and as I get older I love it more and more, that edible quality of lovely old fashioned paint, and I think a lot of people in the world find it ever more fascinating. So this strange and anachronistic thing called painting isn't going away. Van Eyk invented oil paint and we haven't grown out of it and it has been four hundred years. ... and that is what this gallery is about, we are about figurative paintings and sculpture and that can be as abstract and far from reality as ... but there is still as much as I try and then try and get away and do a Cy Twombly something, it doesn't work. I hear myself speaking about it and I think, fuck you Mark. And when I go to other dealers and I go overseas and I see found objects and conceptual works of art and performance art and all of these things I love it, it doesn't mean I feel insecure that I am not dealing in it myself. And I think it is important as one matures as a dealer to know as much who you are as who you are not in order to do a proper and honest job for the people you represent and also it allows you to say no to artists who may be very good, to say, I think you are fabulous but you are not fabulous here and I will send them on to people who can do a better job.

Read has also managed to get into his stable one of South Africa's most internationally renowned and financially successful artists, Zwelethu Mthethwa. I mentioned elsewhere that Mthethwa, at the time, only showed his pastel drawings in South Africa, but when he did, it was at the Everard Read Gallery to a crowd that can perhaps be described as a mix of relatively new Black Economic Empowerment individuals and apartheid-era moneyed businessmen.

In their Art Fair stand, behind the two rock sculptures, were two Mthethwa drawings, one of a young child with bright purple face sitting on a bed inside a room with a dark figure in the foreground. One could not be certain of their relationship but it had strong narrative suggestions of curious domestic scenes at play in South African townships. Mandy van der Spuy⁶⁴, buying for Standard Bank, admitted to thinking these two works should have been bought by the corporate collection that she buys for.

⁶⁴ Interview, 4 April 2008, Mandy Van Der Spuy, Standard Bank Art Sponsorship Manager.

Mark Read's description below of why he has such a loyal art buying audience to his gallery expresses much of what I found around the buying of art and art publics generally (which I discuss in later chapters of this study) as having to do with networks, familiarity, spontaneity and 'fun':

Without wanting to toot my trumpet or put down some of the other dealers, a lot of the times people buy art because they love the dealers and they love the artists and they love the milieu, you end up as Clement Greenberg said in the '60s, I don't know if you read him, but magnificent book called *The Painted Word*, he is sitting in the bath one day and wondering about the art world and how the whole thing worked and he suddenly has this epiphany and it was about you buy your local colour field genius like a Rothko had just come on, it was the '50s actually then you get invited to the right parties ... people love acquiring works of art here because they love the artists, love coming here, it is part of the whole deal, being in South Africa today, you don't come to a gallery because I am rubbing my hands saying I will sell another picture to another client you know so I can get richer, that is not where it is at all, people will buy pictures from me because, not only love the art and that is 90% of it, but there is a 10% and it is a valid 10% that they want to buy art from people who are off the front foot creatively involved in the upliftment of South Africa and that it is fun and they have a glass of wine and there's wonderful people and it is a club, it is a marvelous club and no one buys art when they are depressed, it is just not a place for people who say I hate life it is just terrible. It is a place where people come because they feel good it is fabulous to be alive and things are great and let's go buy a picture we will always have fun there. And they know that they are not going to be let down.

In accordance with his business strategy, Read assured me 'there is not a person in South Africa walking around, and I will simply guarantee that, who is sorry they ever bought a picture from me, not one'. Like many other galleries, Read has a 'buy-back' policy, and so his clients 'know that if they get into trouble that I'll sell it for them. I will swap it if they want, I will make sure of that, I will make a plan'.

Speaking about the giant rock sculpture mentioned before, a lifestyle journalist for a Sunday newspaper,⁶⁵ had the following to say:

One South African couple not likely to be leaving the country soon with their new artwork are IT mogul Ronnie Price and his chic wife, Linda, who clapped eyes on the largest and heaviest exhibit — a two-part piece called *Stand and Sit* by emerging sculptor, Angus Taylor. It features two huge

⁶⁵ Gwen Gill, 'Red dots and jackets of note hit the Joburg Art Fair.' March 16, 2008, *Sunday Times*.

male figures made from stone, and towers over the Everard Read Gallery stand. There'll be seven versions of the sculpture; Ronnie got the first for around R1-million. Gallery owner Mark Read told me two more had been sold. In Linda's words: 'I saw them and we had to have them' — and now they're destined for the Price's huge garden. They should terrify the burglars!'

The Everard Read reported to having sold three editions of these very lucrative sculptures at the 2008 Fair and brought more different variations to the 2009 Art Fair. These works became the butt of the jokes of many young art critics from the *Daily Artheat* news publication at the Fair. In 2009, the Artheat team mentioned Taylor's work as one of the worst works at the fair: 'Angus Taylor's man made out of rocks. Everard Read. Just like last year: They're big, they're vacuous, and they're made out of rocks. Just what every discerning Joburger needs to put at the bottom of their sprawling lawn'.⁶⁶ The work also featured in the Sunday edition of the *Daily Artheat* in a cartoon, illustrating in 'official graph'-form, the divergent paths of 'content' and 'sales', 'calculated in units of rock-men', suggesting that while they might be popular in sales terms, these works cannot be said to have achieved local critical acclaim.

Finally having done this circuit, you would have exited the main space and headed back under the mezzanine area, this time on the opposite end of the corridor where you had bought your tickets upon arrival. To your right, you would have found a booth that looked very different from what you had been seeing. It was carpeted, had special spot lighting, and the walls had been painted a yellowish colour: all of the elements together might have brought to mind an auction showroom, or perhaps even a gallery in a shopping mall; certainly not one of those white-walled and more austere, contemporary gallery spaces. It would have felt cozy and inviting. The art, you would soon have realised was also very different. It was predominantly painting, smaller works, some portraits, some vignettes of people, some still lives, some landscapes. The catalogue would have told you that you were in the *Take Your Road and Travel Along* booth. At the entrance to this booth you would have read a contextualising mini-essay that explained:

The assimilation of the European painting tradition into an African idiom resulted in a rich genre of work that is rarely researched and exhibited, even though it challenges and undermines many of the prevailing

⁶⁶ Daily Artheat Team, 'You're hot then you're not: Top 5 best and worst works at the Art Fair.' Saturday 4 April 2009, *Daily Artheat*.

assumptions about modernism, modernity and the conception of the modern artist. There has never been a survey of their work in Africa. In addition, there has never been a commercial exhibition covering this range of painters. This exhibition will for the first time pair well-known South African artists including Gerard Sekoto, George Pemba and Ernest Mancoba, among others, with their contemporaries from other parts of Africa, such as Ben Enwonwu from Nigeria and Sam Ntiro from Tanzania. It draws on the collections of Michael Stevenson and Johans Borman in Cape Town and Michael Graham-Stewart in London.

The curators mentioned further in the press release that the title of the exhibition had been taken from a letter that Gerard Sekoto wrote, which for them, 'aptly describes the difficult and lonely journey that the pioneers experienced both in trying to study art in their home countries and in leaving Africa to study in Europe'.

Many of the works of African modernists have left the continent and can be found in collections abroad. It was, therefore, nothing short of extraordinary that *Take your road* could be presented at the Joburg Art Fair, representing two year's worth of collecting by the three curators. It was, of course, the very commercial incentive of the Fair that made this occasion worth their while. The work was painterly and had strong resemblances to the movements of European Modernism: loosely painted and very colourful in the manner of the Fauvists in the case of *Self Portrait* (c. 1960) by Simon Moroke Lekgetho; Cubist influences can be seen in Peter Clarke's *Untitled (On the road to the village)* (1960); Post-expressionist as in the highly popular series of work by Ben Enwonwu from Nigeria. According to the curators, these works 'continue the dialogues between the aesthetic traditions of Europe and Africa which first intersected when the European Modernists discovered traditional African art and continued when the young black artists first came across the work of the European painters. This exhibition offers us the opportunity to look afresh at this complex and intertwined history'.

In conversation at the Fair, the curators mentioned that many of the works were pre-sold or reserved, but that some sold at the Fair. For such a landmark exhibition, it received very little attention in the local or international press – something that perhaps is a drawback of being attached to an art fair. You might have read, in the *Business Day Arts Supplement* that came out a week before, dedicated to the Art Fair, Alex Dodd's⁶⁷ review of this show:

⁶⁷ Alex Dodd, 'Africa's road to Modernism.' March 2008, *Business Day Arts Supplement*.

This being a commercial moment, there is also the issue of value, and there's no question we're talking platinum league prices, there being an obvious premium on works by artists who are old or who have been released from this mortal coil. In this sense it is also potentially a very political show, capitalizing on an area of production that few galleries and collectors have cottoned on to. Until now this has been auction house territory and, in Joburg it was chiefly Warren Siebrits who applied his energies to the business of resurrection – tracking down, buying and theoretically repositioning black work from the mid and early 20th century, reinvigorating values in a hotter contemporary climate of postcolonial revisionism ... It is amazing that these works are only surfacing now in this interrelated and connected way, and one is reminded of Stevenson's constructive intellectual rigor, reigniting crucial inheritances that might otherwise be lost.

Dodd neatly captures the ways in which the fact of this show featuring at the first Joburg Art Fair was political and added a necessary historical depth to the event.

At this point you might have decided to take a break and head for the rest rooms and a bottle of water. You would have made your way past an open area with four booksellers displaying and selling brightly coloured art and coffee-table books, then on your left a small stand where you could have bought a glass of champagne for R100, or a coffee from local coffee brand Vida e Café. Lastly, before exiting, from behind the ticket desks, you would have seen a small booth, the signage of which would have told you it was 'FUNDA' sponsored by Siemens. Inside the art works would have been different again from what you saw inside the fair – more naïve, perhaps more 'studenty'. The prices you might have noticed would be much lower around the R2000 mark and much of it had been sold. At any time about seven black youths and one older man would have been hanging around the white plastic chairs inside the booth happy and eager to engage with anyone interested in the work or in becoming a patron for this, the only tertiary institution for art education, in Soweto.

The catalogue for the 2008 Fair has a double page dedicated to imparting information on FUNDA. FUNDA Community College in Soweto, it says, was founded during the 1980s in response to the need for education in Soweto and its neighbouring communities. The Visual Arts Department of Funda Community College was established in 1984 under the direction of Steven Sack. This department, previously known as the African Institute of Art, acted as a creative voice against the systems of apartheid that served to limit the expression and education of black individuals. What began as an attempt at providing

tertiary training for disadvantaged individuals in the arts through UNISA (University of South Africa) grew to a number of programmes in the areas of art-teacher training and arts education. From the catalogue:

When discussing FUNDA's hopes for the Joburg Art Fair, Nkosi was quick to outline its benefits. He sees FUNDA's participation as an 'endorsement of delivery from historically disadvantaged' communities, and provides the opportunity to expose their artists, as well as encouraging networking with galleries and sponsors. Nkosi smiles and says 'we talk until we drop', His positive attitude towards FUNDA and the artists involved in it resonates in the endurance of this institution which is completely reliant on non-governmental funding.

With this last incongruous, but trademark South African, experience in mind, you would have followed the signs leading out of Hall 2, up a set of escalators and right onto the mezzanine level, under which you had entered the exhibition space to buy tickets and where you had just experienced the 'modernist' space, the books and FUNDA. The food on offer at this cafeteria, entitled *Rendevouz*, along with the cherry-coloured wood décor might have reminded you that you were not anywhere near the Tate Modern, but closer to spaces displaying a left-over decorating style from years gone by. On offer would have been oily toasted cheese sandwiches and overly sweet lattes in sharp contrast to the sense of the global that you would have experienced among art works down below. But this space that housed the restaurant had a magical quality in the form of a balcony from which one could look down on the entire fair trading ground and get a first sense of the lay-out of what seemed, when inside, like a confusing maze. Looking down now, you might understand Tracy Murinik's description of fairs: 'This is not the museum exhibition; purity of art for art's sake. This is art as economy, as commodity. It is the stark reality of what keeps artists, gallerists, art consultants, collections, biennales alive and functioning. Art fairs are not about euphemism. They are about recognizing and celebrating that creativity and vision, and on the other side of it, about the economy that function within and around that artmaking.'⁶⁸

Looking down, you would have noticed that while you had been aware of dark walls looming across from some of the spaces you had visited, you never went inside them. These you would now have been able to see were two giant spaces filling the middle area

⁶⁸ Tracy Murinik, 'What's in it for everybody? The complex business of art fairs.' March 2008, *Arttrob*. www.arttrob.co.za

of the fair. The accidental overlooking of this space by visitors was a common feature of experiences at the first Joburg Art Fair expressed in the survey questionnaires. What these giant black blocks housed was the curated exhibition of African contemporary art that Artlogic, gave to international curator, Simon Njami to curate and display works from the continent. This feature was a major part of the first Art Fair and I turn to an analyses of this space in chapter three under my discussion of African contemporary art as public culture.

The 2009 Joburg Art Fair, while learning from and building into the 2008 inaugural Fair, used a very similar floor-plan layout for galleries to the one you would have just experienced. However, had you been a return visitor, as 70% of the survey candidates indicated they would be in April 2009, you would notice the following changes to what you had just experienced: First, whether you compare it with the Friday, Saturday, or Sunday of 2008, the number of visitors walking in and between the booths at any given time would have doubled, creating more of a buzz most times, but moving towards the crowded and uncomfortable on Saturday. The book space had been moved to be in the centre of the space with the Vida e Café coffee stand expanded and placed right next to them. This became the nucleus of socialising at the event. There was also a large bar serving Grolsch beer that you could enjoy on specially imported furniture by a local retailer. To the right of this central space was a very large booth showcasing objects of South African furniture design that resembled the cover of a local interior décor magazine, and which was very popular with visitors. Also part of this central space was a box-like structure constructed out of coloured glass sheets from PG Glass as the logo told you, which housed the BMW Art Talks programme, where at any time during the course of the three days, you could wander in to listen to a representative, artist or otherwise, from each gallery at the Fair talking on a topic of their choice. Then, you could not miss the large installation by Jane Alexander, the ‘featured artist’ of the 2009 Fair which I discuss in the final chapter of this thesis.

In 2009 Artlogic adopted the language and approach of ‘Special Projects’ to denote all the ‘spaces’ not occupied by galleries. This was a dual strategy to at once do away with the contention of curating one big exhibition outside of the gallery space as was the case with Simon Njami’s *As you like it*, while also providing a banner under which other types of art could be shown. The notion of the ‘Special Project’ is an interesting one as it allowed the Fair to both incorporate less-commercial projects and institutions such as

‘development’ organisations while also allowing other sponsors to take ownership of ‘special projects’. It was, thus, a way to bring more money into the project and allow those that could not afford to pay, spaces to showcase their works. For example, Artlogic offered a small booth to the online art publication *Artthrob*.⁶⁹ This organisation writes about and reviews South African art and is perhaps the best point of entry into the ins and outs of the local art landscape for a foreigner. In order to finance their organisation they sell prints that artists donate to them. The editor, Sue Williamson⁷⁰ assured me that each year a substantial (as much as 90%) of their running costs are covered by the sales they make at the Art Fair. Other ‘Special Projects’ included local not-for-profit spaces such as the Joubert Park Project, Blank Projects and the Artist’s Proof Studio.

A couple of galleries, six exactly, had been added in 2009 and one, Jack Shainman had disappeared. The most notable of the new ones were: a gallery from Lagos, the Centre for Contemporary Art Lagos; iArt from Cape Town; and the Seippel Gallery that has branches in Cologne and in downtown Johannesburg. Two of the other galleries were from Germany, both drew very little attention and very few sales. The first was called Artco, the owner Joachim expressed no surprise at selling very little apart from all his small Owuso Ankomah (discussed earlier) paintings, cash to a Nigerian visitor – these started from R30,000. He ‘does fairs’ all over the world and is of the opinion that it is only in the third year that visitors recognise your stand and you start to make sales. The other was called Caprice Horn Gallery. This gallerist decided to come to the Joburg Art Fair to see if the recession had impacted on Johannesburg yet – according to her it had been raging in Germany for a year by that time, making it incredibly difficult for galleries to survive. A gallery from Reunion Island, called Gallerie Béatrice Binoche was another new-comer who made few sales, but was adamant to return the next year – the value for her in being at the Fair was the ‘contacts made’ and exhibitions planned for the future.

CCA Lagos is run by Bisi Silva who lives between London and Lagos. As with many of the galleries from the continent discussed earlier, she does not show work by predominantly Nigerian artists, a trend that seems to hold only with South African galleries at the Fair. Rather her works are mainly by artists living in the diaspora but originating from all over Africa. Her 60 sq.m booth was part-sponsored by the Fair, yet the fact that she sold nothing the entire time at the fair was a great disappointment to

⁶⁹ In 2008, *Artthrob* was included and given a small table in the ‘book space’.

⁷⁰ Interview, 19 September 2008, Sue Williamson, Practicing South African artist, founder and Cape Town Editor of *Artthrob*.

her, not least of all financially. She has nevertheless indicated that she would like to be included in the 2010 Fair. Some names of artists on this booth would be familiar from the *As you like it show* from 2008. Silva had worked with Njami before on, for example, *Africa Remix* and they seem to have connections with similar artists. On the whole the booth resembled a museum show in its professionalism and reserve: medium-sized works hung rhythmically around the walls and medium-sized sculptures on plinths around the floor space. Most notable in this space was perhaps the signature sculptural human figures by Nigerian artist Sokari Douglas Camp. Douglas Camp is a veteran of African art having worked with most of the international institutions interested in this subject.

Down the corridor from CCA Lagos, was iArt (Investment Art). Elana Brundyn,⁷¹ gallery owner and director used to sell art from a gallery in Durbanville at their wine farm, before moving to Cape Town's Loop Street in 2007. Brundyn was one of the few galleries at the 2009 Art Fair reporting very good sales which attests to her strong support base amongst (according to Baylon Sandri) Afrikaans buyers and corporate art buyers. Like Sandri, Brundyn admitted to travelling a lot and visiting the big art fairs abroad whenever possible. Brundyn stated many times during our conversation how excited and honoured she felt to be included in the Art Fair, but that the most difficult part had been to tell artists that she has not chosen their work for this fair. According to Brundyn, this really is one of the biggest challenges to a gallerist in running a gallery. She also made another point that I have found cropping up in many of my interviews: 'I promise you, certain work you can sell them 100 times over and people will find the money'.

In the iArt booth of 60 sq.m the first impression was of a large amount of rusted metal. The booth had so been structured to house in the middle area a large installation by Jan van der Merwe consisting of objects made out of his signature rusted metal, depicting subject matter reminiscent of impoverished Afrikaner homes or his time in the military. For this particular one, two large glass cases housed a series of shirts and jackets hanging on a rail to form two parallel rows to the front of which were stands with folded shirts facing the front. This, he explained in his artist talk in the BMW Art Talks programme, had to do with his relation with his father and his time serving involuntarily for the South African army. This installation sold for R750,000 on the opening night. Another striking

⁷¹ Interview, 11 March 2009, Elana Brundyn, Director, iArt Gallery, Cape Town.

work, often mentioned in the press in this booth was a realist charcoal portrait of South African artist, William Kentridge, for which the artist Paul Emsley was awarded the BP Portraiture prize in London. This work was one of two head portraits of William Kentridge, the other being at the Whatiftheworld booth which Rhodes told me sold to a young 'coloured' couple, 'black diamond money' 'probably working in an ad agency'. I discuss this work in detail in Chapter Seven.

Ralf Seippel,⁷² director of the Seippel Gallery in Johannesburg's downtown suburb of Doornfontein has, perhaps, the most experience with art fairs internationally – the first art fair, he told me, was after all started in his home town of Cologne. He has worked on art fairs 'in Italy, in France, in Germany, in Australia, around the world'. His views on art fairs are succinct and reiterate much of what has been identified as being their 'building blocks' in the introduction to this Part:

The art fair, at first I think, if you don't have a biennale in your country, an art fair is always a meeting point, because maybe a few of your key galleries are coming together, the curators are coming together, collectors are coming; you can meet maybe in 4 or 5 days people you normally don't meet in a year, because we are all busy and all the people are busy, especially people who are buying art, very busy because at first they have to make money before they can spend the money on art. So the fair is something like a nice meeting point, talking and seeing what is going on; the second it is an education opportunity for the audience, because in half day you can walk through twenty-five galleries and if you do it for two or three years, maybe sometimes overseas you educated your eye, and with an educated eye you are then maybe much more satisfied by your own selection. Then you can maybe also find the difference between the galleries and one is more on the abstract field; one is more figurative, one is more on South African art; other one is more on international art, so it is very good.

After the 2008 Art Fair, there was a call from local galleries (mainly from the Goodman Gallery's new director Liza Essers and Michael Stevenson) for the formation of a panel consisting of art world members and representatives from the 'big' local galleries that could control which galleries would be allowed on the Fair with what shows. This is fairly standard procedure for many international art fairs, where much is made annually of the announcement of the panel members. The Joburg Art Fair decided to have a panel

⁷²Interview, 23 March 2009, Ralf Seippel, Director: Seippel Gallery. Johannesburg, Cologne.

in the second year, yet not to incorporate galleries, but rather to construct a two-person panel with Johannesburg Art Gallery's Clive Kellner and the editor of *Art South Africa* magazine, Sean O'Toole. Seippel expressed in our interview vehement resistance to such a model of 'exclusion':

I am a big opponent of these regulated art fairs. At first the art market is free and the art world is free. For me you will never hear me talking about a colleague and saying he is not allowed to be at an art fair. Because he is doing his thing, he is following his vision, he is supporting his artists. So, the audience at the end will decide. And don't underestimate the knowledge of your audience. And that is what is happening in many fairs in Europe; Cologne was killed in this way; Basel has a big problem, because you have always five or ten or twenty-one key, leading galleries, they have their small network and they think we know everything and we would like to occupy the market, and don't let the youngsters, strong galleries in, so please come we will select a few weak galleries because they will only pay, they will not be part of the market, so it is still a battlefield. Yes but the big thing is that here especially in the art scene, they are always saying it is a matter of quality and we have to curate, bullshit. If you look on a car fair, nobody in the world will get the idea to get one of the directors from Mercedes Benz, and maybe Audi and maybe Volkswagen, to sit on a board and decide which other companies are allowed to participate in this fair, so maybe we will keep now Volvo out and Mitsubishi we don't like, also not in ... that is not ... it is an open market, an open market means give access to whom ever want, as long as they are paying the bill.

For the Joburg Art Fair, Seippel presented a very carefully curated show in his 100 sq.m booth, consisting of two exhibitions. For one he had placed extra walls in a tight u-shape formation to form an intimate space for the viewing of black and white South African archive photography. His main exhibition, however, filled the rest of the wall space to the right, back and left of the booth. This was a one-man show of the very large works of Mbongeni Bhuthelezi. When I spoke to Seippel prior to the Art Fair I was skeptical of his plan to showcase only this one artist and his conviction that 'so after this exhibition you will know who will be the next shooting star in your country'. I thought this both financially risky and very limiting to the reputation of the gallery. However, Seippel sold many of these works, and they were indicated by the survey questionnaires as some of the most popular works by far with many visitors being able to name this artist as their favourite at the Fair. Buthelezi is a mid-career artist who has by now perfected his craft of 'painting' with melted plastic. According to Seippel:

It is not necessary to explain it, have a look and then we don't have to talk about quality. The quality of his work is outstanding; the uniqueness of his work is something that is worldwide outstanding, he discovered a totally new technique, nobody else in the world has discovered; after fifteen years of working hard in this technique he is now able to do each and every thing; he has replaced painting with new material; and his images are international, but with a strong African background. He is coming out of this tradition of poor material and out of collaging something, but what he is creating is absolutely new, he is ahead of our time; he is using the material of our time but is using something that we throw away, into art.

The *Daily Artheat* mentioned *Girl reading by candle* as one of the five worst works on the fair: 'According to the gallerist, Buthelezi has invented a 'new' style. He shouldn't have. He melts plastic stuff onto canvas, and then he makes 'hopeful' images of girls reading (he is all about "education") in candlelight'.⁷³ Paul Harris from FirstRand bought one of these works for his private collection. I was also relayed an anecdote by curator Tumelo Mosaka⁷⁴ of a South African friend of his who when seeing the Buthelezi works, for the first time in her life, felt that she wanted to own an art work for herself. She deliberated over the weekend, but when Mosaka explained to her that one could negotiate terms of payments with a gallery (something not many members of the public are aware of), she bought the work on the last day of the Fair. The resounding popularity of these particular works is an interesting phenomenon, which I take up in Chapter Seven.

Many of the personalities and institutions mentioned in this chapter crops up again in subsequent chapters where other aspects of the Fair are examined, as they make up the core of the respondents to this study. The Joburg Art Fair managed to bring this core together in a way unprecedented for the local art and social worlds and as the curator for the largest Johannesburg art museum commented: 'The gallerists have never had to get along with each other in this way' and do 'transparent business' under one roof. If, as a reader, you found this tour exhausting it would have mirrored your experience of traversing the football-field-sized hall filled with some new, some old pieces of diverse contemporary art – and in the spirit of the large scale public event, the many people and personalities that sometimes made viewing a challenge through their sheer numbers. In the next chapter I look more closely at who the publics might have been that were crowding the aisles at these two events.

⁷³ Daily Artheat Team, 'You're hot then you're not.' 4 April 2009, *Daily Artheat*.

⁷⁴ Interview, 18 March 2008, Tumelo Mosaka, Curator Brooklyn Museum of Art.

PART 1

Chapter 2. Publics: Real and Imagined

Having just completed the tour of the Joburg Art Fair it is possible to reflect that the manner in which that tour was conducted was as if one embodied the ‘ideal public’ to such an event: one that systematically and tirelessly follows the grid-like structure of the map in logical and organised fashion from one booth to the next while focusing on the intricacies of art works, display, gallery positioning, coupled with constant reference to catalogue information to enhance the experience. In short, that tour is indicative of one done by an analyst or ethnographer of the Fair. The walk-through of a ‘real’ visitor might well differ vastly from such a structured approach. This chapter aims to populate that backdrop with a public. It introduces people who never made it round the whole Fair as they got stuck at one booth or one art work; people who never intended looking at any art, but rather came to see friends; people who found it too sociable to be able to look at art; or people who realised that this was simply ‘not for them’ – not forgetting people who only existed in the minds of others as their ideas of what an ‘art public’ might be.

What this chapter aims to achieve is to provide both an analysis and contextual description of the public that such an event brings into being at the time that it did. The social milieu in which the Art Fair took place is read off from field notes, press materials and interview data, and so reflects a horizontal reading across material gathered in the field to lay out elements of the ‘now’ that forms the backdrop to this study. A second aim is to understand both what the organisers imagined their publics would be and the ways in which such publics are fluid. Publics comprise of and are constituted by drama, performance, imagination and idiosyncratic biographies that conglomerate around ever shifting and changing trend points. While the lens brought to bear on this material is one that focuses on ‘publics’, it is also, always a way of looking that illuminates the social. In the context of the Fair, this has to be seen as shedding light on practices of consumption. Consumption here is read as a public act both of buying, and of buying *into*, which includes, therefore, merely being present at the event. Two main arguments are made: First, that the public that responded to the Fair is not an ‘art public’, but is drawn from diverse social fields. This public cannot be described as homogenous. Moreover, they

were specifically conceived by the organisers to be a 'new' public; in this 'the public' and the idea thereof reflect social shifts in South Africa at this particular moment. This has at least two immediate implications: First, that the public was larger and more diverse than any contemporary art platform had managed to conglomerate before in this country; and, second, that the publics of the Fair are essentially speculative, both in marketing terms and in how they perceive each other. The second argument I put forward is that both Art Fairs took place at a critical and difficult time in South Africa and that this worked simultaneously *for* and *against* the Fair: for in as far as it represented for its audience a sense of a 'normal' city and cultural landscape amidst radical uncertainty and precariousness; and against, in that many South Africans that the Fair is aimed at, are not able to see a future for themselves in this country, which, in turn, affects their art buying patterns.

Speculations on the Art Fair Public

A local, Sunday-paper's lifestyle section described the public to the first Joburg Art Fair's opening night event in the following way:

The poshest crowd of the year squashed into the bowels of the Sandton Convention Centre on Thursday for the opening of the exciting Joburg Art Fair. A-listers and slightly lesser beings from the business and arts world – with nearly 1000 well-dressed folks saying yes to the launch of the first fair of its kind in South Africa – came to look at this unique selection of local art... Many guests were the bank's 'private clients' and you need to have squillions to be one of those⁷⁵.

This kind of crowd description was exactly what the sponsor and the organising company aimed to achieve by spending a large amount of money on wine, food and decoration for this by-invitation-only social event. The target market, as the description accurately picked up, was what the marketing world refers to as A-income, LSM eight to ten, 'high net-worth', and some might say, 'privileged'. In South Africa, sometimes more so than in some other regions of the world, 'privilege' is heavy with political meaning. In contemporary South Africa, one of the clear scandals of the post-apartheid is the seemingly uncontrollable separation between the fates, lifestyles and fortunes of rich and poor and some journalists have read the Art Fair as a manifestation of this contemporary

⁷⁵ Gwen Gill, 'Red dots and jackets of note hit the Joburg Art Fair.' March 16, 2008, *Sunday Times*.

feature. This view of the Fair was introduced earlier through the opinions of journalist Johan Myburgh⁷⁶. Robins (2005) in his introduction to *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid* reminds readers 'During the anti-apartheid struggle, left-scholars had described apartheid as a system of racial capitalism whose overthrow would require more than simply taking racially based legislation off the statute books' (2005: 1). Robins and many other writers have pointed out that changes to South African economic life, or the remaking of its capitalism after democracy, for many have been invisible and disappointing.

Writing for the April 2009 issue of *Portfolio* magazine, Andrew Rice⁷⁷ uses the Art Fair as real-life anchor for just this kind of scrutiny. He situates the Fair as back-drop to an investigations into the, at the time, immanent change-over from a Mbeki-lead government to that of Jacob Zuma. In his article, *Spoils of Prosperity*, Rice describes, in heavy (many would say problematic), caricature the crowd as 'the multihued members of South Africa's prosperous post-apartheid elite – unshaven white hipsters speaking English in boarding-school accents; jowly old Afrikaner descendants of the Dutch settlers, who ruled the country oppressively into the 1990s; lissome black women, their dresses slight and their hair straightened, sipping Stellenbosch wines alongside their well-tailored dates, members of a young class of black-township-born tycoons'.

For Rice the Joburg Art Fair, first, embodied the contradictions of contemporary South Africa, and second, provided a foil against which socio-economic critique could be levelled; a clear indication that 'the fall of apartheid made many people in South Africa – white and black – fabulously rich'. Adding a more informed, local, point of view, journalist for the *Financial Mail*, Justice Malala, however, sees the Art Fair as a haven away from the crassness Rice invokes: 'A lot of column inches have been dedicated to SA's conspicuous consumption. People bend over backwards to buy the biggest car, and want to arrive at places in a manner that will illustrate that they have 'made it'... It is not just crass. It is juvenile. So I was very happy to be invited to several functions last week inaugurating Joburg Art Fair ... Here seems the thing about a great piece of art. You cannot rub poor people's faces in it as seems to be the habit among the moneyed these

⁷⁶ Interview, 10 November 2008, Johan Myburgh, South African arts journalist, Beeld

⁷⁷ <http://www.portfolio.com/executives/features/2009/03/18/Profile-of-South-African-Leader-Zuma?tid=true>

days. You can hang it up in your home and enjoy it forever, but it is not acquired for telling the world that you have ‘made it’.⁷⁸

Both these journalists are highlighting two distinct aspects of the Joburg Art Fair opening night public: first, that they formed part of what has been called an ‘elite’, which, locally, is undergoing a process of change, and, second, that such ‘elites’ have specific relations to art. The first observation has to do with a perception of a ‘class’ of people that the Fair was aimed at and concerns, amongst other things, a ‘growth in the black middle class’, or a ‘demographic mobility’ (Laden, 2001: 522) that has become a characteristic of the post-apartheid, and the second situates art as a unique consumer good that has bearing on one’s social status. I return to these two observations throughout this chapter.

Now taking a step back from these projections onto the opening night of the first Joburg Art Fair, it is necessary to consider who the Fair organisers imagined as their public, how they went about communicating with that public, and how they would describe those ‘groups’. Their articulation of these aims can be found in proposal documents written at early stages of the planning process. One of these proposal documents, prepared for a ‘process meeting’ with the sponsor, outlines the following:

Over and above the business of buying and selling art, the Fair would create a new class of art buyers in South Africa and Africa. South Africa’s current economic successes and more equitable distribution of wealth have resulted in a growing pool of South Africans from all our cultures who stand as potential art buyers and investors. The Joburg Art Fair as a hot event on the social calendar will draw in these new potential buyers – and offer them a friendly, empowering buying environment.

They continue: ‘Art Fairs are about the business of art; it combines art and lifestyle, thereby appealing to an audience that would ordinarily shy away from the white cube gallery space’. Their aim was, thus, to create and conglomerate ‘new’ publics’, by creating a ‘friendly’ and different environment which simulates ‘lifestyle’ options.

A substantial portion of their target audience, then, was perceived as the kind of person described by many of my interview respondents as those who find the space of the

⁷⁸ Justice Malala, ‘All crass, No class.’ March 21, 2008, *Financial Mail*.

gallery intimidating – an observation raised routinely by respondents, even though they themselves go to galleries all the time. In one of our early interviews Douglas⁷⁹ put the problem thus: ‘One of the reasons why galleries are so intimidating when you go in there, is because most time, nine out of ten, there are five staff and one visitor and you are not camouflaged’. Kirsty Wesson⁸⁰, whom we met before as the ten-years-long gallery assistant and curator for the Goodman Gallery, describes the same phenomenon: ‘You know, it is quite strange, a lot of people feel that galleries are very elitist and they feel quite cold and they feel that they don’t really understand. They don’t know the kind of rhetoric and the art historical context and they are too scared to ask’.

Fair director, Douglas’ own vast network, a result of his background outside of the arts sector which is explored in the next chapter, played a definite role in bringing new publics to the Fair. The extent to which this is true is hard to quantify, yet through various digital campaigns drawing directly from his address book and cell-phone certainly had manifested effect. For Douglas⁸¹ three such examples stood out when we spoke in March 2008 after the Art Fair. The first was a family member, a farmer from Nottingham Road in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands ‘who spent six hours there, and he was just so amazed by all the things he could see for the first three hours, and he then went out for lunch and then came back for a second three-hour session’. Another is a friend of his, a ‘businessmen (who) just sold his business for quite a lot of money who had never bought art before, never thought of buying art before. But then went to the art fair and was so bitten by the bug that he spent R100,000 and had to restrain himself, there were another two or three pieces that he wanted to buy but thought he should stop there. You know wants to be on the invitation list for the pre-emptive buying next year because he wants to be in the front of the queue, et cetera, et cetera’. And a third ‘is a guy in banking at JP Morgan, he lives about 500 m from David Krut and he has never been into David Krut in his life, but ended up buying a work from David Krut. It was the first time he bought an art work and also quite amazed at how that whole process talked to him and resonated with him. And he kept saying to me, it is kind of crazy I have lived next to David Krut for five years but never been in through the door’.

⁷⁹ Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

⁸⁰ Interview, 16 August 2008, Kirsty Wesson, assistant curator at Goodman Gallery Johannesburg.

⁸¹ Interview, 19 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director Joburg Art Fair.

Douglas mused that for these three people, the Art Fair was an introduction to a whole new world that had 'slipped them by'. One also picks up something of this amongst survey respondents. One survey respondent commented that the thing 'he most liked about the Art Fair' was that it was 'very different to places I usually go to'; another stated 'First time at art event, lovely to see different art, become more exposed to what art is'.

The 'proposal document' quoted earlier emphasises that drawing in a new public of this kind was of primary importance. Accordingly in the planning stages, Artlogic had to create an idea of who they might be speaking to locally. What they imagined this public might be like, is most clearly communicated through their advertising campaign. In the first year, Artlogic in collaboration with First National Bank, the presenting sponsor, spent R1 million on advertising across the media platforms of radio, magazine print, newspaper print, online, bookstore activation and billboards. The adverts were differently conceived of for what they identified as different 'publics'.

The most obvious ones were those directed at a local or international art public who read art magazines. These ads followed exactly the formula for the generic international art fair advert. They were comprised of the following elements: the logo, a neutral background, sponsors logos at the bottom and a long list of all the galleries participating in the Fair. Artlogic placed such ads in *ArtForum*, the international art magazine, *Damn*, a European, design-orientated magazine and the local *Art South Africa*. For this 'public' the fair is best described by journalist, Alex Dodd, in a presentation reflecting on the impact of the Fair, as a hybrid between the impersonal trade exhibition and a family reunion; Mark Coetzee, an ex-South African who heads up the Social Responsibility arm of Puma globally described this phenomenon to me when he visited the second Art Fair: 'Why do we all go to Basel every year? Because you get to hang out with your friends and see everybody again'. This first circle of people comprised, then, of what one survey respondent put down as what he most liked about the Fair, 'Seeing everyone you know'. From the pool of survey respondents, 40 % in 2009, and 37% in 2008 when asked 'how did you hear about the Joburg Art Fair?' chose 'from friends' rather than 'advert', 'press', 'online' or 'radio'.⁸²

⁸² This point about the power of 'word of mouth' as advertising tool does of course not only point to the existence of a 'core' of art followers, but also indicate the degree to which networks are mobilised to spread the word on the event.

Outside of this 'core' public, Artlogic then had to imagine a second tier of people and postulate what the relational distance between this public and art might be. A whole series of adverts were created and tailored to specific publications that aimed to draw people into first-time interactions with art. These adverts were constructed using the formal elements of blocks of colour in which different bits of information appeared. Each advert had a large piece of black background that took up two thirds of the page, this area would sport only the Art Fair logo, in white on black and that of FNB. Then would follow horizontal thinnish stripes of colour bars in which dates, venue and website address would be typed out. The bottom third of the advert would be free for the insertion of a 'by-line'. From the copy used as 'by-lines' one can deduce that they had been conceived for people who are familiar with the acts of consumption in the spheres of interior decorating, cars and the stock market and would now have to be introduced to the very concept of buying art. It is telling that here in the first year the 'hook' was that of consumption, rather than appreciation of art. Since there was not unlimited budget, very specific magazines were targeted, based on their demographics, more so than their reach; only four magazines were targeted in this way.

The first was *Classic Feel*, a magazine primarily dedicated to classical music in South Africa and less specifically the other 'arts'. Artlogic placed a series of adverts in the *Classic Feel* magazine for which the by-line read: 'Appreciate art while it appreciates'. Another advert read: 'Why buy art?' and then in point-form beneath: 'Pleasure of the piece; Process of buying; Appreciating asset'.

The second publication was *De Kat*, a local Afrikaans magazine that explains its purchase as 'the art of lifestyle in Afrikaans'.⁸³ For this market the by-line for the campaign read: 'Are your curtains worth more than your art collection? If so I'd be worried'. Ross Douglas often comments that South Africans spend far more on their curtains than they do on their art.

A third was placed in the magazine called *The Afropolitan*, which explains themselves on their website as 'For the intelligent, success driven professional, *Afropolitan* is a breath of

⁸³ <http://www.dekat.co.za/wieisons.html>

fresh air’;⁸⁴ an ‘African professional magazine’. For this audience, the by-line simply read: ‘Is your car worth more than your art collection? If so I’d be worried’.

This concept of introducing the buying of art as investment was pushed to its maximum potential in the then recently launched magazine, *Destiny*. *Destiny* editor and founder, Khanyi Dhlomo, owns her own media company and received an MBA from Harvard and so geared her magazine towards the successful and wealthy South African woman. The magazine press release read as follows: ‘billed as the country’s first high end women’s glossy magazine in which 60% of the publication reflects business content and the balance focuses on lifestyle elements’.⁸⁵ For this, seemingly, very valuable demographic, FNB and Artlogic had booked a double-page spread advert: on the right-hand side was only the logo of the Fair and on the other a piece of advertorial text, laying out in roughly 800 words, the concept of ‘art as alternative form of investment’: ‘Art is increasingly being considered as an alternative investment asset class, but is un-chartered territory for many South Africans... However, FNB cautions that the decision to invest in art is not to be taken lightly. It is important to note that the art market is illiquid, opaque and unregulated. As such, this can sometimes pose as a problem when making the decision to use art as an investment vehicle. However, it is important to diversify your investment options and make sure that you have a balanced portfolio and art could be a good alternative’. The text continues: ‘What makes the Fair so attractive is that they provide collectors with a single point of access to a wide range of galleries that have the credentials and experience to profile artists with investment potential. This type of event will help make the purchase decision a little easier for potential buyers’.

Without being overly simplistic, the adverts tell us the following about the different demographics: *Classic Feel* readers are closest to understanding ‘appreciation’, and is enticed by the notion that art appreciates in value as ‘you appreciate it’ in your lounge. *De Kat* readers are in the habit of splashing out on interior decorating, hence, the ominous voice ‘I’d be worried’ is suggesting that this kind of buying has little long-term value. Similarly for the presumably black, *Afropolitan* reader – a market obsessed with luxury cars: cars are depreciating assets however nice they might be. The voice saying ‘I’d be worried’ here indicates a judgment towards this kind of buying. Lastly, the *Destiny* reader

⁸⁴ <http://www.afropolitan.co.za/pages/324790372/about.asp>

⁸⁵ <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/39/18737.html>

is one that informs themselves and wants a lot more information in order to be enticed into considering art an investment in class – thus, as not just something to enjoy, but as a means of accruing *cultural* capital.

So each advert hints at different ways to convert from economic to cultural and social capital. Anthea Buys, writing for the *Mail and Guardian*, somewhat sarcastically positions this as the aim of the first Art Fair: ‘to introduce the revolutionary notion of owning art to the rank-and-file luxury goods consumer.’⁸⁶ Furthermore these adverts assume that conspicuous consumption is topical in the manner that artist Karel Nel⁸⁷ laments: ‘I think for me the biggest sadness is that the black nouveau riche are buying fast cars and fancy kitchens’.

All of the adverts are premised on the compounded assumption that members of the target market are versed in the act of consumption; that they often do it conspicuously; that art has not yet been the target of their attention; and that they need to be *introduced* to art as something that you can own. When Douglas was given a final opportunity to brief the press just prior to the opening of the first Joburg Art Fair, he chose to focus on the difficulties of speaking to this kind of new public in South Africa. He emphasised that in this country, one is not speaking to a public that knows what art fairs are, but one is trying to entice a public that is yet to become interested in art at the most basic of levels. Journalist Lizza Littlewort⁸⁸ explained in an interview much later, that this press presentation by Douglas, for her ‘set the tone’ of the Fair, it was also, she explained, one of the ‘most realistic’ things she had heard in a long time: ‘in South Africa we not only have to say “well here is our art fair and it is this good” but to at the same time, within the phrase sort of explain what art is and why you should be interested in it in the first place.’

Littlewort, herself also an artist, became very passionate in our conversation around this topic – she perceives herself as not from the art world nor belonging to the general class of the privileged that she encountered when she decided at the age of 40 to start an undergraduate degree in art. She described her frustration with younger art students who

⁸⁶ Anthea Buys, ‘The art of selling art.’ 7 March 7, 2008, *Mail and Guardian*.

⁸⁷ Interview, 11 March 2008, Karel Nel, Practicing South African artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

⁸⁸ Interview, 19 November 2008, Lizza Littlewort, practicing South African artist and art cartoonist.

‘will all believe that everybody gets something from art, if you come there with an art education you can bring certain things to it and then other people might come there and be like “wow those colours are nice” and “I like the fact that it is dripping like this” and I don’t think that they have any perception of the fact that for intelligent members of the public to come and be faced with something they don’t understand is not like a happy experience’. Littlewort’s point is that members of the public not familiar with the ‘stuff’ of art or art buying, should not be seen as uneducated, but, more likely ‘educated’ individuals for whom a first encounter with art could be highly unsettling as they do not have, what Bourdieu (1998) would call, the ‘encultured’ knowledge to decode it. Artlogic seems to have come at this dilemma through the vehicle of luxury consumption as a known and familiar experience that might be successfully superimposed onto art works. The adverts have nothing to do with art education, or art history, but simply the value to be had through the purchasing thereof.

Demonstrating the context of this strategy was the first Joburg Art Fair opening night address by the then Premier of Gauteng, Mbhazima Shilowa, who would emerge in the following months as a political celebrity.⁸⁹ In his speech, he drew attention to the unfamiliarity of art for many South Africans. His closing remarks on the Fair, mentioned below, are highly suggestive and yet were mentioned by only one newspaper columnist, in *Sowetan* upon reporting from the Fair. Edward Tsumele,⁹⁰ in his article *Grasping Art* positions his comment in the following way:

The premier of Gauteng, Mbhazima Shilowa, who opened the fair, said those like him, who had no clue about art, should not bother but just buy whatever art they fancied and find a good space for it in their homes, finish and klaar. No worries about aesthetics or investment potential. This is probably good advice within the context of the South African art market, particularly when it comes to art appreciation. Art is only appreciated by a small, elite class. Shilowa’s comment might have shocked many people, had he said it at an art fair in a sophisticated art market.

Tsumele’s framing of the comments made by Shilowa exposes the degree to which the ‘encounter’ of the Art Fair for many South Africans of different races was a ‘first time’

⁸⁹ Shilowa’s background lies in the trade union movement that formed one of the three legs of the ruling party alliance. In the months between the first Art Fair and the second, Shilowa would move out of his ANC-appointed position as Premier of the Gauteng Province to join, and become one of the faces of, a breakaway political party, Congress of the People, or COPE a party that many have commented were directed at the ‘new black middle class’ rather than the ‘masses’.

⁹⁰ Edward Tsumele, ‘Grasping art.’ March 18, 2008, *Sowetan*.

one and that it has not yet been assimilated into patterns of 'social marking' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996).

One of my interviewees, an employee of Artlogic's, also picked up on this seemingly pragmatic comment by the then Premier. Jaco van Schalkwyk⁹¹ is a 30-year-old, white male who, like many South Africans, had left South Africa a decade ago to study and work in New York, having, at the time, just returned to South Africa. The extract from my interview with Van Schalkwyk below places an interesting emphasis on Tsumele's observation:

... if you think of the opening night, the Premier, he had no clue, I don't think he had ever hung a work of art in his life, it is a thing where you don't have an engrained sense of success means, I buy art, you know. There is the ... the sense that successful African business man ... in NY I met many Kenyans, Ugandans who are very successful and they come to NY and they live this life of successful African businessmen, not middle class, at least upper-middle class, highly educated, highly successful and then what do you do, do you go Puff Daddy? Or do you go ... Yves St Laurent, what do you buy, how do you this thing as a successful black African businessman and that sort of identity is something that changes constantly, it is not just African, it is also African American businessman, do I get the BMW or do I get the Hummer?

Van Schalkwyk was constructing an argument around the 'work' commodities could perform and, primarily, the role of art as status symbol. He continued: 'at some point the decisions, the possibility of making the decision "do I buy a work of art," starts featuring in that spectrum of decisions'. According to him, it is at that point that one would start to accrue wealth and become a different kind of consumer: 'You might not get it and then you will not be wealthy you will just be rich, Chris Rock makes that great distinction between, you know, we are running around trying to be rich, but the queen is wealthy, there is a real difference. You know just because you wear a Rolex, doesn't mean that you are wealthy'. This, Van Schalkwyk opined is something that is part of 'an education that happens through a demographic or through social strata and that takes time'. Returning again to the Premier's speech, he stated 'that', referring to the comments made by the Premier, 'doesn't equate to buying art yet'.

⁹¹ Interview, 19 March 2008, Jaco van Schalkwyk, Artlogic designer.

Van Schalkwyk's argument around 'art' and 'wealth' expresses a similar point to some of what Bourdieu constructed through his research on art's relation to social and cultural capital in *Distinction*, specifically as it translates to class and social standing. In the extract below, Bourdieu draws a parallel between luxury consumption and the buying and owning of 'cultural goods' in the same manner that Van Schalkwyk does for the local context:

If among all fields of possibles, none is more obviously predisposed to express social difference than the world of luxury goods, and, more particularly, cultural goods, this is because the relationship of distinction is objectively inscribed within it, and is reactivated, intentionally or not, in each act of consumption, through the instruments of economic and cultural appropriation which it requires (1998: 226).

In trying to come to grips with the implications of Bourdieu's 'distinction' in this country, Van Schalkwyk's crude framework of description, one which is primarily about race, needs to be taken seriously and analysed. Deborah Posel (2009)⁹² has theorised some of the ways that 'black' consumption and class mobility have been written and spoken about in South Africa as a political reading of the black person as consumer within the particular historical paradigm of this country and the liberation struggle. Wendy Luhabe (2007) phrases this kind of phenomenon as one of the founding principles of Black Economic Empowerment: 'We must reject the widely held notion that it is acceptable for white people to be wealthy but that wealth creation for black people is obscene' (20). This was not Van Schalkwyk's point, his was closer to that of Bourdieu, rather it rings true of those referred to earlier made by Rice. Rice's comments on the Art Fair above might well fall into such a reading as most of the Art Fair visitors that he mentions as noteworthy are black. That is, a reading that places special focus on the fact of black consumption as somehow scandalous. The director of the Art Fair stated in many interviews that the fair aims especially to grow art appreciation amongst the 'new black moneyed'; he explained that 'in the art world, we are yet to exploit the new black middle class into buying art. We have not been able to convince them of it – Louis Vuitton has convinced them very successfully, Hugo Boss has, Prada has, et cetera'. What this means in this particular context is a complex coming together of art works as very unique commodities or 'marking services' with a growth in black wealth,

⁹² Posel presented a working paper at the WISER Summer School Conference in June 2009 in Johannesburg. The paper explored the connection between politics and consumption by black people in South Africa.

together with crude readings of how wealth should relate to art buying of a certain kind. However, unlike, perhaps the opening event of a mining convention, the Art Fair certainly did not draw a crowd the majority of which was black, yet it is within this sector that the most 'speculation' is at work in contemporary South Africa,⁹³ both economically and socially (where do they go for entertainment, what do they buy?) often forgetting the many other kinds of middle-classness within particular demographics at work within this country.

Returning to the advertising campaign, it is noteworthy then, that the advertisements for the first Joburg Art Fair aimed to do away with the notion of art buying linked to historical privilege by dovetailing, in the minds of their target audience, general acts of consumption with that of art consumption. Considering the theoretical framework of consumption that I highlighted in the Introduction, one could argue that this reading of consumption by the organisers was conceived of narrowly: that people buy stuff for its value alone. It is telling that in the second year, this sharp focus on consumption as buying per se was considerably softened in the advertising campaign. As I explain below, the Fair seemed to have moved from an understanding of consumption that is in line with those discussed above, yet in quite a restricted sense, to one much more in tune with consumption as social act. For the 2009 Joburg Art Fair, the campaign was conceptualised as 'people looking at art'. In these adverts, an image would take up a large proportion of the advert and would depict people or a person silhouetted in front of an artwork, presumably contemplating that work at an exhibition opening. Some of these photographs were taken from those commissioned for the first Art Fair, (actual members of the public photographed looking at the art at the Fair), but others were especially shot at various exhibition openings around Johannesburg. The concept was to entice the public to identify with the person looking at the art, thereby not forcing him or her to contemplate the work itself, but to see herself as already part of an audience, screened by other people, or seeing herself as part of a group simply looking at an art work. By looking at the work 'over the shoulder' of the figure in the advert, she will already be forming part of a public 'looking at art' – thereby closing the distance between an imagined public that might not have looked at art before, and actual works of art. It also introduced a more diversified idea of an art public: the art public, it seemed to be saying

⁹³ Recurrent and very expensive marketing conferences such as the Unilever 'Black Diamonds on the move' would be one such that demonstrates the viciousness of this concept.

is not just a buying public, or about *buying* art, but also about looking, learning and judging. Such an approach might better prepare a viewer for what Littlewort describes as a potentially ‘unhappy’ and personal first encounter with art. Her views elaborated earlier, communicate the degree to which the South African general public might not have had much contact with art and would, therefore, not know what ‘to do with it’ when they do encounter it. Littlewort’s point is highlighted here specifically as it is one of the few of my respondents who relayed this encounter in these terms, of a possibly violent confrontation, thereby demonstrating a level of compassion and empathy as someone who herself feels that the learning curve is a steep and deeply defamiliarising one.

The underlying assumption of Littlewort’s opinion, that by far the greatest part of the South African public is to some degree ‘ignorant of art’, mirrors a fundamental point that comes across in my interview data, where the vantage point was that of the ‘core’ art community (for whom the Fair is a ‘family reunion’) being asked who they think the art public might be. The Fair, I would like to argue, articulates a tension between a public that sees itself as ‘inside’ and a public that Artlogic would like to entice into art. Furthermore, as I explain below, a tension exists between the stark characterisation of the ‘new’ or ‘outside’ art public, in other words the ideas harboured about who they are and how they behave, and the manifestation of ‘them’ at the Fair. Artist Beezy Bailey⁹⁴, in our discussion quoted himself as ‘always saying’: ‘a truck driver in France knows more about art than a company director in South Africa’. He continued: ‘So we, as an artist, we deal with the consequences of that on a daily basis, this terrible level of ignorance, this sea of philistines’.

Many also commented that it is not necessarily that the ‘general public’ might not have encountered art before in their lives, but rather that they have ‘the wrong’ idea of what to buy. In fact, large amounts of money might well be spent on art in South Africa, but not of the kind to be found at the Art Fair.

In our interview, gallerist Baylon Sandri⁹⁵ explains his understanding of this kind of market section, presumably, one that *De Kat* speaks to: ‘The market from Pretoria especially, I am sorry to say, that I think has done a lot of harm because they really do

⁹⁴ Interview, 1 November 2008, Beezy Bailey, Practicing South African artist.

⁹⁵ Interview, 1 November 2008, Baylon Sandri, director SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch.

buy in a very narrow kind of way. And that is why a guy like Adriaan Boshoff is selling for over a million'. Boshoff is a South African artist painting in what Sandri characterises as a 'pastiche' of an impressionist style – he paints colourful landscapes and flowers. This work, Sandri explains, covers the pages of South African auction house catalogues, and would never make it into those of auction houses internationally. What Sandri means by 'narrow', is much like what Andries Oberholzer⁹⁶ explains as 'Pretoria art buying tendencies': 'People all over your new nouveau riche suburbs, they would love to have these big, huge paintings of flowers ... and bloekom trees and all those kinds of things. That's what they want and that is the way that their interiors are designed because it goes very well with the French Tuscan-look houses'.

Pretoria is a city to the North of Johannesburg, historically seen as 'Afrikaans'. Andries Oberholzer, whom we met before as the representative from the Department of Arts and Culture, is Afrikaans himself, from Pretoria and working there, since many national government offices are located in Pretoria. He has well-honed theories on who the art public is, and explained that according to him there are four distinct sectors. From the extract below it is clear that he is conflating the terms 'public' and 'market', but he feels they are virtually the same thing:

Your first market is your craft market, where people see a little framed skuldvelletjie with two assegais and a little pot, and they see that as art. And they buy that from curio shops, alongside the road, at holiday destinations like in Mpumalanga. That's your first market. Your second market is the market that buys from Art in The Park and from your one type of commercial gallery, your guy that does framing, and framing of prints that he buys from a catalogue that he gets from Hudson or wherever. They see that as art. They don't have the knowledge to know whether this is a real artwork or whether this is a poster, and they don't care as long as it looks nice.

Without needing to give it much thought, Oberholzer reeled this theory out in one breath as if having conceived of it previously:

Then you have your third level, which is your more educated private collector. These are people mostly in ... Well, it used to be older people but now lately I see it's more younger people that have money, firstly, that have built or bought a house. In most instances these people have also

⁹⁶ Interview, 7 March 2008, Andries Oberholzer, Directorate Multimedia: Visual Arts, Department of Arts and Culture.

inherited some artworks and they are trying to build on collections by starting, mainly buying watercolours or etchings, or those kinds of things. I think their background actually helps them with what they purchase. These people will be able to buy your small Kentridge, they will be able to buy your small Boonzaier, your small sculpture. Maybe if it is a functional role, or whatever. Then you've got your fourth level, which is your serious collector, where we talk about a person buying from auctions, buying with the purpose of maybe reselling for a bigger profit, where art is a prestigious something to have in your house, but on that fourth level it's really like 'This is the thing', like 'I own four Maggie Laubschers', you know, or whoever. I think it becomes more a thing of pride. And you see, the thing with that is, unfortunately with everything that is maybe 2% of the population. Whereas your bottom percentage is maybe 40%.

A couple of things are happening within this extract that bear upon the argument about 'art publics' that is crafted here. A surface reading merely illustrates that the man has an opinion and has given this some thought – in this, as I have mentioned, he is not at all alone; the people who consider themselves inside the 'art public' by default, have opinions about those that are not. A deeper reading reveals the extent to which the opinions are based on very distinct attributes that speak back to the person buying, creating a discourse between the work and the buyer. Never in this extract does a person just 'buy what they like' at a given time; they buy within strands of knowledge and style, which cast them, in turn, into distinct spheres forming a pyramid diagram with a clearly identifiable pinnacle. What he does not explain is whether there might be movement between the strata; rather the extract gives the impression of hard horizontal boundaries that are not traversed, leaving very little room for individuation, or individual spontaneous decision-making.

This brings the discussion to the manner in which respondents tend to name and isolate 'groups' within a larger understanding of the 'art public'. In this the 'art public' mirrors and mimics ways in which South Africans can be said to generally conceive of fellow 'strangers' – to evoke again Warner's (2005) formulation of a public as a relation amongst strangers. The 'Afrikaans' group is one of them and is often named. FirstRand CE, Paul Harris⁹⁷, believes contrary to the two individuals above that 'funny enough, in the Afrikaans community, I think, there is a greater appreciation for art. I definitely think so'. Another such group is the so-called 'new black middle class', of which everyone seems to have an opinion. Many respondents think that Gallery Momo, owned and run by a black

⁹⁷ Interview, 20 March 2008, Paul Harris, CE FirstRand

gallerist, is attracting more black buyers into the market. Yet, he assured me that while there has been a demographic change in the 'art public' in the past decade 'let's not beat around the bush, let's talk numbers. This gallery is predominantly white-supported and black support is about 5%. Like I said, *Picasso*⁹⁸ has changed that to 8%'.⁹⁹

The general feeling amongst interviewees is that this market has not yet begun to buy art. The reasons given in most instances are not the stuff of facts, but rather biases that still powerfully direct the ideas South Africans harbour about each other. For example, it is an obvious fact that the vast majority of South Africans of all races are more interested in luxury cars and curtains than they are in the buying of art, yet this is the only group with whom conspicuous consumption is routinely associated. Ruark Peffers¹⁰⁰, another interviewee for this study, shares a demographic with Van Skalkwyk quoted above, yet, in his role as director of the painting department at a local auction house,¹⁰¹ has economic incentives for expressing an exasperation at the slow rate of 'conversion' between new 'black' money and art buying:

You get Tokyo Sexwale, he is just not interested and Cyril Ramaphosa¹⁰², yes who is worth gagillions, he is just not really interested. And have we tried? They are called the black diamonds, and there was this huge BEE black diamond everybody getting so excited, we must get them, we must get them, but you get them to a cocktail party, you show them the stuff, you are like this is Gerard Sekoto, he left the country out of political exile for you know, it is like surely you relate to this, and you try without sounding like a complete elitist, racist kind of snob and say fool why are you not buying this; you can afford it? But it is like you can't make somebody appreciate something, you are like dude this is your heritage.

Peffers' characterisations of the art buying interests of this group of rich black South Africans are crude but, I found, reflects a sentiment that is surprisingly commonly shared amongst people I interviewed for this study.

⁹⁸ Mokoena is referring to the *Picasso in Africa* exhibition sponsored by and held in the Standard Bank Gallery as well as the South African National Gallery, which he experienced as a major boost to the amount of black South Africans interested in art generally.

⁹⁹ Interview, 24 April 2008, Monna Mokoena, Owner and director of Gallery MOMO.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, 7 October 2008, Ruark Peffers, Ex-director of Sotheby's Paintings Department.

¹⁰¹ At the time of interviewing Peffers had resigned from this position.

¹⁰² Both these individuals have made great post-apartheid business successes and are often mentioned as at the top of the of Black Economic Empowerment sphere.

Apart from the fact that ‘they’ keep emigrating, little fault could be found with the group often referred to as the ‘Jewish collectors’. Journalist Sean O’Toole describes ‘them’ as ‘constituting’ a very ‘earnest and committed buyer base’, yet lamented that ‘a lot have left over the past two decades’.¹⁰³ Ruark Peffers confirmed that in his experience, the Jewish community has an ‘inherent appreciation of art’, and that ‘if you show me a truly, truly spectacular Irma Stern, that is worth 15 bar the three people I would take you to, all 3 of them are Jewish’. So too Baylon Sandri, quoted above, has similar ideas about ‘Jewish buyers’, but differ from most in his opinions on the ‘black buyers’: ‘The Jewish community, throughout history have for some or other reason got an appreciation for the finer things in life and they can identify it, they can see quality in things which I think many people just can’t see and that is cultural in many ways, and the one thing that I like about the black buyers that I find, and that is why I get along with a lot of black artists, the real deal kind of artists, they seem to have that instinct for the appreciation of quality’.

Reading vertically across interview data and reportage on the Fair the assumption that comes across is that the buying of contemporary art reflects a certain kind of personality which is somehow incompatible with the buying of cars and curtains. However, the fieldwork revealed that the buying of art by art buyers is something that, while having the tendency to become somewhat obsessive (not unlike the buying of cars for some), it is an act of consumption that is integrated into a lifestyle; thus variegated, where people move in and out of ‘hierarchies’ prescribed by taste and style, buying-patterns and identification. Answers by gallerists to the question of who their buyers are, and who the public might be ‘who never buys’ but always looks, are far more resistant to grouping or hierarchising and far more idiosyncratic. This reveals something about the dynamic at play within interviews, where the respondent often feels obliged to have an opinion when ‘put on the spot’ with a question such as ‘who do you think the art public is?’, yet later in the conversation when anecdotes and experiences are relayed, these opinions are placed in much more uncertain and individuated terms. As Douglas and Isherwood puts it: ‘Often it is not so much about a having made a decision (about what to buy) but of having been overtaken by events’ (1996: 4), suggesting one can buy a piece of art at the Fair, and the act would have nothing to do with undergoing a personality transformation or jumping up a level in class and taste, but simply being carried along by the moment.

¹⁰³ Interview, 15 September 2008, Sean O’Toole, Editor Art South Africa and free-lance journalist.

Similarly, many interview respondents who buy art seem to do so across a wide spectrum of 'tastes' and hierarchies of style, with the possible exception of the very focused 'super collector' who sees himself as somewhat of a museum for contemporary art, of which, in this country, Gordon Schachat¹⁰⁴ is probably the best and only example.

What then might be an estimated size of this 'public' – the one that might be interested in the Joburg Art Fair; or come to it if they are in town for the weekend; or who would make a point of being in town; or who would buy art? Artlogic's financial director, Kevin Fleischer¹⁰⁵ believes: 'The problem with that in South Africa is that it is very small, very small, 20,000 people, I don't know, but it is very small, smaller than the DSTV (Digital Satellite Television) market, it is a subset of the DSTV market, it is smaller than the BMW and Mercedes market, it is a tiny market. But it is very high end'. Of this rough estimate, gallerist Gavin Rooke expressed without any reservation: 'I believe that there are under 500 people in this country that on any meaningful and ongoing bases purchase art above R50,000'.¹⁰⁶ Regardless of how accurate these estimates might be, what is noticeable is the gap between the committed buyer base and the potentially interested base of people. Accordingly, perhaps, many journalists reporting on the Fair thought it appropriate to publish a 'guide to buying art' leading up to the Fair that would arm the new-comer with some hard facts. Gavin Rooke is quoted in *Classic Feel* as saying: 'Firstly, (works) must carry a balance of craft and concept. Secondly, they must represent a new direction in contemporary art. This can apply to work created yesterday or over a hundred years ago. Thirdly, they must be part of a family of work that are all recognizable as being part of the same family. A one hit wonder is seldom, if ever, a key acquisition'.¹⁰⁷

In this manner expressed by Gavin Rooke through *Classic Feel*, it is clear from the press material that the arts press felt it necessary to reach out to a public and arm them with a tool kit for appreciation and buying art. The *Financial Mail* published on two different occasions similar lists on what to look out for or how to move from 'looker' to 'buyer',

¹⁰⁴ Schachat and his staff members were the only instance where an invitation to be interviewed for this study was declined.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, 31 March 2009, Kevin Fleischer, Artlogic shareholder, Financial director.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, 18 September 2008, Gavin Rooke, Part-owner of Rooke Gallery, Johannesburg.

¹⁰⁷ CF Team, 'Leading African and international galleries at the Joburg Art Fair.' March 2008, *Classic Feel*.

as did the *Weekender* and the *Mail and Guardian*.¹⁰⁸ Brenden Grey, blogger for the online version of the *Art South Africa* magazine, clearly imagines a very large gap between someone like himself who is 'in' the art world and those that are not. His description of what one would need to create an educated and informed buyer base out of the 'public' assumes that they don't know much: 'The fair generally produced a kind of slow, rhythmic pacing because of the massive glut on show. People simply were not looking at art but browsing to pack as much in as possible in one visit'.¹⁰⁹ The audience in his mind is one resembling a horde of cattle trekking through the Fair without the impetus to stop and look at art, because according to him, they lack the necessary 'education'. A similar version of the buying public as somehow uneducated and belonging to a different group altogether is echoed in an article by journalist Mary Corrigan in which she quotes Anitra Nettleton, professor at the University of the Witwatersrand School of Arts, as saying about the buyers at the first Joburg Art Fair: 'Yuppie elitists will probably buy the artworks'.¹¹⁰

In the more contemplative space of the blogosphere, Grey, however, comes to admit in a later blog 'Looking at my snapshots of people interacting at the Joburg Art Fair I begin to think that perhaps the commercialization of art is not such a bad thing if we consider that it may engender a new model of sociability. I don't know what happened in those stalls, the kinds of conversations that took place between gallery staff and visitors, artists and buyers, but I am sure that the idea of an art fair allowed ordinary people the opportunity to speak to and about the objects they encountered there, without the dutiful obligation to understand what it was all supposed to mean.' Grey's comments elucidate the positions held by a particular kind of 'public' as well as providing an example of a particular kind of 'art person'. First he sees those outside the art world as 'other', 'uninformed', and identifiable as group; but he then, through the vehicle of the Fair and the space provided him by the internet, undergoes somewhat of a transformation of his assumptions as he comes to contemplate through the process of blogging every day that art here might serve as vehicle for an alternative mode of 'sociability' – simply a reason for coming together, for getting out, for encountering

¹⁰⁸ Sean O'Toole 'Is making money out of art luck... or something more?' May 25, 2008, *Financial Mail*; Anthea Buys, 'Do-it-yourself Guide for collectors: The Joburg Art Fair is Africa's first contemporary art fair ever. It offers a prime opportunity to start collecting art.' March 14, 2008; *Financial Mail*; Anthea Buys, 'Making fair work of Africa's talent.' March 15, 2008, *The Weekender*.

¹⁰⁹ Brenden Grey, 'To be fair – Mixed feelings.' March 17, 2008, *Art South Africa online*.

¹¹⁰ Mary Corrigan, 'The Bottom line is the Art of Success.' March 9, 2008, *The Sunday Independent*.

things and having conversations around different topics. Even at this point, however, he is not ready to let go of his assumption that the 'general public' feels somewhat startled by 'the dutiful obligation to understand what it was all supposed to mean'. Much of the process of 'making' new publics is precisely that of sociability and that perhaps is foremost amongst what the Fair enables. The fact that there is a general lack of acknowledgement of this 'attempt' in the press material is perhaps not that uncommon, and that is not the point here, rather the aim is to understand the different ways in which publics might be conceived of and ascribed attributes to, especially in so marked a territory as the appreciation of art.¹¹¹

In this instance, Grey was part of a public that communicated about the event from private spaces in a way that illustrates Warner's point about the fluidity between the private and the public. Another instance that demonstrated Michael Warner's point on how events can call 'publics' into being from private spaces into a public discourse (2005: 16), was a comment by a member of the public responding online to one of Anthea Buys' articles on the Fair. Buys wrote for the online version of the *Mail and Guardian* with whom the Art Fair formed a media partnership that would ensure that the Fair was covered almost in 'real-time' online. Buys was tasked with keeping this dialogue alive. At the end of numerous postings over the four-day period and leading up to it, in which Buys finally atmidet to be relieved that the Fair is over, a blogger, Robert Saner, posted the following: 'I am also glad that the Art Fair, whatever it was, is over and now we "dumped down" types don't have to read any more incomprehensible articles about how art is uncomprehended'.¹¹²

Robert Saner's comment is suggestive. The tone is reminiscent for me of that which comes across in a reading of the comments to the open-ended question at the end of the survey questionnaire: 'what did you most like or dislike about the Joburg Art Fair'. It is an ambiguous comment in the way that it acknowledges the preconception afloat amongst the art press writing on the Joburg Art Fair, that they are writing for people who find art 'incomprehensible', without admitting that this is a true assumption, yet further suggests that the writing itself is 'incomprehensible'. This comment unsettles for me the very fixed 'ideas' about art publics that come across from both the majority of my

¹¹¹ I refer here to the discussion in the Introduction section of Bourdieu's (1998) *Dinstinction*

¹¹² Anthea Buys, '4 Responses to Fair Game'. March 21, 2008, *Mail and Guardian Online, Thought Leader*.

interview data, and the press material. What 'Saner' introduces, is a public that is not 'Afrikaans', or 'Jewish', 'startled' and 'uneducated', but complex and unpredictable. It is this quality that pervades the survey information, not to discredit what my interviewees have found in their fields, but to perhaps suggest the many ways in which the 'new public' is not one that is known or easily classifiable.

The survey questionnaires referred to above were distributed to every visitor to the fair who bought a ticket. At any time there were three research assistants positioned within the fair encouraging visitors to complete their questionnaires. In 2008, the Fair visitor numbers for the duration of the Fair, including the invited guests on the opening night, were 6500; during those four days 646 questionnaires were returned; the 2009 visitor numbers were 10,000 and we collected 1189 completed surveys. The survey cards were printed so as to have the look of something of some worth. They were carefully designed and laid out by Artlogic's designer to fit neatly onto an A5 paper and printed on a hard card.

The use of a survey as a medium for eliciting information about a group in a study such as this one, which is mostly qualitative, has its limits, as many theorists have indicated (For example, King *et al.*, 2003; Neuman 1997). King *et al* for instance point out that often respondents understand questions in divergent ways leading to answers that are essentially not deducible to the same question; in other instances, answers are simply too abstract to become data that can be measured. This particular survey consisted of eleven questions, ten of which were scaled, and the last was open-ended. The problems highlighted by these authors do not seem to bear upon the findings from the surveys from the Fair, yet it remains true that the survey only illuminates a very surface reading of a public. It should also be acknowledged that answers in many ways are compromised by factors such as what kind of person might be likely to engage in a survey and how the survey might be used as mechanism to communicate to 'an authority figure' thereby skewing answers to either 'trying to be right' or 'trying to be subversive'.

Certain measurable data does however emerge which give an indication of who a public might be, for example, the answers to the question, 'To which economic sector do you belong' brought out the following results: Finance 10%; Media 10%; Academic 17%; Retail 5%; Mining 1%; Manufacture 4,5% not working 13 %; service 11 % and creative

industries 30%. Another interesting point is that there are no discontinuities between the data from 2008 and that of 2009, with percentages for all questions generally varying within a range of 3%. It is telling that in the first year the survey included a question 'did you buy an art work' to which only 7% of respondents replied 'yes', a figure that seems unlikely to be accurate given that the estimated sales figure of that year was between R25 million and R30 million. This could be interpreted to indicate that the 'type' of person who buys art is unlikely to spend the time on surveys, either because she is private, as Beezy Bailey¹¹³ describes art buyers to be: 'Art collectors I have learnt are very low key, very discreet kind of people' or because she is occupied with the work of buying and so differs from the 'browser' who has more time during the Fair to spend on such things as surveys. The survey questionnaires, however, as they stand as 'texts', are useful here as an entry point into the nature of a public that is anonymous, but becomes momentarily vivid and embodied through the voices of participants to the open-ended questions and not in their more common function as producing measurables (Neuman, 1997). It also seems that the surveys offered the public a means to speak back into a space which traditionally and still, as I outlined above, has been sanctioned by experts.

One striking aspect brought to the fore by the comments to the open-ended question (What did you most like, or dislike, about the Fair?) was the extent to which the space and the lay-out of the Fair was on the agenda: the most common comment in relation to this question had to do with spatial organisation, and furthermore, a virtually equal amount of respondents found the space 'confusing' as they did 'very logical'; 'cluttered' or 'spacious'. Thus, for a large amount of respondents, attention was focused on their experience of walking through a constructed space first, and one that displays art, only second.

Then, true to the predictions discussed above by members of the 'art community' that people would be baffled or left cold by the art, one respondent did comment: 'inaccessible, do not know how to decode'. Another, more reflexively pointed out: 'must have open mind to relate to art, did not relate to much'. But most often such a comment was put alongside a 'liked aspect' that elaborates on actual art works. For example, one respondent mentioned that she 'liked' 'Gerard Sekoto, Lindy Sales', but disliked 'don't understand some'; another liked 'well layed out, loved some audio visual work' but

¹¹³ Interview, 1 November 2008, Beezy Bailey, Practicing South African artist.

disliked: 'some work above me', suggesting a far more personalised engagement than that predicted by interview respondents. Some others pointed out that they liked the fact that it was 'accessible'; or 'very friendly unthreatening and great way to educate public about art'; balanced out by 'Too arty, not accessible enough'; while another simply says 'I disliked it and that is it' or 'It was boring and expensive'.

A much more authoritative voice also comes across suggesting a public not at all intimidated by the stuff of contemporary art: 'Too much political commentary, please introduce various themes'; 'Not enough mainstream contemporary'; 'You need more African art work, and more positive work'; 'No period pieces'; 'Too contemporary could not hang anything in my lounge'; disliked 'African artists, should be more international'. In a similar vein, perhaps from the seasoned curtain buyer: 'Too depressing'; 'Disturbing'; 'Too elitist and 80% crap'; 'Too much contemporary stuff, too abstract'; 'Not sure, confused'; 'The art displayed anger and hate'; disliked 'repetitive, dreariness of the work'; 'Graphic nudity, Sodom and Gomorrah'; 'Hoping to see some older classical art'; 'Hate video art'; one person liked 'African beads and textile work most', but disliked 'too much political art, tired of it'. And then the voice of the discerning public: 'Very little new and risky, mostly dull, exhausted'; 'Lots of junk'; 'Too much old stuff'; 'Standard of some work abysmal'; 'Ranged from very bad to very good', and countering that: 'more inspiring than my last visit to the MOMA in New York'; and liked 'The extremely wide variety and the controversial issues addressed like *Security* by Jane Alexander'. And then addressing their fellow public: from 'Nicholas Hauser': 'too many white folk overdressed'; 'Too many people pretending to like art'; another liked 'the audience'; as did someone else: 'Diverse cultures of people attending'. From these extracts emerges a very multi-faceted public, which while seeming to cluster their attention around some common themes, are almost impossible to group. The names given by those who wished to be added to the Joburg Art Fair mailing list as well as information on 'economic sectors' and ages further suggest a varied public.

When, after both the first and the second Joburg Art Fairs, I spoke again to Ross Douglas¹¹⁴, in response to my question of who he now thinks the 'art public' to the Art Fair is, he answered: 'Well I think the first thing is that they are not an art audience and I

¹¹⁴ Interview, 25 April 2009, Ross Douglas, Director of Joburg Art Fair.

think that has been a very important part of the Art Fair. What we realised right up front is that the art audience in this country is very small, and not that commercially desirable'. This is a point that became increasingly important as his sales-pitch for prospective sponsors became not the concept of an art fair, or of African contemporary art, but the chance to speak to a 'valuable' audience. He explained that the art audience:

are a lot of academics and they are clever people, but they are not necessarily BMW buyers, Grolsch drinkers, FNB Private bankers; they are people who grew up with art in their families, who went to university and possibly studied history of art, who are into the whole art narrative, which is fantastic and that is your core of your audience and you don't want to alienate them by any means, but if you are only catering to them you are not going to have something that is commercially viable. And more importantly you are not going to grow the market for your galleries. So right up front the idea was that an art fair is so accessible that it talks to more than the art audience. The gallery openings talk to the art audience and they get 50–250 people a night, the Art Fair gets 10,000.

In the period spanning the first adverts that Douglas conceived of for the Fair and this point in time, he had come to understand his public as those 'curious about contemporary culture', and perhaps not so much those interested in luxury consumption: 'people who read relatively mainstream but nice publications like *Weekender*, *Mail and Guardian*, *Business Day*, *House and Leisure*, et cetera, et cetera, people that are interested in the narrative of what it is to be South African and what a hyena photograph by Pieter Hugo is and where it comes from. So they are really more just curious about contemporary culture of which a large proportion of them are flirting with the idea of starting to buy some, some time when they have the money'.

What stood out for him upon looking back on the Fair on the Saturday and the Sunday was that there were 'a lot of families, which I thought was quite amazing, so kind of families coming through the space with prams and kids'. Douglas believes that this was because this audience wants to 'introduce their kids to culture because there is so little of that in the town. And even if there were some naked penises drawn here and there, they were prepared to take that risk and push their kids through an art environment, I mean all of those people who came through with kids could afford baby sitters, had they thought this was inappropriate for their kids they would have left them at home, with baby sitters. But they wanted to say "look kids this is what art is about", this is the start'.

Picking up on a similar point, Jaco van Sckalkwyk¹¹⁵ quoted above cast his experience of the public at the Fair in the following light:

My favourite museum in the world is the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The reason I enjoy that museum so much is because you go there on a Saturday and Sunday and it is strollers and families and they are going through the museum and they are having coffee or whatever, it is an 'outing' in a sense, you know, so I was very happy to see an art public at the Joburg Art Fair which had to do with families and had to do with strollers, and it wasn't about I don't know... it wasn't about sort of an informed art scene, people who have read up and can tell you everything about everything, this is so hot this year, and so... it wasn't that.

Both these observations bring to light a new characteristic of the presumed art public for the Fair. First, Douglas casts them as simply 'interested in contemporary culture' and second, added details of how they view art generally, not as intimidating or scary, but as one element in a larger understanding of culture and living in South Africa.

The Art Fair for its Public

The comments by Douglas above speak of conceptions that were shaped, changed and formed over the period between the two Art Fairs. I have mentioned before how the sense of the present as particular was always latent within the fieldwork; being mentioned in interviews and directing the planning of the event. This section is dedicated to looking more closely at that time and how the Art Fair sat within it. At a certain point in the field work, both in the construction of the event, and in my conversations with the interview respondents, I became aware that, unlike perhaps fairs in other parts of the world, a certain desperation and 'hope' was attached to this Art Fair in Johannesburg. This sentiment, I realised had to do with conditions of living in South Africa in the year 2008, and in Johannesburg specifically, as it impacted on the 'group' or unit of analyses that this study brought into the research realm. In order to understand this public, it is important to understand how they perceived the Fair and how the social and aesthetic realms became interwoven in a way that might well be unique to this social context. Here the surveys can also be used to dialogue with some of the advertising material discussed earlier in the way that it speaks of 'what is the Art Fair to its public'. The advertising

¹¹⁵ Interview, 19 March 2008, Jaco van Schalkwyk, Artlogic designer.

hinted at what significance the organisers imagined an audience might attach to the event, yet it seems what transpired was far more nuanced. A theme that develops in both the 2008 and 2009 batches of surveys is one in which the event is cast as significant in a broader sense in its role for the city: 'Something different to do in Joburg'; 'Good for South Africa and Johannesburg'; 'Nice place to spend a Sunday afternoon'; 'Great that it exists'; 'liked that it was actually taking place' and 'Want more in 2010!'. For me this reflects some of the mood of a precarious present, where South Africans are making decisions about staying or leaving the country and seeking sign posts of what was termed the 'normal'.

The extract below from journalist and art buyer, Alex Dodd, serves to introduce one such relation to art at this specific moment.

... this is something I feel very passionately about in Johannesburg, and that is why I would be prepared to spend sometimes half of my salary or more on an art work is because I find this an incredible hard core city; quite harsh. The social conditions; the living in such radical proximity to violence; the potential of violence all the time; the lack of natural beauty, all of these things, for me leave me, ... that is not the reason why I am living here, the reason that I am living here is often quite a metaphysical scaffolding, that is quite an, ... a kind of very energising and visible network of people and thinking and minds and creativity. So for me, the art world in Johannesburg is a life-blood, it actually is genuinely a real reason to be here. It is not just a frivolous thing; contemporary art in my world is like a kind of glue that puts my world together. You know in Johannesburg I could be having a truly bleak day, having read some shocking headlines that have happened to people who live in the suburb next door to me, you know, drive through Empire Road, go through a four way stop that has not been fixed for 6 months that is causing a massive traffic jam, just look at, ... infrastructure around me, I am not sure if it is crumbling or being built in relation to 2010. There is this weird sense of decay and construction in the city, mutually at the same time, and I am not sure whether to feel optimistic about it or depressed to be honest. But certainly it is in constant radical change, Johannesburg, and it is destabilising, and yet, on that journey, I can literally go to a gallery to cover a story or to look at a new body of work by an artist and have my entire day turned around. I mean, it is often like that for me, where I go and I meet an artist and I hear about what they are doing, why they are doing it, how they have arrived at this new body of work, and I literally leave feeling so uplifted and excited and energised by their thinking and their output and their application.

What Dodd is expressing is a society experienced as uncertain and often dangerous, where art specifically provides a foil that enriches daily life sufficiently. This notion of precariousness is one often mentioned in scholarship around African cities when the focus is on people's everyday, desires and dreams. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2008) in their volume *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, for example, make reference specifically to the register of uncertainty inherent in African cities. It is a heading under which they consider ways of reading by four different authors, each of which 'have based their reading of the African city on the assumption that in the wake of the new circulations of the global economy, African urban social life is being reshaped in the midst of uncertainty' (2008: 6). While these elements make for very 'creative' living, the authors acknowledge, it comes with incredible burdens, which different kinds of citizens have different strategies for incorporating into their 'life-worlds'. Speaking about Mumbai, Arjun Appadurai's (2002) use terms intimately familiar to South Africans: 'Such cities... are the site of various uncertainties about citizenship... The rich in these cities seek to gate as much of their lives as possible, travelling from guarded homes to darkened cars to air-conditioned offices, moving always in an envelope of privilege through the heat of public poverty and the dust of dispossession. Frequently, these are cities where crime is an integral part of municipal order and where fear of the poor is steadily increasing' (2002: 55).

Comments from the interviewees conducted for this research suggested, at times, weariness with this uncertainty, especially as it hampers social and personal security. One might suggest that those likely to end up at the Art Fair and pay R100 to enter could be classified as a unit of analysis that is privileged relative to other segments of this society, and, some might even blanket them as all falling in the category of elites. It is not a segment of the population that has seen much scholarly attention, as I pointed out in the introduction to this study in relation to the work of Savage and Williams (2008). It is a segment of the population often only mentioned in passing as those that 'gate' themselves. The Art Fair, read in one of its registers placed a momentary spotlight on the lives of this segment of South Africans, for whom much of the 'informal' qualities that Rem Koolhaas, for example, attributes to Lagos and other African cities (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2008: 6) translate into a radical precariousness. Scholarship on these lives often homogenise them as 'the privileged', 'the rich', but in South Africa a vast array of income

groups live in these ways, some extremely wealthy and others, middle-class families looking out for their own safety: bankers, academics, artists, doctors, et cetera.

The taking shape of a feeling of 'precariousness' within the local context, in my own thinking was a result of clustering together of phrases used intermittently, slipped in, as it were, in a very large portion of interviews conducted for this study. These are expressions of extremes. I list some of them here by way of illustration: 'if the country collapses'; '... going to go like Zimbabwe'; 'things like civil wars and the stuff that is happening in Zimbabwe'. 'The other risk is more our own macro politics, so if we get a bunch of sort of incompetent cleptocrats to take over government and the whole South Africa is slipping into nepotism and making stupid policy decisions then that whole, that little experiment could falter, if Joburg had this blaze of glory and now it is going down the tubes'; 'a lot of tension, the big thing is that it shouldn't boil over into something serious, you know, someone shooting someone and that escalating'. As against 'we live in a far more inventive, exciting, global society than we used to'; 'so I think South Africans are very interesting, warm, open people, this is the most incredible stew of cultures I have never seen anything like it anywhere in the world, I don't believe there is. And people who live in Joburg particularly get bored when they go to other places, because once they have figured it out, once they have figured out what is different, it just stays the same and you start thinking god if I have another week that is exactly the same as last week, I am going to shoot myself, whereas here nothing is predictable'; 'I absolutely love living here, I think it is such an amazing country with such different, diverse cultural backgrounds and makes it so interesting, I love it'; 'This is a curiously robust place, our lovely South Africa is, against all odds it seems to rise itself'. It brings to mind Zygmunt Bauman's (2005) description of modern living as 'liquid', as 'a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines ... in a liquid modern society, individual achievements cannot be solidified into lasting possessions because, in no time, assets turn into liabilities and abilities into disabilities' (2005: 1). However, much of Bauman's subsequent characterisation of this 'liquid' state relates to issues of fickleness, fashion and boredom – characteristics not alien to life in Johannesburg by any measure, but perhaps only existing on the surface of a much more troubled and urgent underneath (Bunn, 2008; Nuttall, 2009).

In many ways then, the informants to this study highlighted that living in South Africa in 2008 was particularly filled with uncertainty. Kevin Bloom's writing, in his *Ways of Staying* (2009), traces a continuum of daily insecurity from detailed descriptions of violent crimes committed in wealthy suburbs, and the effects of that on the survivors, to those at the mercy of the xenophobic violence that became public during 2008. Bloom's inquiry, as the title suggests, is one that investigates emigration by South Africans to places where they would feel safer, physically as well as economically, or in other cases, what it would mean to stay in this country. As Bloom suggests, the dynamic of 'staying or leaving' presents a form of luxury, a *choice*, which many of my respondents expressed¹¹⁶ yet, that within that luxury resides massive burdens and personal loss. Many of my interviewees pointed out that South Africa at the moment, and indirectly the art market, is suffering from 'a new wave of emigration' often compared to that of the late '70s and '80s. This seems to be a loaded concept, Linda Givon¹¹⁷, described it as 'this business of abandoning your country'.

What Achille Mbembe in a conference presentation¹¹⁸ referred to as a 'short-termism' prevalent in South Africa that marks for him the spirit of the moment, expresses a freedom to move, yet one that leaves many victims behind. Mbembe coined this term in the context of a prevailing lack of responsibility for actions of self enrichment and corruption that speaks of 'being in the moment' without considerations for one's own future and a complete disregard for the futures of others. Yet, it could be read in a very literal way, which impacts directly on the life of the Art Fair, in as far as it denotes the inability to plan and to imagine a long-term future in the place that is your home. Monna Makoena¹¹⁹ expressed his exasperation at this phenomenon: 'In the last three months ... you know, the amount of people leaving the country has a tremendous impact on our sector. Emigration of people out of this country. And people tend to cast these things in racial tones, but I must say, the level of crime in this country knows no colour'. It

¹¹⁶ Two examples of respondents that have made conscious decisions to live in this country, rather than emigrate are gallerist Liza Essers, and art collector and surgeon, Oupa Morare. Essers stated: 'I am actually very positive about South Africa, otherwise I wouldn't be here, I think it was a massive decision for me, deciding not to emigrate, unlike most of my friends, which is the sad reality for me. Yes absolutely, which is not something that I ... it wasn't a light decision, but probably I think something that, I think a lot of South Africans feel very, I think the sense is that they feel isolated, that they are stuck here, and maybe I don't feel that, I am a global citizen so it doesn't really matter.' Morare has a similar attitude: 'I think South Africa is very interesting, and it has its own negatives and positives, but I am hopeful otherwise I wouldn't be here'.

¹¹⁷ Interview, 25 November 2008, Linda Givon, Former owner and director of Goodman Gallery.

¹¹⁸ 6 July 2009, at the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism.

¹¹⁹ Interview, 24 April 2008, Monna, Mokoena, Owner and director of Gallery Momo, Johannesburg

remains important to bear in mind, however, and many of my respondents pointed this out, that people emigrate for very different reasons often because of their 'idiosyncratic biographies' as journalist Sean O'Toole¹²⁰ described it in our interview.

These more economically and socially unstable times came on the back of high levels of economic growth in the country since the transformation into democracy, which also had measurable effects on the Art Fair. The years between 1995 and 2005 in South Africa, apace with the global, have been regarded as 'boom' years (Innes, 2007), of which the growth of the art market, and the eventual formation of its first art fair is seen as a product, a sign of 'stability' and 'growing up'. One of the conditions of the Art Fair's existence is growth in the market that makes it viable for galleries to exist. While the Art Fair, as one of my respondents expressed 'is not the same as a golf course housing development' in as far as it is a product of good economic times, art fairs the world over have benefitted from more money being around. Clive Kellner¹²¹, previous director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, when I spoke to him in March 2008, positioned this as a general condition, 'a very simple analogy (exists): in a time of growth and expansion there are more galleries. Jo'burg and Cape Town never had more galleries. One opened last night. One opened 2 months ago, one opened 6 months ago, Rooke Gallery, Art Extra and now, Art Space'.¹²²

Makoena, mentioned earlier, was another to draw attention to the relationship between the economic boom and the art market; that it 'brought lots of money into the art market', however, it would seem that the economic boom and the 'flight mentality' or 'short-termism' work against each other to the detriment of the Art Fair. Douglas¹²³ expressed as one of his concerns for the future of the Fair the fact that his 'market is emigrating' but also points out that for those that, for the moment, are still staying in the country, social and political instability are influencing their art buying patterns:

¹²⁰ Interview, 15 September 2008, Sean O'Toole, Editor *Art South Africa* and freelance journalist.

¹²¹ Interview, 5 March 2008, Clive Kellner, Chief Curator at Johannesburg Art Gallery.

¹²² He is of the opinion, furthermore, that the performance of South African art internationally is a sign of the stability of the national economy. For him the first time South African 'master' Irma Stern 'broke a million rand in Cape Town, there was excitement'. The price performance of this South African artist, according to Kellner made South Africans realise 'there's a new potential here'. Kellner was unequivocal that there is a direct relation between the prices fetched by this artist and the fact that the 'South African economy and social scene was settled and more stable'. It also indicated for Kellner an increase in money available within the economy for art and that art had 'became more appealing as an investment'.

¹²³ Interview, 25 April 2009, Ross Douglas, Director of Joburg Art Fair.

I don't have much to back this up with, but one of the things that also affects the market is the feeling of stability in a country. The last thing you want to be doing is buying a whole lot of South African big canvasses that fits in your big home in South Africa if you might be thinking of going to live in Berlin in two or three year's time in a apartment that is tenth the size, because your art collection is not going to fit into that apartment. And my sense is two or three years ago, people were a lot more bullish about staying here.

What Douglas is describing is a kind of a one foot in and one outside of the country – a non-investment in the future. He is also of the opinion that in times of uncertainty, the last thing people think of buying is contemporary art, if anything at all, they will be buying South African modernist art that have seen sustained growth in value on international auction markets¹²⁴.

The 'wave' of emigration that my respondents felt compelled to point out to me in interviews, some have argued, is embedded in the fibre of life in ex-colonies, but particularly so in Johannesburg. It is a boom-and-bust town and people live at the edge of their seats in anxious prediction of where the next 'swing' will be heading (See van Onselen, 1982). The year 2008 produced plenty of evidence of the pendulum swinging in a negative direction for those on the look-out. In 2008, added to the threats that violent crime posed to personal safety that have long been associated with life in Johannesburg,

¹²⁴ This notion is often coupled with that of 'speculation' within the market. Clive Kellner's point above regarding the perception of South African art as investment is telling in this instance. Many of my respondents suspect that the recent growth in the international sales of South African art is fuelled by a mere handful of buyers. Most of these sales happen on auction, so the ex-director of the painting department of a local auction house, Ruark Peffers, is probably in a good position to know: 'when they refer to the London market, that London market comprises of predominantly South African expats, predominantly Jewish, in fact, because a lot of the Jews, you know they were the first ones to go really, when things go bad ... The Jews could because most of them had the passport to do so'. The most significant fact of this 'condition', real or rumored, for the Art Fair, is the actual art that is being bought. Some of my respondents pointed out that, in times of uncertainty, when people buy South African art, it is often art that they, perhaps wrongly, describe as a rand hedge. Hedging is the condition of buying a stock that is 'on the down' yet connected to something that is 'on the up' – in this case it would denote the buying of 'under valued' South African art, which is assumed would increase in value, as the value of cash in Rands continue to fall. There are no signs that the market for contemporary art is speculative in this manner, however, the Joburg Art Fair is a contemporary fair, and the only *contemporary* artist mentioned, almost without fail, as an investment that would stand up in an international market is William Kentridge. Where one can detect signs of speculation, is in the market for so called 'South African old masters' or 'South African modernism'. A government employee described the speculative buying of this kind of art as a 'phenomenon' of recent times connected to the fact that 'our control on money that you can take out of the country if you want to emigrate or whatever is very small. You can't really start off in a foreign country with that amount of money so people buy art and take it out, and it's completely legal. So that's been happening for a long time, but lately it's become quite a thing, a phenomenon'.

came signs of possible crumbling infrastructure. Editors, McGregor and Nuttall (2009) collected a volume of short-stories during 2008 entitled *Loadshedding* to investigate exactly the impact of ‘precariousness’ on the lives of South Africans. The title points to the power failures that started plaguing South Africans from December 2007, creating mass concern over the stability of infrastructure in the country.

On a micro level this phenomenon threw the organisation of the first Joburg Art Fair, then at a critical point in its planning, into severe insecurity - immediate and for its future. Businesses were under immense strain as hours of productivity were slipping away under darkness; business hours had to be restructured to fit into the sometimes predictability of the loadshedding schedule posted by Eskom, but perhaps most soul wrenching to many South Africans in one way or another, was the chaos of their daily commute through dark traffic intersections. Artlogic itself was strained to insanity as loadshedding would mean no internet connectivity or phone lines as telephones were digitised to a central network. The only person in the office not feeling desperate and at a loss at that stage, was the newly arrived German production manager who thought that, surely, this was what living in Africa was all about. By the time the Art Fair opened its doors to the public in March, the country’s nerves were running high. Speaking to the head of FNB Private and Investment Banking on the opening night of the first Art Fair, Robert Keip¹²⁵, he expressed: ‘It is very difficult at the moment ... this week numbers were released that shows a huge business confidence drop as a result of this Zuma – Polekwane – Eskom – corruption, et cetera, all of that, ... which is seen in the business confidence and resonates in the consumer confidence. I think people will be against Africa as a continent’.

It is with this ‘climate’ of uncertainty in mind that one should take on board the description of the Art Fair by some visitors as a ‘safe’ space; others as a glimmer of hope for what they term a ‘normal’ city. One of the Artlogic directors, Kevin Fleischer¹²⁶, a 50-something, ex-investment banker explains: ‘So Joburg wants “this is actually a normal city, it is not a den of crime and poverty”, so we have fancy people wandering around buying art. It is totally normal and it is funky and happening and people are coming from abroad and it is exactly what Joburg wants. And my view is and I will say that, the people of Joburg are desperate for those kinds of sign-posts’. Fleischer fits squarely into the

¹²⁵ Interview, 13 March 2008, Robert Keip, Head of Premier and Investment Banking, FNB.

¹²⁶ Interview, 31 March 2009, Kevin Fleischer, Artlogic shareholder, Financial director.

sector of the privileged. He has lived in other places in the world, and having now chosen Johannesburg as his home, would like to see it resemble some of his favourite features in other cities. Local fashion celebrity and important buyer of local contemporary art, Marianne Fassler¹²⁷, is also familiar with the 'global trends' that come with frequent international travel. Her hope and excitement for the Fair mirrors that of Fleischer: 'I am sort of longing for that buzz that comes from contemporary art happenings, because I travel a lot'. One of the booksellers from the 2009 Art Fair told me that at the opening event, a South African writer planning to move to Paris, exclaimed to her: 'who needs Paris!' – suggesting the Art Fair brings some of those elements to this country. This longing for the 'buzz' of 'culture' remains a key feature of the Joburg Art Fair.

Young Johannesburg gallerist, David Brodie¹²⁸, however managed to cast this kind of nostalgia in a harsh light in our interview, reminding of its 'constructedness', thus:

But that is also what the Magic Flute¹²⁹ was about, it was about reminding people that even in South Africa, there is a certain amount of gentility that you have come to rely on; you can still come and spend your millions on art, you can still go and watch opera, you still have to drive back to your fortress. But, people saying it is so safe here, well it is so safe because it takes place in the commercial centre of the entire country which I am sure per square metre has more security and more security guards and more security cameras, than just about anywhere apart from maybe the Anglo (Gold) buildings in town. That is not about safety, you are in a privately owned, security-guarded, shopping mall.

What Brodie is describing is a condition that urban geographers are well familiar with – that of the 'rich' walling themselves off from the poor and living in enclaves of 'safety'. This is certainly true of ways of living in South Africa, yet is too often seen and used as an all-encompassing description. What I mean to suggest is that while the Art Fair has received some criticism for choosing the Convention Centre and indeed the suburb of Sandton as its venue, it speaks of a pragmatism that citizens of the city have become familiar with.¹³⁰ When asked about this choice of venue Ross Douglas¹³¹ routinely replies,

¹²⁷ Interview, 18 November, Marianne Fassler, Private art buyer and director of fashion label, *Leopardfroek*.

¹²⁸ Interview, 28 April 2008, David Brodie, director Brodie Stevenson Gallery.

¹²⁹ Before producing the Joburg Art Fair, Artlogic produced William Kentridge's version of Mozart's Magic Flute in South Africa.

¹³⁰ When interpreting it physically, geographically, it is tempting, following Brodie's critique above, to contrast the experiential journey of going from the space of your home to the North of Johannesburg, where the Sandton Convention Centre has been built, with a journey that takes you to the South of the

as he did in our interview: 'we would love to do this big art event in 'town' (referring to the original city centre), show me a venue that has 10 000 parking bays and toilets for 10 000 people and I would take it'.

The above section aimed to demonstrate through the words of some respondents that they feel their lives in South Africa to be under threat from time to time and that the Art Fair sits within this climate as something positive, not only because the showcasing or buying of art might be a good thing for society generally, but because it resembles and portrays a certain stability and social excitement.

This chapter has argued for an unpacking of notions around 'art publics' by looking at the ideas people have about who art publics might be or might become; and the behavioural attributes that are frequently ascribed to such publics. I aimed to break open, through eliciting voices from the surveys, some of the assumptions that I had encountered during field work, but also to draw attention to the forms and types of 'public' speaking evident from the surveys, without necessarily drawing firm conclusions about who these publics turned out to be. Finally, I attempted to position the event of the Fair in relation to the local context of South Africa in 2008 and 2009. This was done in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of how this event is situated in the local landscape and what its threats, downfalls, and successes might be.

city, into 'town'. Tomlinson and Larsen (2003) have done such a comparative description of these two 'very different' spaces. They describe the journey that a traveller might follow from the international airport. 'Driving along the freeway towards the Central Business District (CBD) they would carefully circumvent the center, as advised by their travel agent, and connect with another freeway heading north... (to)... their hotel, an extension of an up-market mall... Knowing that the suburbs close to the hotel are legendary for their wealth, they would be surprised by the intermingling of races. Were they to find out that the malls in the north have begun to draw clients from Soweto, they might also find the intermingling of classes somewhat surprising. The visitors would be most unlikely to go to the CBD. If they were to venture downtown, they would encounter the streets traders crowding the sidewalks at transport termini along busy shopping streets or have to walk in the street for lack of space on the sidewalk. They would note the absence of white shoppers and the dirt and clutter' (2003: 43).

¹³¹ Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

PART 1

Chapter 3. Public Culture in the Making: Artlogic, African Contemporary Art and the Global South

Returning to Don Handelman's (1998) theory around the ability of events to speak beyond themselves to the society in which they take place, I move now to the place of the 'African' in the Joburg Art Fair and the way Ross Douglas conceived of this event. I take this specific point of departure when considering the 'African', and by extension public culture, so as to shed light on a practice which might well exist outside of the well theorized canons of this topic. A section of this chapter is devoted to the theory that informs such decisions as making an art fair 'African contemporary', yet the focus is on a specific manifestation of such a theoretical register. As outlined, Handelman stresses three 'assumptions' at play in the studying of events. The first two are about the event's 'logic of composition' and its 'organisation' (Handelman, 1998: 17). The tour offered in Chapter 1 captured aspects of these. The third assumption was outlined as 'that which an event communicates about itself, as well as what an interpreter makes of this' (Handelman, 1998: 17). The previous chapter considered a range of interpretations made by the Art Fair's varied publics of the event and what that signified about both the event itself and the context within which it took place. For that reason, the first part of the third assumption – 'that which an event communicates about itself' – which is here interpreted to signal the aims of the organisers and what the event sets out to do read against what *actually* happened, forms the focus of this chapter.

The 2008 Joburg Art Fair was by its nature, as the first of its kind, a 'model' art fair. It comprised all the ingredients of a generically international fair, transposed onto a Johannesburg setting. At the second Art Fair, it was clear that lessons had been learnt and the model was in the process of being indigenised to fit more appropriately into the local setting. This implies a *journey* behind the scenes, which, at its start, was about imagining what might be possible and what might transpire, followed by a learning experience, after which the organisers reconsidered that concept and retooled themselves. It is also about aims, preconceptions and prejudices, which are forced into processes of translation and transformation over a period of time.

This chapter is structured around the notion of a ‘public culture in the making’ by which I mean to suggest two things simultaneously. The first usage has to do with expectations of the work that ‘public culture’ – here interpreted to suggest forms and formations of culture in ‘the public’ realm – might be able to perform. In that sense, the term suggests imagination and speculative publics. It is also positioned to indicate a crafting process which has flaws and which falters in ‘real time’. It is for this reason that I focus on the intentions behind the Art Fair and some of the preconceptions that informed them. The discussion revolves around Ross Douglas, as the Fair director, and the decision to introduce first the theme of African contemporary art as framing device for the 2008 Joburg Art Fair, and then that of ‘Global South’ for its second instantiation. In the second instance, the term ‘public culture’ deployed here is framed by Appadurai and Breckenridge’s understanding of the concept, which was discussed previously, and has to do with shaping a properly global epistemology and practice, but in a way that is fundamentally public, ‘a zone of contestation’ (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 2004: 689). What this means to suggest is a focus on how things come to be and how those things are often fought over and the results of conflict and struggle. This is done here through a detailed account of what transpired between the two Art Fairs, each read in terms of its chosen theme and constituting thus, a focus on *practice* within a theoretical framework. In this section, space is devoted to outlining the initial objectives of the Fair and the persona of the Fair’s director. Thereafter, a discussion ensues around first, the intentions and then, the ‘meaning’ behind the thematic of the African contemporary. The aim is to open up what was at stake in the choice of this theme, but also, more specifically, to trace the journey and progression that took place through the choice thereof. I then turn to the second Art Fair’s theme of the Global South as both a continuation and a transformation of the original intentions.

Ross Douglas

In trying to trace how the Joburg Art Fair embodies a vision of public culture, how an event calls publics into being, and also how art, specifically, ‘enables’ such publics, owner of Artlogic, Ross Douglas’ role as front man to the event offers a point of entry. Douglas is often described in the arts press as an ‘outsider’. In one article he is referred to as ‘the entrepreneur Ross Douglas, who lacks purist artistic commitments’,¹³² in another as someone who has ‘observed the South African art world from a dispassionate distance,

¹³² Anthea Buys, ‘The Art of Selling Art.’ 7 March 2008, *Mail and Guardian*.

only involving himself in its logistical and business processes’;¹³³ in yet another as a ‘fast-moving, fast-talking’¹³⁴ promoter of art as commodity. Indeed, his biography reads as anything but a trajectory leading towards the art world: After secondary education at one of South Africa’s private boarding schools fashioned on the British public school model, Michaelhouse, he started his graduate studies in agriculture, but eventually majored in philosophy and economics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Upon graduating, he moved to the Okavango Delta working in the eco-tourism industry. Speaking to Douglas¹³⁵ about that time, he mentioned that his work in tourism, ‘initiated a premature move to Mozambique in 1993 before that country’s first election. When it became apparent that tourism was not going to happen for a while, I got a job producing a documentary on the demobilisation of Renamo and Frelimo soldiers’. Douglas returned to South Africa in 1994 and continued his career in television, making documentaries for local television and a three-part series for National Geographic. After two years in the local film industry, ‘a couple of trips abroad, and half a dozen projects needing massive budgets’, he decided that it was time for a new start.

It was at this point that he approached local top artist, William Kentridge. This move, he mentioned, was as a result of some research into the business opportunities and market for local film production. According to his research, there were at the time two people ‘making money’ in film: slap-stick comedian, Leon Shuster, and artist, William Kentridge, which was why, he claims, he approached the latter, shortly after which he formed his company Artlogic in Johannesburg. This was in 2004. William Kentridge is a kind of local superstar artist with a solid international career, and there is no doubt that Douglas managed to squeeze through some of the doors of funding the way he did as a result of attaching his name to that of Kentridge’s. It is also true that by the time he became somewhat of a local arts celebrity himself, he was creating his own momentum. Nevertheless for the first crucial steps in the life of his company, he used the slipstream provided by Kentridge’s international fame and local idolisation.

Artlogic describes itself as a ‘communications company’ that positions corporate brands in the ‘art space’.¹³⁶ Artlogic’s first project was the digitisation of William Kentridge’s animated films to form *9 Films for Projection* or sometimes called *9 Drawings for Projection*,

¹³³ Mary Corrigan, ‘The Bottom line is the Art of Success.’ 9 March 2008, *The Sunday Independent*.

¹³⁴ Michael Bleby, ‘Framing the spaces where art and business meet.’ 21 September 2007, *Business Day*.

¹³⁵ Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

¹³⁶ www.artlogic.co.za

first performed in South Africa in 2004 at the then newly-built Constitutional Court. Douglas approached Kentridge with a proposal to raise funds to digitise his animated filmed drawings from its original VHS format. The films would then be projected along with live music and so create a performance, moving it away from a conventional, gallery-based viewing experience. It is worth mentioning in connection with this project that it was somewhat of a recreation of the work allowing it to be seen and appreciated by a far larger audience than perhaps a museum installation might have done, and not altogether unexceptional as an event for the local context. The branding rights for this project were sold to Standard Bank in this country and to the financial analysts, Bloomberg, in America, where it was performed in Central and Prospect parks in New York. After the *9 Films* project was handed over to an international production company, Kentridge approached Douglas to produce the South African incarnation of his *The Magic Flute*¹³⁷ a commission by Belgian opera company, La Monnaie. At this time in 2006, Douglas had already been introduced to the chief executive of FirstRand, Paul Harris, by the owner of Everard Read Gallery, Mark Read. Douglas approached FirstRand's private investment bank, Rand Merchant Bank (RMB) for the sponsorship of the opera. By the time the opera was staged, Artlogic was employing three full-time staff members, with Douglas as the company director.

Douglas' varied background and ability to interact with people from different fields, characterises him as a member of what Savage and Williams (2008: 6) terms 'intermediary elites'.¹³⁸ These individuals bridge different economic and cultural sectors, and might, in certain circumstances, be more influential than, for example, heads of big corporations who operate in one field only. Douglas often remarks that it is not noteworthy in the least to be a 'somebody' in art circles, as it 'does not take much', but seems enamoured by 'his friends in business' – a phrase he often throws up. While he acknowledges that the art world has internal structures made of individuals that 'have done their time', he is disrespectful of hierarchies and relatively unconcerned with the opinions of the art world about his conduct, which generally, leaves more fastidious members of the art community sometimes irritated, sometimes exasperated and sometimes in awe of him. He has no formal training in the arts, nor had he had any experience of art production or

¹³⁷ *The Magic Flute* was performed in Johannesburg at the Joburg Theatre in October 2007 and in Cape Town at the Civic Theatre in September 2007.

¹³⁸ Bourdieu also uses this term to speak of producers of events as 'cultural intermediaries', but for him, however, denotes literally to those individuals who 'take culture from the artists to the masses' and suggest slightly different readings which I explore in Chapter 4.

administration prior to taking on the *9 Films* project. In this regard, gallerist Michael Stevenson is the most outspoken about his disdain for Douglas' neglect of more intellectual engagement with art matters: 'I mean, Ross starts top down, you don't start with the marketing budget and work yourself down. You work your way up. You get the best galleries, you get the best shows and the rest will look after itself, you don't start with the hype'.¹³⁹ Most large-scale art exhibitions in this country to date have been the result of panel discussions and processes of inclusiveness,¹⁴⁰ yet for the first Joburg Art Fair, Douglas consulted with the few close friends he had made in the art world up to that point. He does, however, come across as the perfect bridge between the corporate world and the arts: the corporate world knows him through his circle of contacts, and he operates in the arts at a level that is accessible to the corporate world. For example, the *9 Films* project with its high production value, its stage-like distance between the audience and the work, and the live performance element, one banker described to me as an experience at the theatre 'with an edge'.¹⁴¹

Artlogic actively works to achieve this kind of brand image: one which seeks to bring the corporate world and the art world closer together (as I discuss in the following chapter). At their custom-built office in Johannesburg's Milpark, situated between the old green suburbs of Westcliff and the city, Artlogic regularly holds parties and entertainment lunches for a diverse public drawn from the devoted art community and the corporate world – each 'group', according to Douglas, being made to feel 'more cool' through the presence of the other. Nonetheless, a great exasperation to him is the fact that his 'friends in business' often approach him for *informal* advice or consultation on their small-scale art projects or aspirations, and view 'the arts' as a part-time divergence or hobby. Never has anyone approached him in his professional capacity based on his track record; he has had to do the reaching out to corporates with proposals, enticing them to 'reposition their brands' and 'align themselves with art'.

The character of the 'outsider', or 'intermediary' as it emerges from this biographical account is instructive and shows Ross Douglas operating in two ways. First, it points to the outsider who uses the relatively small pool that is the art world, with its low barriers

¹³⁹ Interview, 30 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, owner and director of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

¹⁴⁰ For example, before *Cape07* launched the biennale, the art community gathered to discuss pertinent issues in the *Sessions Ekapa*.

¹⁴¹ Interview, 11 May 2008, Beth van Heerden, FirstRand Brand Executive.

of entry, to fashion a larger-than-life public profile, while drawing on networks much wider than that of the arts community. This manifests through the calling into being of an art public for the Joburg Art Fair that is larger than, and different from what previously has been mobilised for art in this country. The second role is that of the 'outsider' who pays glib attention to established representational canons and protocols and thereby, at once, acts opportunistically, even expediently, while also daring to open new representational possibilities. The most accurate way of decoding this second development is by looking at the conceptual construction of the Art Fair.

In an early proposal document that Artlogic produced to outline the concept and structure of the Fair, in February 2007, they state as 'objectives' for the fair: 'To create a meeting place for the world to discuss and critically assess African contemporary art; To create a point of connectivity on the African continent for members of the international diaspora around art'; and in an even earlier version: 'A vibrant, forward looking event which embraces the viability of contemporary art and nurtures the seed of investment in new African art. The first Joburg Art Fair should bring together the best African art in one location and stimulate a local and international appreciation for these works'. African contemporary art was, thus, from the beginning a thematic concern as well as a driving force. Along with this was the idea of creating a 'meeting place' for a global community around the African contemporary. These aims read to be as much about having work from Africa as it is about drawing on 'publics' interested in this thematic. Telling then, within this proposal-writing-rhetoric, is the concept of 'publics' being evoked as it suggests an attempt at speaking to and bringing into focus a larger, transnational, yet in many ways spectral public, assumed to be 'out there', without knowing much about them. South African art world stalwarts who have 'done their time' since before the two biennales might be more familiar with, at least, the scope of such a community, but Douglas, at this stage, would have been imagining them into existence and into being for his Fair.

Considering African Contemporary Art as Concept

'African contemporary art' has been a domain predominantly claimed by a group of diasporic intellectuals. South Africa itself has until fairly recently paid very little attention to art from the continent, having been much more concerned with their own internal processes of resistance politics, transformation, themes of identity, memory, and South

African narratives. Curating the 'African contemporary' has been a contested terrain for reasons stated as recently as 2003 in the catalogue for the exhibition entitled, *Fictions of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* by Tumelo Mosaka and Shannon Fitzgerald as an endless construct of 'fictions' about art making in Africa. Fitzgerald writes in her introduction: 'In the West, it has long been assumed that non-Western artists naturally possess an intuitive sensibility concerning spirituality, ethnicity, and geography. While every Western artist equally possesses these sensibilities and experiences, they are rarely criteria for serious consideration of their work' (Fitzgerald, 2003: 3)¹⁴² (see also Roome, 2002). Writing in the same volume and outlining much of the frustrations around this thematic, Okwui Enwezor elaborates on the notion of 'authenticity' within the context of the African contemporary:

Authenticity's primary structure is the fiction that reproduces it as the figure of a unitary, homogenous belief in the particularism of an African essence. Authenticity as an idea towards the standardization, hence banalization of the complexity of contemporary African identity appeals to certain romantic notions of African uniqueness that have been promoted so long...Authenticity therefore must be understood as the handmaiden of an ethnocentric discourse blind to the complexity of the modern map of African social reality, and doubly blind to the multiplicity of identities forged in the crucible of colonization, globalization, diaspora, and the postcolonial social transformation of insular cultural worlds. (2003: 58).¹⁴³

These are issues explored by many scholars, written or visual, around the understanding, or misunderstanding of the 'sign' that is the African contemporary. Enwezor's voice is an important one within this scholarly work on African art. He is also known to many South Africans as the curator of the Second Johannesburg Biennale and later for the seminal, *Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945 – 1994* (2001) in Munich, New York, Chicago and Berlin. His most significant contribution to the discourse, through the act of curation, arguably has been his role as curator of *Dokumenta 11* (2002). Within the various attempts to craft appropriate modes of analysis and new definitions of African contemporary art, this was a landmark example used here to spell out some of the issues at hand.

¹⁴² This particular exhibition sets up its own set of binaries as its subtitle is 'Contemporary Africa Abroad', which for the curators is a more complex understanding of place and its relation to Africa: 'The diasporic positioning of the artists establishes paradigms of discourse that consider nationhood, community, locality, and a sense of place and belonging that counter essentializing views of Africa' (Fitzgerald, 2003: 3).

¹⁴³ See, for example, also texts in exhibition catalogue, *There and Back. Africa* curated by Daniella Tilkin, 2006; *Next Flag: The African Sniper Reader*, Fernando Alvim, Heike Munder and Ulf Wuggenig, 2005.

Enwezor's 2002 exhibition focused on postcolonial places and art-making through the well-established canon of the *Dokumenta* platform held every four years in Kassel, Germany. This is a significant 'event' in the theoretical trajectory of African contemporary art, precisely because *Dokumenta* has become an institution within the international art arena that is looked upon by the international art world as a barometre of what issues are current in the world at the time. In 2002, Enwezor was given the opportunity to focus on the postcolonial. Enwezor and his panel structured the event along five platforms to take place at different times in different parts of the world. They were: Platform 1, *Democracy Unrealized*, Vienna, Berlin; Platform 2, *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the process of truth and reconciliation*, New Delhi; Platform 3, *Creolite and Creolization*, St. Lucia; Platform 4, *Under Siege: Four African Cities: Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, Lagos; Platform 5, *Exhibition*, Kassel. These various shows opened in succession to each other, forming an entire experience of eleven months. What this signals is an epistemological shift not only in *Dokumenta* itself, but also in how art making, or art practice, could be understood. This shift is manifested through the 'scattering' of exhibitions around the globe, especially in postcolonial spaces, as well as through the specific 'themes' around which the exhibitions were organised. The insertion of postcolonial discourse into the curatorial structure is not merely symptomatic of the historical moment of the present, but calls into focus certain political and ethical questions. In this regard, it is highly significant that such a major international contemporary art exhibition turns to the *themes* taken from postcolonial realities, and moreover being placed in such spaces, rather than merely showing works by postcolonial artists. There have been many examples in Western centres during the last two decades where a 'space for counter-hegemonic voices' comprised of 'painful neocolonial dynamics' (Harney, 2004: 234),¹⁴⁴ and an attempt at creating categories for presenting various 'kinds' of 'African' art. Enwezor, in contrast to some attempts at categorising and, if you like, 'difference-for-difference-sake' instances, turns the attention to how lives are lived in these geographical areas and the relation between the 'place' and artistic production.

According to Elizabeth Harney's (2004) informative survey of one time president of Senegal, Leopold Senghor's role in the arts of Africa, the difficulty that curators face

¹⁴⁴ For an excellent overview of the major attempts at focus on 'Africa' art, see Elizabeth Harney, (2004) *In Senghor's Shadow*.

when engaging with the African sign can be traced from some of the earliest of international exhibitions, the 1984 *Primitivism* exhibition at MOMA in New York, through to the *africa'95, Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa* held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. One of the enduring problems with such international ventures, opines Harney, is that often the notion of difference is fetishised without interrogation. Furthermore, Harney believes that within such international shows, 'the aesthetic choices, cultural references, personal visions, and voiced opinions of African artists all but got lost in a morass of academic discourse' (234). In typical and, I believe refreshing, 'say-it-as-it-is' mode of writing, Lizza Littlewort in the *Daily Artheat* circulated at the Art Fair sums up the dilemma:

Art from Africa is necessarily going to be troubled by the commodification of suffering – off the top of my head. It sounds like there are two angles here: one is the skewed (and essentially colonial) relationship between the first and the third world, resulting in producers from Africa getting a pittance for efforts that would be rewarded a hundred times more were they produced in Europe/America, et cetera, purely as a result of an unjust global economic system, with all its injustices and abuses and resulting trauma. The other angle – representation of Africa and how this is distorted to fit the first world's sensibilities, and therefore how this affects how art is produced on the African continent (i.e., because Africa is disadvantaged economically, Africans must make art appeal to a European's idea of African art: pictures of starving children, joyful natives hoe-ing their way through cassava fields, clay pots, et cetera). There is therefore less space for more 'honest' art, whatever that may be – this seems the preserve of those with a lot of economic power who seem to use this opportunity to wank off, for the most part. Alas.¹⁴⁵

The *Daily Artheat* is a newspaper-version produced especially for the Art Fair of a blog space devoted to both art debate and art gossip – hence, the style of this extract; yet it also speaks of a local art public who has become familiar with the difficulties of working within this thematic – and perhaps, an impatience with it.

It is worth mentioning two extreme examples of 'readings' of African contemporary art from my interviews to demonstrate the way in which this terrain is marked and to bring it into closer proximity to the project at hand. These are two views or stances, I encountered when interviewing Christopher Spring and Michael Stevenson respectively.

¹⁴⁵ Lizza Littlewort, 'Who is Simon Njami?'. March 15, 2008, *Daily Artheat*.

Christopher Spring,¹⁴⁶ curator of the African Galleries at the British Museum in London was one of five invited speakers at the first Joburg Art Fair. Spring joined the British Museum twenty years before when his department was called the Department of Ethnography housed in the Museum of Mankind. His department showcased what would now be termed forms of ‘material culture’ from distant lands, such as textiles, carvings, artefacts, et cetera. Spring, after some time, and since the ‘millennium development’ of the British Museum, felt ‘ethnography’ to be an ‘unreal category ... a category invented by the West’. The development of the British Museum included the dedicated and purpose-built African Galleries and, says Spring, ‘by that stage I was very convinced that contemporary art was the way to introduce people to the arts of Africa’. For Spring, this ‘education’ process involved exhibiting contemporary African art, such as the ‘cloth pieces’ by El Anatsui which had been shown at the Venice Biennale and other contemporary art spaces, alongside examples of ‘traditional’ textiles: ‘right next to a wonderful example of the Abenyasa, the woven Kentic cloth that is the inspiration behind quite a lot of his work’. Many visitors, he comments, have asked why these art objects are not rather shown at the Tate Modern, a space dedicated to contemporary art, but for Spring this process of education and rooting it in an African tradition is far more valuable to his audience. It is clear that in his dedication to explaining to others the significance of the world that he has long been familiar with, that of ‘ethnography’, Spring perpetuates the notion of the African ‘authentic’ discussed earlier. Spring, through ostensibly benign convictions linked to imparting valuable information, sees African contemporary art as not at all the same as the German contemporary or the British contemporary; as a stand-alone work of artistic expression, but as meaningful through a trajectory that leads back to a traditional past ‘re-constructed’ by the museum environment. It is a context within which African contemporary art has no relation to contemporary art from elsewhere in the world, but is meaningful only through its supposed place of origin and continuity with a past. This is not the kind of reading that authors such as Enwezor, Fitzgerald or Mosaka work to achieve, but closely aligned to what Harney has termed a ‘fetishization of difference’.

Spring’s inclusion in the first Art Fair’s talks program was as a result of a recommendation by one of the directors of the October Gallery in connection to a book Spring had recently published, entitled *Angaza Afrika: African Art Now*. It is a book

¹⁴⁶ Interview 15 March 2008, Chris Spring, Curator of African Galleries, British Museum, London.

about African contemporary art. He admitted in our interview that many of the artists at the Joburg Art Fair were completely unknown to him and that the choices around which artists to include in his book were really his own preferences. Another one of my interviewees was unwavering in her scorn of this book, yet Spring had been awarded *The Art Book Award* for it in London by the Editorial Board of the Art Book and the Association of Art Historians¹⁴⁷. She explained:

I am sure he did it with the best of intentions ... but I just think that it is a great pity that a book like that goes out into the world. It is such a kind of dull... Yes I mean the lay-out is dull, the cover is awful, they said oh it is African lets go bright colors so it looks like African fabric, great. I mean I think it is outrageous, no one would sit here and write a book about British art for god's sake, you know, why didn't he collaborate and find some people here who knew something, it is just neo-colonialist all over again.

The above extract from my interview data and the quotation by Littlewort from *The Daily Artbeat* earlier, together express for me an overriding sentiment that came across in my fieldwork from South Africans towards the African contemporary: at once a deep familiarity with what is at stake, and the politics around what it means to create work within this context, but also a frustration with being labelled in this way by, mostly, those that do not live in this context. This is not to suggest that Spring is not highly engaged in the African contemporary, as the awarding of a prize for his book might suggest, albeit in a way that sits uncomfortably with many in South Africa.

On the other extreme then of Spring and more closely aligned to his South African counterparts, is gallerist Michael Stevenson¹⁴⁸. Stevenson is specifically of interest to this discussion as he was the curator of the seminal exhibition, *Distant Relatives, Relative Distance* in 2006, which was one of the first curated exhibitions of African contemporary, predominantly diaspora, artists in South Africa. In our interview, Stevenson referred to Spring's project as 'that whole British Museum aesthetic', 'very scary', 'hugely problematic' and fundamentally crippling to the possible life and meaning of an art work, as it becomes the only register within which the work can be read. Stevenson noted in our discussion that he had detected a similar tendency in South African scholarship, which 'has come out of African arts traditions' where there is an inability to read art

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.aah.org.uk/post/197>

¹⁴⁸ Interview, 31 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, director and owner of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

works by young *black* South African artists as anything but something linked to ethnicity and 'craft'. He explained:

So they reduce everything to the theoretical, or one of these ethno-, Afro-, positions and the work that is outside of those realms, they just don't have the capacity to see it, in (the work of) Julie Mahreto, you just don't see it because you can't bring it down to Ethiopia, and or Wengechi Mutu, you want to take it down to landmine people in Kenya...it makes the work African in a very suffocating way.

Stevenson claims to have embarked on the *Distant Relatives* project out of 'irritation' and 'exasperation' with an incessant self-referentialness in South Africa, an 'in-grown toenail syndrome'. South Africans, he has found, are illiterate in the debates surrounding African contemporary art and have very little interest in learning¹⁴⁹.

For Stevenson there are two very different aesthetics at work within contemporary African art: on the one hand, there is a trained, diaspora artist who engages in contemporary art much like any other artists from anywhere in the world; and on the other, the untrained, or self-taught African artist who practices in Africa. The latter he believes, based on his own endless research, does not fit into a white-cube type space and should be treated differently; the two aesthetics are mutually exclusive and have no relation to each other. It is clear that Stevenson is highly opinionated about this thematic and believe it should be explored and treated 'very, very carefully', with thorough knowledge of the 'debates' involved. He is, however, also of the opinion that 'the world' is desperate for knowledge on African contemporary art, 'they have a desperate desire to engage', a point echoed by South African artist, Penny Siopis¹⁵⁰, in my discussion with her, who has found through recent travels, many departments of African contemporary art being formed at universities in the United States. When I asked Stevenson whether he thought the Joburg Art Fair could become a place where the 'international community' could meet around African contemporary art, he did not hesitate in his reply: 'I won't talk about the Johannesburg Art Fair, let's use a parallel. Why is Frieze so extraordinary? You meet Amanda Sharp, one of the two co-founders of Frieze, and there is a real intellectual and conceptual engagement with the issues at stake. And there is a real

¹⁴⁹ In this might well fall into the categorization of the 'art community' explored in the previous section where 'they' are ascribed very specific attributes to and often found to be lacking in 'real' engagement with art.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African Artist and Professor at the Wits School of Arts.

conceptual vision there, and a real understanding and curiosity and engagement with what is going on. And that is what makes it extraordinary. And Ross has not got that.’

Ross Douglas, I have mentioned earlier, is not in the least ‘read’ in the discourse surrounding African contemporary art. He confesses as much and does not see this as a handicap. When asked how he sees ‘African contemporary art’ in the South African context he replied: ‘I am probably not the best person to ask this because I am new to the art world, I come from the documentary world, making movies about crocodiles and lions and sharks very much about the Africa that the rest of the world wanted to see’. In this context and that discussed above, it is perhaps not surprising then that the African contemporary thematic for the Art Fair drew generally cynical reactions from the local art audience. For example, Anitra Nettleton, academic and published author on African art, opined that the very notion of this theming, ‘gives people the idea that they are buying into something exotic’.¹⁵¹ Local artist, Clive van den Berg¹⁵², believed that there was no real interaction with the continent from South Africa, and that, from a marketing point of view, it simply ‘expands the range of the products that you can offer’ at the Joburg Art Fair. In a similar vein, the only local gallerist who focuses on showcasing and selling African art, Henri Vergnon¹⁵³ of Gallery Avronova, while being excited that this drive might educate the public, was equally weary when he explained that ‘if I wanted to make money for myself and buy a new car, et cetera, I would do more South African artists’ as there is so little interest in work from the continent in South Africa.

Douglas explained in our discussion that to his mind there still exists a tangible tension, in ‘the eyes of the world’ between the very word ‘contemporary’ and ‘African’ – most art fairs do not have to use the word ‘contemporary’ to denote that they are interested in work from the present, but in South Africa, the title works against, in his opinion, the still strong connotations of the word ‘African’ with ‘darkness, wood, native, that if you say “African art” the world thinks tribal art’. He stated that he had two motivations for theming the event ‘African contemporary’. First, he thought that the world had become less interested in South Africa, after the first ‘decade of democracy’ had come and gone. He was also influenced by such local events as, *Distant Relatives, Relative Distance*, a 2006 curated by Michael Stevenson, and also at the Standard Bank gallery, *Picasso and Africa* in

¹⁵¹ Mary Corrigan, ‘The Bottom line is the Art of Success.’ March 9, 2008, *The Sunday Independent*.

¹⁵² Interview, 11 August 2008, Clive van den Berg, Practicing South Africa artist, and director of ‘Trace’.

¹⁵³ Interview, 20 November 2008, Henri Vergnon, Owner of Avronova Art Gallery.

2005. Both of these exhibitions had as their focus not South African art or the history of this country, but African art – the first looked at contemporary African art and the second at African artefacts and Africa's relation to global modernist art. Another was the *Cape07* biennale and the global phenomenon of *Africa Remix – Art of a Continent* (which I discuss elsewhere in this document) shown at various venues around the world and here, at the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

His second motivation was financial in nature. He believed that, 'Contemporary art that is for sale is currency, it is stuff that you can buy and sell anywhere in the world. It is no longer about, or so much about representing culture or representing a narrative, it is about currency. That is why art fairs work, that is why good art bubbles to the top.' He sees African art as a newcomer, a gem to be discovered, that would follow this international trend of buying, selling and investing in contemporary art: 'I think what is going to be interesting is that the world is going to view the Joburg Art Fair as a place to find value for money, not as a place to find narratives about oppression, slavery and apartheid. And they are going to compare and say "I am going to go to the Joburg Art Fair and buy a work that costs me 10,000 pounds and the equivalent work in London costs me 50,000 pounds." It is not like, "I am helping this poor black South African that has been a victim of police brutality for twenty years, I am helping him make a living and that sort of crap".' In believe that seeing the buying motivation for African art as somehow value-based, as connected to investment and other contemporary art elsewhere, could be argued to preempt a move that many theorists of the African have longed for in one way or another. These ideas are potentially liberating and celebratory of an 'African sign' that has moved away from what many theorists claim is still its stranglehold, that of having to somehow be 'authentically African', closely aligned with craft and artefact. This, Douglas theorized, would happen through the vehicle of commerce.

It is also true that these ideas, specifically at the time he voiced them in our interview before the first Art Fair, were untested. Artlogic itself quickly ran into difficulty creating such an 'African' representation. Preliminary research into galleries on the African continent that could afford to travel to the Joburg Art Fair yielded very little results as first, the numbers of *contemporary* galleries were limited, and second the spaces that did exist were often not-for-profit and needed a substantial amount of financial support to

take on any projects. Faced with this dilemma, Ross Douglas devised, what he saw, as a solution in the form of a curated show of work from the continent. Many other fairs incorporate such 'hybrid' structures that deviate from the gallery-booth grid of trade fairs, and they take different forms in different fairs.¹⁵⁴ In the hope of drawing prestige to the Fair and attracting some strong diaspora artists Douglas cast around for a big international curator that could take control of this element of the Fair. After some research and consultation with his network, it was decided that Simon Njami was in the best position to achieve both these goals for the Fair. Artlogic thus decided to 'outsource' the 'African element' of the Fair to Njami. This decision is critical to understanding the way in which the African contemporary manifested at the event and I consider some of its implications below.

As you like it by Simon Njami at Joburg Art Fair 2008

If one could glean from the description of Douglas above that he has a somewhat 'maverick' approach and way of operating, his choice of individual to take control of the 'African' aspect of the Fair, Simon Njami, had a similar reputation.¹⁵⁵ By the time Njami was announced as chosen curator for the Fair, most interested South Africans knew him as the curator of *Africa Remix* that was brought to Johannesburg in May 2007; furthermore as Swiss-born of Cameroonian parents based in Paris, who never takes off his dark glasses. Njami, together with Angola-based artist and curator, Fernando Alvim, was also the chosen curator of the first African pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007 – a position for which many South African curators applied through a proposal submission system.¹⁵⁶ Here his reputation as an 'enfant terrible' was honed with his decision to show work from the Sindiko Dokolo collection, which became shrouded in rumours of corruption and 'African blood diamonds'.¹⁵⁷ Njami claimed in our interview that the 'rumours' around the collection were spread by the 'Enwezor-clan', proving again that this terrain is heavily contested. It was, thus, with some trepidation that the local art

¹⁵⁴ The Cartier Award at Frieze Art Fair forms a curated element. These pieces of art are also for sale.

¹⁵⁵ Artlogic's press contact in Berlin expressed severe concern over the connections between the Joburg Art Fair and Njami as the European press latched on to controversies surrounding the collection of art works that Njami chose for the Venice Biennale.

¹⁵⁶ See *Art South Africa* issue vol. 5.4 May 2007 in which Colin Richards explains his entry, and the editor printed some opinions from the local art world on the choice of Njami and his controversial exhibition of works from the Dokolo collection.

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/artnetnews2-23-07.asp>.

world responded to the news that Njami was in charge of the Curated Show, amidst cries of ‘why use a foreigner’ and ‘not him again’.

Locally, however, no one could deny the impact of *Africa Remix* on the art landscape. *Africa Remix* was initiated in Germany in 2004 and first exhibited in Düsseldorf at the museum, Kunst Palast, thereafter in Hayward Gallery, London, then at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and finally in Johannesburg, at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2007. *Africa Remix* is possibly the first large-scale contemporary art exhibition to truly attempt to disaggregate the mould of what constitutes an ‘African’ experience through symbolic forms. Through the various incarnations of the exhibition and workshops held around the event, the platform actively confronted assumptions about the truth claims that could be made and are in currency about Africa. The South African leg, at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, drew an enormous crowd to the opening function and was generally regarded as a milestone event. Njami¹⁵⁸, in our interview, described one of his motivations behind *Africa Remix* as wanting to show the world that perhaps they do not know what Africa is, because ‘everybody knows something about Africa. Everybody around the world has an opinion and has this strong feeling that his opinion is valuable. And he would argue with you, the African, saying, “No, you have got it wrong,” I don’t think any other continent has that strange privilege’. He explained to me that he desperately wanted *Remix* to be shown in Africa and was pleased that it could be shown in Johannesburg specifically, because ‘I think Joburg is probably the least educated place as far as Africa is concerned’. For him African contemporary art is ‘a point of view’; it is not merely ‘geographic’ but ‘emotional, cultural, historical – it is what makes you an individual’.

Njami’s (2007) text to the Johannesburg *Africa Remix* catalogue introduces immediately the polemic of the ‘African contemporary’ in the public imaginary and in global scholarship: ‘it is impossible to comprehend fully what Africa is’ (Njami, 2007: 13). This point, at some levels an obvious one, was forcefully demonstrated by a review article by Jonathan Jones to the London incarnation of this exhibition in the *Guardian*:

¹⁵⁸ Interview, 9 March 2008, Simon Njami, Curator, *As you like it*.

Africa resists this kind of exhibition because it is one vast and terrible reminder that life and death are more real than art – more real than video, anyway. By insisting on the urban and the technological, Africa Remix misdescribes the continent. What do we say about the masses who live outside the city and have no art magazines? That they are the objects of history, and only city-dwelling elites are its makers?¹⁵⁹

Such a statement and the time and place from which it emerged testify to the complexity of the sign that is 'Africa' and its interfacing with creative practice as well as, crucially, what an audience makes of it in different settings. Jones seems to be saying that Africa and Africans are, or should be, more concerned with the stuff of everyday survival in harsh circumstances and that art and creativity somehow sits outside of that reality. It demonstrates Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe's (2004) point in relation to Africa '...So over determined is the nature of this sign that it sometimes seems almost impossible to crack, to throw open to the full spectrum of meanings and implications that other places and other human experiences provoke and enjoy' (348). Njami explained to me that he was committed to destabilising some of these preconceptions and allow his audience to think about Africa, first, more accurately, as in the following example he gave: "Simon, you've put some Egyptian in an African show", I say, "Well, look at your map"; but also more experientially: 'I always say Africa is a feeling: I am in Africa, I feel like I'm in Africa'.

In many respects, his approach to the Joburg Art Fair Curated Show, as perhaps more pragmatic than theoretical, mirrors some of Douglas' aims towards bringing an audience to art and being unconcerned with what Stevenson insists are the 'debates' surrounding this thematic. In our discussion, Njami insisted that the Joburg Art Fair had merit as a platform for merely showing people what African art could be. He explained that it was a platform that could be an empowering experience to an audience completely unfamiliar with the appreciation of art and, therefore, unfamiliar with the process of being able to make value judgments 'for themselves'. He stressed the notion of 'for themselves', and elaborated on this in his essay in the Joburg Art Fair catalogue. What he meant by this is the idea of an audience member of an art fair being able to go to the event and look at art works in no particular theoretical register, as objects that they might want to buy and own. Njami's view of an art fair is a particular one that I return to in the last section of this study when I consider how art objects exist at an art fair. This encounter of art

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Jones, 'Africa Calling'. 9 February 2005. *Guardian*.

objects by an audience, for Njami is valuable in that it has the potential to, eventually, cultivate a museum-going audience, 'because you cannot have museum going, if you do not have a market, if you enter a museum you have to be "intelligent"; of a certain intelligence saying, "Okay, what did the artist mean?"' Before one is able to ask such questions, Njami explained, one might be more familiar with, "How much is it?" Within the Fair environment, he stated 'that is what you have been asked to do: "How much is it?" So you see, there is no secret. You can make your own calculations, you can decide, depending on what you are making a month, "What can I afford? Will it fit at home? Does it fit with me?"' It is in this way that he saw value in the art fair enterprise, particularly in Africa: it is 'a place where people can talk; It is like a kind of a nice display in a supermarket, where you become your own critic. You become your own dealer'. The Fair, ultimately, in his view, is an 'art' place where a visitor is 'active', whereas in a museum, she remains 'passive'. These ideas were followed through in his curatorial choices which seemed to have much more to do with this process of coming into an 'active state' as a visitor, as I discuss below, than with current debates around contemporary African art.

The brief to Njami was to create an exhibition of work by African contemporary artists, not represented by galleries at the Fair, that would be for sale. Artlogic's press releases, however, as time went on, started suggesting that not only would the artists not be with a gallery represented at the Fair, but also, that they, in fact, do not have gallerists at all, thereby implying that they were young artists that could be 'discovered' at the Fair. This was perhaps a case of a 'story taking on its own dimensions' as Njami did propose to work with artists that were not represented by galleries at the Fair, but did not say that they did not have galleries at all in the global market. Njami did not propose anything to Artlogic, nor did they have any idea what he had in mind, beyond what he called 'a market' of 'as you like it' until very close to the event. He did, however, specify that the space must be radically different from the white, clean gallery environment to suggest an altered experience when in its presence. Physically, *As you like it* comprised two big black boxes in the middle of the Fair space of around 700 sq.m in total. Both spaces were enclosed with an entry and exit at both ends, explaining why they were easily missed by many visitors on their first round-trip of the Fair grounds. A visitor would enter one side and walk along a darkish passage the width of which was about fifteen metres and the length fifty metres. Inside, the space was demarcated into separate, u-shaped 'booths' for

the work of separate artists. These U-shaped booths showcasing individual artists works, Njami explained to me, were devised to show artists works as if in a studio setting, where one could focus on one person's work at a time, rather than how they existed as 'curated' together. The first black box, the larger of the two, showcased almost exclusively photographic work; the other, smaller space, showcased video and multi-media work, some projected, some on monitors.

What Njami meant by the notion of 'as you like it' is best explained with reference to his essay in the Joburg Art Fair catalogue. 'As you like it' is a quote from Michel Basquiat 'in an interview during which a critic tried to ascribe his interpretation to one of his canvasses' – 'as you like it' was Basquiat's response (Njami, 2008: 8b). This, Njami points out is a response heavy with irony, if one considers that Basquiat's career had by that stage already reached 'rock star' status. Njami uses this phrase to suggest that the work no longer belongs to the artist, but has entered the public realm. However, for him, this ironic approach to the market is perhaps too extreme and so his other inspiration for the title of his show was the more familiar words of Shakespeare. He mentions that the Shakespearean connotations of 'supply and demand' are closer to what he means to convey in the art fair context. It suggests that the 'customer' is 'king' at an art fair bringing the 'two extremes' of the journey of an art work into direct contact: that of the art work as singular and as it existed in the artist's studio and the consumer that will become its owner. From this he deduces that there is no place for the curator to assert his decisions, readings, or interpretations of the art work, but that his role is merely to select and display it in the most 'pure' manner possible or allowed for by the fair and his position: 'It is the complicated analysis of these sometimes incestuous relationships that exist between the market and art production that govern the design of the exhibition, *As you like it*' (Njami, 2008: 8b). He states, '*As you like it* will operate as an artist studio' by which he meant that each artist would show a number of works in separate booths – one booth per artist (U-shaped inside the rectangle) – in an enclosed, market-type space. He, therefore, opted to arrange the work inside the 'black box'.

When looking through the catalogue at the past exhibitions of the represented artists, it becomes clear that many of the artists on the show were either from Njami's Bamako Photographic Biennale selection (where he was the annual curator for a number of years), or from his *Africa Remix* selection. As one might expect from such an open

curatorial approach to the selection of the artists, the work in the curated show was very diverse with some personal, other more socially-concerned and yet other, strongly political works. The work by Bili Bidjocka, for example, *The Jetlag Experiment – 24 Watching the Mount Sainte Victoire* (2007) is a conceptual piece consisting of a series of photographs of the mountain in different stages. Bidjocka, originally from Cameroon, of course, is not a ‘young talent’ as the press release for the Curated Show from the Artlogic press office stated the artists might be. In fact, the majority of Njami’s chosen artists were represented by gallerists abroad and had been exhibiting for some time internationally. Bidjocka has been living in Brussels and exhibiting professionally for at least a decade. There was a slickness about his work that attests perhaps to his European influences and strikes one as quite different from works such as that by Berry Bickle, *Book of Angels* (2006), which was a layered photographic print of African artefacts. A work such as this asks more direct questions of postcolonialism and the status of the object in Africa. These were, however, the only photographic prints that were not strongly realist in nature; where there had been an interception by the artist into the frame of the photograph. Most of the other photographic work, such as the street scenes of Algerian society, were documenting ‘daily life’, for example, the streety photographs by David Damoison, the calm interiors of Patrice Felix-Tchicaya and the sun disappearing behind the mosque in the work of Jellel Gasteli, *Eclipse N 1 – 7* (2001).

If anything ties these works together, curatorially, however unexpressed, it would be the theme of ‘bringing together of cultures’ (Njami, 2008: 11b)¹⁶⁰ as expressed in the synopsis of Malala Andrialavidrazana’s works. The introductory sentences to the artist biographies mention parents from different continents, diaspora upbringings and difference. Loulou Cherinet, born in Sweden, for example, is interested in the ‘alienation experiences by people belonging to different cultures’ (2008: 14b); David Damoison ‘follows the journey and human currents of people from the Caribbean and Africa’ (17b); Modou Dieng, born in Senegal, but living in San Francisco looks at ‘history, race, social status, gender, cosmopolitanism, and belonging’ (18b); Jellel Gasteli ‘is the author of a series of portraits of ‘Tunisians born out of French-Tunisian culture’ (19b); and the artist collective IngridMwangiRobertHutter’s work ‘concern questions of how to realize common

¹⁶⁰ Artlogic requested that Njami supply them with texts on each artist including exhibition biography. These seem to have been written sometimes by the artists themselves, sometimes ‘lifted off’ copy on the artists. These texts were not generated by the Art Fair organisers. Similarly all writing on artists in the ‘Artist Profile’ section was submitted by the relevant galleries.

realities through overcoming cultural and social discriminations ...' (23b). Perhaps the most forceful exploration of this theme of difference and mixing is that expressed by Michèle Magma born in the DRC and living in France, 'the predominant focus of her work is the articulation of the consistent exchange between her Congolese culture and her adoptive French culture' (33b). Her photographic work, *Overseas stories – Mary & Bruck a successful integration series* (2007) shows a Congolese family of husband and wife, presumable father and mother of the Congolese daughter (presumably), standing beside a white male¹⁶¹. In this context it is important to mention that these were not themes that say different incarnations elsewhere in the Fair. Whilst the idea of subject positioning and personal heritage is on that South Africans grapple with, as I explore in Part 3, the idea of movement and cross cultural exchange comes across far more powerfully and coherently in *As you like it* than in the Fair as a whole.

As mentioned earlier, Simon Njami felt strongly that the space should be clearly distinguishable from the gallery area. Apart from being different from the rest of the fair, the black box was also meant to create a more intimate space for the work and enhance the 'studio' visit cum African marketplace atmosphere that Njami intended to simulate. Unfortunately, Artlogic had decided, mostly out of desperation since *As you like it* was becoming far more expensive than they had imagined, to buy second-hand walling from another exhibition. They got these wall structures for 70% less than had they bought them new. By the time these boards had been transported to storage, stored, and re-transported back to the Sandton Convention Centre for the Art Fair their vintage was clear to any Fair visitor. It transpired that the presentation of the work on the curated show was far inferior to that on the floor by galleries. Artlogic had to leave out certain works, mostly sculptural, that became too expensive to ship as budget was running out. This caused embarrassment to some artists that arrived with their families from across the world to see their work at the Fair, only to find that it had been left out. It also meant that some artists' works that were listed in the catalogue were not actually at the Fair. Furthermore, some other works were stuck at customs and were only hung the second day of the Fair due to delays and difficult communication between the Artlogic office and Njami's assistant in Paris. There was also little time or money for framing of photographs. The production management of this exhibition was desperately frustrated

¹⁶¹ All the extracts in this paragraph are from the short artist synopsis in the Joburg Art Fair 2008 Catalogue.

by Njami's hectic travel schedule, making getting hold of him incredibly difficult and sending the process into an endless series of delays.

The amalgamation of these factors resulted in the strange sense that the work from 'Africa' was 'shabbily' displayed, in an unproblematically 'African' way, whereas the works in the booths by galleries were displayed on an 'international' standard. Artist Clive van den Berg¹⁶² described it to me as 'so truly appalling. It was a bad space. I don't think anything on that show was great'. Sue Williamson¹⁶³, mentioned earlier as the editor of *Artthrob* and an artist in her own right, felt, as many did, that Njami simply did not take the Fair assignment very seriously and pulled some old work from artists out of the store room: 'I thought Simon Njami just did a really bad job of it, you know they weren't even good works from the artists, I think it was the worse work I had ever seen from Loulou Cherinet, it was the worst work I had ever seen from Ingrid, what was he thinking?' And Michael Stevenson¹⁶⁴: 'It was dreadful, I mean, it was a serious embarrassment. Most people don't know what an embarrassment it is, because they don't know the field, they don't know the field or the genre, or the debate ... this notion that there are contemporary artists out there waiting for a break, forget it, it was ill-conceived all way around, it was perpetuating ... it was not conceptually thought through'. Not a single work sold from this show, which, according to David Brodie, could be traced back to the manner in which it was presented: 'I think the way it manifested itself was outrageously bad. I think the reason people did not buy work was because the construction and installation was so appalling. And the work was crap'.¹⁶⁵

Some maintained, however, that the creation of such an exhibition and the choice of the thematic, in Africa, even in South Africa, and the making of an attempt at negotiating what is clearly a difficult field was a worthwhile endeavor. For Thembinkosi Goniwe¹⁶⁶ it is a step in a process of reorientation and repositioning a frame of reference. Writing in the *Daily Artheat*, Linda Stupart makes a similar point, yet suggests that the Fair environment is perhaps not ideal for such an engagement:

¹⁶² Interview, 11 August 2008, Clive van den Berg, Practicing South Africa artist, and director of 'Trace'.

¹⁶³ Interview, 19 September 2008, Sue Williamson, South African artist.

¹⁶⁴ Interview, 31 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, Director and owner of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

¹⁶⁵ Interview, May 2008, David Brodie, Director Brodie Stevenson Gallery.

¹⁶⁶ Interview, 25 March 2008, Thembinkosi Goniwe, Practicing South African curator, and Wits School of Arts lecturer.

Hard as it is to look past the curator's rock star personality, *As you like it* is a vital part of the Joburg Art Fair. Both a part of the bright lights, rank commerciability and slick consumability of the Art Fair and also enclosed in its own high-walled darkness, the mere fact of a curated show of African art intersecting a South African art fair is worth considerable thought. How does the notion of space function within this makeshift gallery within an exhibition hall in a conference centre? Perhaps the answer is mirrored in the place that South African artmaking situates itself within an African discourse, or maybe looks at the notions of how contemporary African production has been viewed by the 'centre' powers for centuries. Dark, and easy to by pass... There were also a lot of other strong work(s) on the show: particularly the beautiful, weighty photographs of Emeka Okereke and David Damoison. I found these pieces very hard to digest though, as the prints were stuck, unframed, on the badly painted black walls of a makeshift gallery within the context of an art fair, where no one expects really to have to think hard about anything.¹⁶⁷

After the first Art Fair, Douglas received such focused criticism about the 'Curated Show' from the art world and the galleries represented at the Fair, that he referred to it as a 'sacrificial anode' which deflected all other possible criticisms of the Fair. This element of the Fair also cost him roughly three times what he had budgeted for it, due largely to the incredibly high costs of shipping and crating of art works to South Africa. He was criticised, amongst other things, for not knowing what African art is or how to display it. Douglas then, in May 2008, decided to visit the *Dak'Art Biennale*, one of only two other large-scale art platforms on the continent (the other is the Bamako photographic biennale) to see African art for himself.

Dak'Art is a 14-year-old 'brand' in Senegal and, whilst well-known on the international arts 'calendar', not without its 'challenges'. As a biennale on the continent it has outlasted the Johannesburg Biennale and one in Havana. However, in 2004, Olu Oguibe felt it necessary to ask, 'Why do we need *Dak'Art*? What is wrong with *Dak'Art*?' (Oguibe, 2004: 84). Oguibe, an international art critic, writer and curator seems to have a set of personal interests in the event that resonates with much of the art diaspora's concerns over, hopes for, and disappointments in, African art and African art experiences. Christian Hanussek comments on the terrible level of organisation of the event and laments the fact that Senghor's collection of the Musee Dynamique, 'is rotting as a result of bad storage' (Hanussek, 2004: 85). Hanussek bitinglly concludes his criticism and review of *Dak'Art 2004* with 'This whole setting, with a lack of real interest and

¹⁶⁷ Linda Stupart, 'Black Box in a White Cube.' March 15, 2008, *Daily Artbeat*.

responsibility towards art and the ambition only to show off in front of an exclusive international art audience, is not a caricature but the bitter postcolonial reality' (2004: 85). According to Oguibe, 'the greatest problem with the Biennale is one of purpose: its organisers no longer have any idea why it is there!' (2004: 830). He refuses to accept that *Dak'Art* is simply important or significant because it is on the African continent and showcases works by Africans. There exists for Oguibe a frustration between Western art criticism and criticism of 'African' art. This for him revolves around a lack of understanding of difference as well as a 'fetishisation' of difference that often 'flattens' into a glib internationalism. Oguibe seems to be suggesting that many international scholars, not living in Africa, 'need' *Dak'Art* to exist ideologically, but the fact is, its manifestation, and what it delivers is disappointing and, therefore, undermines its own 'possibility'.

Douglas returned from *Dak'Art* extremely disillusioned, describing the experience as underwhelming, funded by European cultural institutions, and seemingly a big lawn party for delegates from Europe to 'hang out by the sea' – in this mirroring some of what Hanussek criticizes in the event. The one he attended also happened to be one of the most poorly funded *Dak'Arts* of recent times, due, allegedly, to overspending on the massive 2006 event. He seemed to have come to the conclusion that perhaps the 'international community' is not as interested in African contemporary art as he had hoped, in the first instance, and in the second, that his economic incentive might have been premature. He mused in the aftermath of the 2008 Fair that: 'No one is feeling a massive economic drive in Africa. Plus Africa is not a cohesive place, there are 900 million people spread over fifty-seven countries that speak 400 languages, whatever, whatever, so it is much more difficult than India or China to say, "hey, this is Africa"'. He concluded: 'It is just logistically impossible to access all of Africa and extract good contemporary art from the whole continent and put it in one space at an art fair. So I think this idea of foreigners flying in to discover the undiscovered is possibly a bit optimistic'¹⁶⁸.

This 'conclusion' reached by Douglas should be seen in the context of his and Artlogic's process of constructing the first Art Fair and the emphasis placed on an interested

¹⁶⁸ Interview, 19 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director Joburg Art Fair.

international public for African contemporary art. When Robert Sloon asks in the *Daily Artheat*, 'Does holding the fair in Africa negate the neo-colonial aspect?',¹⁶⁹ which he describes as a predominantly white audience buying work by predominantly black artists and the accompanied exoticisation and exchange of money, the answer from Douglas might well have been that he doesn't care. He was following, from a distance, a movement that he detected internationally where African contemporary art was gaining a certain momentum and interest; he happened to be on the African continent; and he brought these two things together. It was an expedient move as well as a pragmatic one. He also became aware, through the process, that speaking to an international public requires marketing budget and ideally, press relation officers positioned abroad. When it seemed that this thematic was both too 'loaded' and too expensive, he was eager to if not let go of it, let it slip under the radar. In the planning phase for the second Art Fair, a decision was taken to consider the thematic of the Fair in broader terms, which Douglas insists does not negate the focus on the African contemporary, but allows for the possibility of a larger transnational public.

In view of the second Joburg Art Fair then, and their business strategy in general, Artlogic decided to 'enlarge their caption area' and turned their sights on the Global South. What is meant by the Global South and their intentions with this framing are circumscribed in the following way in a letter written to participating galleries of the first Joburg Art Fair to communicate their new direction:

The populations and emerging markets of Africa, Central and Latin America and most of Asia – collectively known as the 'Global South' – offer immense hopes for economic growth, investment and cultural innovation. Artlogic has begun to sow the seeds of regional interdependence with the aim of building more solid trans-national networks within the creative industries of the 'Global South'. Whereas northern markets are largely fixed and determined, the South still offers great space for fresh and energetic partnerships based on shared economic and social histories. Artlogic is a communication company based in South Africa and has now changed its focus to include business ventures in the Global South. We are looking to form reciprocal relationships with other art fairs, creative industries and companies active in these regions. In the first Joburg Art Fair the focus was on African contemporary art, this, however, is a limited market. We will continue to create a focus for art from the continent but have identified the Global South as a strategic way of positioning the art fair to become an internationally important fair in

¹⁶⁹ Robert Sloon, 'A love like no other'. March 15, 2008, *Daily Artheat*.

time. The Joburg Art Fair is ideally placed to forge fresh alliances and reciprocal relations within the contemporary art worlds that have sprung to life in newly prosperous economies like India and Brazil, which share South Africa's rich cultural diversity.

The key theme within this extract is the idea that Africa might be read more productively in relation to *other* places that share certain historical and economic features, rather than in relation to the West, or endlessly in circular fashion in relation to various readings of 'itself'. The notion of creating a theme was still a strategy to demarcate and differentiate this particular fair from the many others that are perhaps for the general art buyer more conveniently located in other world centres – to create a reason for existing; a premise. The 'Global South' seems further to enable a larger international public, once again in the form of a market in one sense of the term, but in another sense, it seems there is a desire to reach out to more sympathetic and dynamic publics, through the mention of creating partnerships with 'other fairs'.

The Global South

In step with these decisions, it was decided that the Curated Show for the 2009 Fair would carry the theme of the Global South and not, as was originally announced in press releases, constitute a different take on the African contemporary by a new chosen international curator. It is, however, crucial to realise that there was substantially less emphasis placed on the Curated Show of the 2009 Fair and that it was ostensibly camouflaged within a whole range of what was termed 'Special Projects'. Tumelo Mosaka, an ex-South African living in the United States, was chosen to work on the 'Global South' Curated Show for 2009. Chapter Six of this document outlines the immense economic strain Artlogic was facing in the planning process for the second event, which had specific impact on this element of the Fair. Artlogic could afford Mosaka's fee and the expenses of bringing him from New York to South Africa, but had to undertake a compromising 'product exchange' with audio-visual brand, Bang and Olufsen, for equipment. This element gave the large booth a home entertainment look and feel.

Mosaka, along with Christopher Spring, was first introduced to the Fair organisers as one of the five international guest speakers for the 2008 Joburg Art Fair Talks programme.¹⁷⁰ His talk was geared towards questioning the need the Joburg Art Fair felt to evoke the label of the African contemporary and he cautioned that many diaspora artists might shy away from being fitted under such a theme. I asked him to elaborate on this point in an interview after his presentation, and he positioned it in the following way:¹⁷¹ 'For me, the question that I am curious about, [is] why you would call it contemporary African, as if you are talking to the West and seeking for it to be validated'. He cautioned that now that the thematic had been established 'you need to find a way to reposition that. Otherwise you land up in the same box'. In our discussion he took a particular stance on the choice to theme the Fair as a move to differentiate it from other fairs which brought home to me, personally, the gap that often exists between theory and practice. Mosaka made the point that one could be sure, in his experience that diasporic African artists resent being labelled 'African' and want to blend into an international criteria for being a recognised artist. Hence, by theming the Fair, Artlogic would have even less chance of attracting the right kind of attention to the event. However, as I have explained, Douglas felt it necessary to create a reason for international visitors to travel all the way to South Africa, and felt convinced that they would not make the expensive trip for merely 'another' art fair.

Mosaka can, thus, be understood to be 'against' geographic labels for exhibitions generally and so it is puzzling why he would except to work on a fairly similar demarcation to the 'African contemporary' in the form of the 'Global South'. In a

¹⁷⁰ Following the international model, Artlogic endeavoured to construct a 'Talks' program for the 2008 Fair with the following themes: 'My collection: collecting African contemporary art' 'Artists talk'; 'Creative industries and the city'. Artlogic received some criticism from the local art circles for having the art fair in Sandton and so thought that the 'Talks' should be held at the Alexander Theatre in Braamfontein for one afternoon only. The speakers included Tumelo Mosaka, Christopher Spring, featured artist Robin Rhode, Simon Njami and Louise Blouin MacBain. All the speakers have relevance for some section of this document except for Macbain who owns a large publishing company and seemed to have flown in to South Africa for one day in her private jet to market her products to 'Africans'. Art Info is an online publication that tracks art prices, art events and art fairs owned by Louise Blouin MacBain Media that also owns Art+Travel, Art +Auction and Modern Painters, arguably one of the most powerful art publishers in the world today. Blouin MacBain agreed to speak only on the following conditions: that she was named as the keynote speaker; that she will leave straight after her talk and not join in any panel discussion; that she can address a group of students, organised by the Art Fair at a different time to promote her new *My Art Info* site – a *FaceBook* type initiative for art students; that she could meet with local journalists for press coverage for herself; and that she can meet with the fair organisers to discuss promotional options for the fair and the galleries with tailored rates for the Africa market. In short, this was a marketing trip to 'capture' some of the new African contemporary market as advertising clients for her products. MacBain, flew in from the US in the morning of the talks and flew out again before the day was over.

¹⁷¹ Interview, 18 March 2008, Tumelo Mosaka, Curator Brooklyn Museum of Art.

newspaper interview he positioned his understanding of the Global South: 'It's another categorization, a generalization of a number of cultures that have traditionally been marginal to the West – it's another way of talking about development'.¹⁷²

Around the time that Mosaka was commissioned, Artlogic also embarked on a plan to attract galleries from the regions of the Global South to boost revenue for the trading component of the Fair. In August 2008, I accompanied Ross Douglas on a research trip to the first art fair in India, *The Indian Art Summit* in Delhi, as a way to test the waters. This experience added richly to my own developing notions about 'public culture' and ways of seeing links between places. While the notion of the Global South has gained some academic interest, the practicalities of forming such bonds, as experienced with the Fair, shifted my thinking around this notion. I outline some features of the *Indian Art Summit* here, both as a backdrop to the journey connecting the first and the second Joburg Art Fairs, and as a way to better position the theoretical analysis of 'public culture'.

The *Indian Art Summit* was held in one of the halls of a large and multi-space conference facility in Delhi, alongside others such as a 'Franchise Expo' in Hall D. This fair occupied about a third of the floorspace of the Joburg Art Fair. I learnt in an interview with team leader for the Summit, Neha Kirpal¹⁷³, that they had a very slim choice of venues that could host this event in India, especially since they started the organisation of the event only six months prior to the day it opened on August 24, 2008. The floors were carpeted, the walls were exhibition-shell scheme of a particularly robust kind and they had thirty-five galleries exhibiting – mostly from India, but some from elsewhere dealing in Indian art. Kirpal explained that the space could only accommodate thirty-five galleries which necessitated a panel of 'industry experts' to select the most appropriate from the ninety applicants. Neha Kirpal was a 28-year-old woman who had worked in the PR and events industry for eight years, two of them in London. She was the one to suggest to her current employer, Hanmer MS&L, that they should look into the business opportunities of owning the first art fair in India. Her company identified the arts industry as a 'growth area' two years prior to this and started by partnering with auction houses for local auctions and small-scale art events. Before this time she 'had no

¹⁷² Anthea Buys, 'Moving Art About Time,' March 20, 2009, *Mail and Guardian, Friday*.

¹⁷³ Interview, 30 August 2008, Neha Kirpal, Hanmer MS&L, employee and team leader of the Indian Art Summit.

knowledge of art', nor did any one of the team members, being more versed in such diverse areas as aviation, lifestyle, finance and sport.

Allowing her background in public relations to come to the fore, she stressed in our interview that even though art had become 'newsy' in the lifestyle and business sectors due to the massive increase in the Indian art market, the art 'following' was still very small. Much like the situation in South Africa, she outlined one of their objectives as being to grow local interest in Indian art, because:

art is very little exposed to the people of this country, very few people go to museums, there are very, very few museums, you can count them on your finger tips, it is not like it is in Europe where going to museums and things is part of every child's growing up experience. I don't know if it is the lack of museums that is responsible for that, or whether it is that you know because people just don't go they do other things for entertainment and somehow art appreciation in our own country is taken for granted, we have a very rich art history of 5000 years, but today's generation is not really aware of what is going on, on the art front.

Once again mirroring some of what Artlogic found in relation to their South African public, she opines that one of the reasons for this lack of interest has been that 'galleries can be quite intimidating for people who don't understand art. It is difficult to walk into a gallery and make a first start'. Accordingly, their idea was to 'drop the gallery walls and to bring out all the galleries and the art and the people behind the galleries into a common more publicly accessible venue where a larger number of people can experience the art, as well as access the knowledge of art'.

Their other motivation for considering an art fair, according to Kirpal, was to 'acknowledge' the full extent to which art works exist within a fully formed economy and industry, and that there 'is need for different stake holders to come together, to discuss (and) collaborate'. The first step for them, then, was to gain the 'trust of the local art community', which involved flying all over the country and was 'a huge effort', she explained, because:

why would anyone trust, why would anyone believe, why would anyone invest their time and money and come? They don't know us. They don't know me, they don't know my organisation at all, we have no background in art, why would someone come and share their collectors with other

galleries and just be exposed in a public platform like this? So it was essentially a leap of faith.

Artlogic used the same words, 'a leap of faith from the galleries' in their 2008 Art Fair catalogue welcoming letter. Yet, where Douglas contacted and visited twenty-three galleries of which twenty-two accepted, Kirpal's team worked off a shortlist of 500 initially, whom they contacted in the early stages to send proposals to participate in the event. The company further used their already established media relations, which they had built up as a PR company, for most of the marketing – something Artlogic had to create from scratch.

Company director, Sunil Gautam¹⁷⁴, had recently merged his Hanmer PR company with the multi-billion dollar international publicists MN&L. He described his operation as a 'multi-disciplinary company of 400 people and we operate out of forty-three cities in the country'. Despite the difference in scale, his central aim and concept was reminiscent of Douglas': 'Our idea was just to give a phenomenal experience to the art world (and) to make art accessible to as many people in India as possible'. Their first fair sold 50 % of the work available, which translated into 10 crores, or 100 million rupees, which is R16,500,000.

The notion of the Global South is premised on shared attributes and possibilities for partnerships. Already some equivalence between the *Joburg Art Fair* and the *Indian Art Summit* was demonstrated, as these relate to the audience for art and the objectives for the creation of a 'first' art fair. Some other clear analogies between the conditions of art production in India and that of South Africa were brought to the fore in the Summit's lecture series, which incorporated academics, artists and journalists, dealers, and auction houses. Most speakers were from India, with the exception of Professor Robert Storr, curator of the 2007 Venice Biennale mentioned earlier, Philip Hoffman of the International Art Fund and a representative from Sotheby's office for Asian Art. Geeta Kapur, an internationally-renowned art historian, gave a brief overview of developments in the arts in India, which seems to have much in common with the situation in South Africa:

¹⁷⁴ Interview, 26 August 2008, Sunil Gautam, Owner of Indian Art Summit.

The last phase of State initiatives came with the often short sighted and over celebratory, but not unimaginative, Indian Festivals all over the world, their dates corresponding to the transition of our quasi-socialist state in the global arena. By now the Indian state had destroyed, through the exercise of bogus authority, resource crunch and sheer incomprehension its basic institutional structure. What then should be the role of the private sector or of the art community? The TATAs can provide some example of a public-private partnership triangulating with the state. For the art community, it has been too slow with alternatives. If you are to go beyond counting the zeros following an artist's name, we need the journals for art history and contemporary theory to make for a consistent critique.

Kapur's description echoes some of the elements sketched out in the Introduction to this study, where the condition of the local arts landscape was outlined. The moments of similarity strikes me as that of a country moving through a period of transformation, where it received much uncritical, international attention; thereafter a period where the state became severed from and disinterested in the arts, forcing others, such as corporates or the 'art community' to see what remains to be done to survive, continue dialogue and communication in one form or another. Kapur disagrees that the art fair can play the role they set out, as her conclusion made clear: 'This art fair, rather grandiosely called the 'Art Summit' claims to speak for the art community. This is a misappropriation of the term 'community', because communities have quite other attributes than corporates and auction houses'.

At one of the private functions to which I received an invitation in exchange for signing up and paying to be a 'delegate', Kapur asked me 'did you come all this way for this crappy art fair?' According to Kapur, one should travel only for biennales, meaning that it is the art fair format in general, and not this one specifically, that she had a problem with. These doubts about the benefits of having an art fair in one's country might well be shared across the globe, but it becomes more acute when, as is the case in both India and South Africa, you have so few other large-scale art platforms, or where the art fair might be the only one. There are, thus, some tangible shared qualities between the two regions. There are also, I found, many irreconcilables.

The first of these was the shape and size of the respective art markets. Returning to the lecture series at the Art Summit, after Kapur, Abhai Sardesai, the editor of the local *Art India* magazine, some artists and Robert Storr gave presentations. After lunch and gearing

up for the 'Art and Commerce' session, a transformation in the audience profile occurred from what seemed like members of a fairly diverse public of scholars and interested art community people to very wealthy looking individuals – I was told then that these were local art buyers and collectors. The local market for Indian art appeared to me, based on this session, to be deep and well-moneyed, functioning in a different stratosphere to the South African or African contemporary ones. The first speaker, Philip Hoffman of the International Arts Fund, who runs sixteen art funds all over the world, stated that India had more art funds than there are in the rest of world. This for him indicated a locally robust buying contingent, but, as other members of the discussion indicated, these are primarily speculative buyers. Young artist, Jitish Kallat, noted that this buying base 'buys a piece and sells it on their way home', which, while ensuring a steady rise in prices, and causing the collective value of the market to soar from two million dollars to more than double that in the past five years, it does not make for a stable art market. Kallat also noted in his presentation that even though prices have doubled over the past ten years, the amount of reviews of art exhibitions in newspapers have declined, with reports focusing more on who attended events than on what was on show. The numbers flying around for art works and the worth of the market were astronomical compared to that in South Africa and this represents an important difference in the two art economies.

Why then would a gallery from India, that has a dedicated local buying base, incur the costs and risks of paying to show at an art fair in South Africa, where the whole economy, and even more so for its art market, is smaller? If an international audience is what the gallery is after, the Dubai Art Fair or one of the many European ones are far better positioned to draw an interested and wealthy audience. This was one consideration that Douglas had to take on board from the lecture series. He nevertheless embarked on a tour of some of the galleries which interested him, and visited them in their own premises to propose the prospect of the Joburg Art Fair and his Global South initiative. One gallerist that he approached told him that she knew the kinds of Indians who lived in South Africa and Johannesburg, and assured him that they do not buy art, certainly not contemporary art. But most frustrating, perhaps, was the general sense gleaned from numerous conversations with different individuals that Africa simply was not a desirable place to aspire to. Douglas found that the connections between India and London or the US to be extremely strong, and that, in fact, much of the market was fuelled by highly successful, young expats living in Britain or America. He had to draw the conclusion that

Africa was not seen as a place where value could be had, and certainly not a place with which India has a connection worth celebrating. Apart from some academic interest in creating partnerships, such as that by editor of the *Art India* magazine, Abhai Sardesai, or some NGO-gallery spaces, there was no commercial interest in the notion of forming bonds across the Global South.

Douglas also met with the director of the Dubai Art Fair, a British man who runs the Fair from London, for the possibility of partnering to create a Fair that shows work from the 'other' places in the world. The Dubai Art Fair receives the bulk of its funding from the city of Dubai. He made it clear that such a notion was not only not appealing; in fact, it was degrading to him – the strength of his fair was the notion of an internationalism with some interesting pieces from places that you might not have visited as a buyers. Ideas around theming generally and a theming coupled to Africa in particular was highly unappealing to him. This then, was not a successful trip for Artlogic and being low on resources generally, another outreach attempt, perhaps to another place in the Global South, was not an option. Neither did Douglas' efforts at gaining support from relevant cultural attaches and consulates based in South Africa yield much that he 'could work with'. As the year progressed, Artlogic was forced to turn their attention to more manageable options and the notion of the Global South slipped away.

As mentioned earlier, in the end, Mosaka's 2009 Curated Show formed one of twelve 'Special Projects' and the emphasis in marketing material was spread between these in a way that was very different from the *As you like it* exhibition which enjoyed a great deal of marketing attention. Accordingly, the project by Mosaka, while essentially replacing what *As you like it* was meant to *do* at the Fair, should be seen in a different, and less emphatic manner. Mosaka was asked to work with multi-media, film or video work exclusively to save the costs of shipping and display. Curatorially, he explains in the same article referenced above: 'I think that Global South is a term used largely in relation to capital flow and economics and I was concerned about what this term would suggest in the context of an exhibition. I started thinking about the urgency of the need to address the notion of locality'. Mosaka titled his show, *Here and now*, signaling specificity of time and place within this larger geographical grouping and thereby simultaneously undermining the 'construct' of a connectedness. The works he chose were predominantly by artists living in the diaspora. The fact that this exhibition became a 'non-event',

especially so when compared to *As you like it*, is symptomatic of Artlogic losing economic and conceptual interest in the idea of the Global South. As this section aimed to make clear, this was principally due to the fact that the ‘public culture’ of the Art Fair at this time, within this setting, renders such a concept less easily producible and perhaps less relevant.

This chapter proposed to speak of ‘public culture in the making’ in which the Fair is positioned as a case study cum battleground cum laboratory for such a task. As outlined above, the term public culture denotes at once cultural forms and formations taking place in the public realm and situated in a given public space-time reality, while also placing considered focus on what Appadurai and Breckenridge demarcate as that ‘especially outside of the Euro-American world’ (2008: 351). Principal amongst the conclusions one could draw from the above discussion and descriptions of Artlogic, Ross Douglas, the African contemporary and the Global South is that the task is frustrated at both the levels of the theoretical and the practical. It illustrates in this instance how tenuous the practical links between places are, outside the spheres of, on the one hand, the academic or theoretical, and, on the other, the more harsh realities of global markets. An Art Fair is premised on business and economics, and concepts such as ‘shared histories’ seem to speak a different language.

This section of the thesis then, has been dedicated to the analysis of a particular incarnation of the African contemporary and the Global South which might well play out very differently within a different setting and time.¹⁷⁵ The aim was to focus in some detail on a *practice* within these realms that tests some of the theoretical arguments that have been in circulation, without being able to draw definitive conclusions. As with the rest of this study, it is also an attempt to better understand the ingredients of the contemporary reality in South Africa and what such a reality creates and enables, but also what it disallows and blocks through the time-space continuum of the first and the second Joburg Art Fairs.

In conclusion, it is important to note that in introducing the Art Fair’s publics and its space/time ingredients within this section of the thesis, a main finding was that the

¹⁷⁵ Tony Bennett in questioning the usefulness of terms such as ‘globalisation’ and how they are often used in scholarship to denote epochal changes or the ‘emergent’, make a similar point. His is not necessarily one of the practical frustrations of ‘globalisation projects’, but the thinking around the term that does not include considerations of power relations between nations and places (2006: 47).

public(s) that conglomerated around the Joburg Art Fair did so for reasons that were not, in the first instance, narrowly political in nature. By this I mean to suggest two things. First, this was the first time in South Africa that art publics were brought together on this scale without any national or political agenda to do with celebration of nationhood or a sense of political solidarity. Moreover, in the design of the Fair, there was a conscious attempt at placing the focus on aspects of 'lifestyle' and consumption, but also, on the simple experience of being in the midst of a public. In this the Fair displayed a disregard for what publics from elsewhere might expect of a South African cultural event. An attempt was made to create a Fair that is not like a 'festival' but more like a 'mall', thereby playing into the notion of the everyday or 'unexceptional'. With reference to Douglas' comment about families bringing their kids to look at art, it seems that the Fair aimed to simulate a 'normal', everyday experience for a curious public. Second, the focus on the art *industry*, through galleries, rather than the art works, allows for a new 'public' to enter into this arena, either to add to the art economy, but also, and perhaps more richly so, to add to the conversation around this topic; to introduce the concept of art as sociable activity. This last chapter, however, aimed to show the ways in which publics from elsewhere have different motivations for their interest or non-interest in the event, either to do with conceptions of the African contemporary or conceptions of the depth of the market for this kind of art.

The second part of the thesis that follows takes a step back from the event itself to look at the economics of the Joburg Art Fair, whilst, in the final part, attention is brought back to the Fair to look at how the social elements of the Fair stand in relation to the actual art objects exhibited at the Joburg Art Fair.

PART 2

Art Money: Culture and Economy

Introduction

The Joburg Art Fair, for most, was an event that lasted three days. For those that created it, however, it was an everyday preoccupation. In this part of the study, the Joburg Art Fair is considered as a business. I argue here that the Joburg Art Fair forces a version of an art-money relationship to the fore in a way that is unique within South African art history and that begs closer consideration. Such a focus implies that the art object of contemporary art as such, takes a back seat to the cultural 'work' that art does and the 'ideas' people have around how art ought to interact with money and with society more generally. In doing so, this section seeks to provide answers to questions about the interrelationship of art and money within a particularly South African context. Whilst some elements of this local context may be ascribed to the specificity of the contemporary moment, others are deeply imbedded in the historical trajectories of local finance, the local art landscape, and art and patronage relationships in South Africa. I highlight throughout the ways in which this specific South African case speaks to global movements of art and finance, yet it is not my intention to do a comparative analysis. An investigation into some of the effects and conflicts that the, often disparate, realm of art and economics produced in the life of the Fair, enables a reading of cultural products and the working lives of people, amidst broader questions about financial transactions and the logics of finance, the sustainability of 'cultural projects', and cultures of work. It also positions, contextualises, and un-packs preconceptions that exist around an art-money coupling.

Four sets of ideas are crucial for this part of the study. The first is the importance and nature of the relation between 'culture' and 'economics' enacted by the Fair. The second is of the Art Fair as a marketplace. The third is the manner in which the relationship between culture and economy exemplified by the Fair also harbours a political dimension. Finally, this section engages with questions about money and the power of numbers.

The Art Fair is an annual event and so has to structure its finances to run like a business year after year. Unlike a once-off production or large government-sponsored 'festival', the Fair secures for Artlogic a valuable source of income as a small company that employs full-time staff and aims to position itself as a small business operating in the art world, through its *ownership* of the event. The Joburg Art Fair's main source of revenue is corporate sponsorship. Thereafter it relies on income from art galleries that rent booth spaces each year. What these two sources of income suggest up front is that the company behind the Art Fair has clients that are in the purely financial sector, and others that deal only in the 'creative industries', or purely cultural sector. Artlogic is positioned between these two realms and needs both to come together in order to make the Fair happen. This relationship suggests one that is both 'cultural' and 'economic' in an obvious and instrumental way, yet a deeper reading suggests two different approaches to negotiating the contemporary.

For this reason, the meeting of 'culture' and 'economy', both cumbersome terms, often used without specificity, is crucial to an understanding of the Art Fair. Through its being and its form, the Art Fair brought these two terms into dynamic interaction, in ways that take on different meanings at different moments in the analysis. The cultural project under investigation here, the Joburg Art Fair, is also a kind of a market – arguably the oldest form of economic exchange, and perhaps the epitome of modern-day capitalism. It is, however, a market for cultural goods. Highlighting this aspect brings to the fore not only the economic within the cultural, but also ideological tensions around expectations of a cultural object as a 'public good' or a thing for 'private' ownership. In this specific case, the nature of the cultural project is overtly 'economically' focused and it is this aspect of the Art Fair that received the most attention in the media. Using the market as an interpretative framework is part of an attempt to understand what happens in the minds of the public when 'culture', in the form of cultural goods and a cultural event, is brought into such close and unashamed proximity with the economic.

This section, therefore, maps the shifting meanings of the terms 'culture' and 'economic' as evoked by the Joburg Art Fair, while arguing that the proximity of these two terms creates a nexus in which the political resides. The political is present, for instance, in the stance the organising company takes in relation to the post-apartheid culture that it is creating. There is also a distinct political aspect attached to the manner in which the

sponsor, in this instance, the bank positions its financial backing of projects. Finally, the way in which the relationship between culture and economics are viewed in the public realm has political implications for understanding the respective responsibilities placed in the private and public sectors to nurture and grow the arts.

Finally, the three chapters that together make up this section are underpinned by the idea that numbers speak; that numbers are performative, that numbers have agential powers. All three chapters are, in part, about the agency of numbers and the *relationships* that numbers unlock. This section of the study, thus, engages with numbers and figures, and ask critical questions about how numbers are generated, how they influence the way things are viewed and read, and the kind of power they exert over creative practice.

Much anthropological and sociological work focuses on the relationship between culture and the economy. Some writers believe that there is an increasing ‘culturalisation’ of economics (Lash and Urry; 1994) brought on by, amongst other things, increasing cross-national trade and digital communication. Others (for example Ray and Sayer, 1999) believe that the ‘cultural turn’ in social theory has given rise to new ways of reading economic behaviour through a focus on discourse, which highlights the gendered and racialised qualities of the contemporary workplace. More recent writings such as that in the volume by du Gay and Pryke (2002) indicate a weariness of both of these apparent ‘changes’ in the relationship between economics and culture. Du Gay and Pryke admit that ‘new’ readings based on the ‘cultural turn’ might well apply to our understanding of economics, yet, it should not lead one (as sometimes happen in Lash and Urry) to confuse two very distinct processes – there are different objective tasks at work between economics and cultural economics; they are still ‘two distinct practices’ with different aims (2002: 6). It is also possible, as Gavin Jack (2002) points out, that trying to see the present as somehow radically different from previous times, what he calls ‘epochalist’ theories, could lead to new grand narratives that ‘are so grand that they are decontextualised and empirically insubstantial’ (265).

Within cultural economic writing two distinct approaches can be identified: the first applies economic models to arts sectors of which David Throsby’s (2001) volume is exemplary; the other looks for the ‘culture’ within the economic, or does a cultural reading of economic behaviour. Keith Negus (2006) refers to the former as a ‘distinct

research tradition' that developed in the late 1970s' which was 'concerned with the economics of the arts' (116). This is an approach that calculates the value of the arts in economic terms and looks at sustainability models, policy and business practices within what is often seen as, the 'creative industries'. Within this strand the focus is most often specifically on 'creative' economies such as the workings of advertising agencies, the music industry or museums, in order to shed light on an economic sector that has only recently started receiving scholarly attention. Writers such as Cooke and Lazzeretti (2008) feel strongly that a general conflation of the terms 'cultural' and 'creative' within these kinds of studies does a disservice to a thorough understanding of the 'creative industries'. They feel that 'cultural' events are 'perforce usually subsidized or sponsored by industry' and so, in some senses, sit outside of the market. They point out that 'there is a strong perception that art, in particular, but also music, is a good that should be universally available since contemplation of the sublime refreshes the human spirit' (2) and, therefore, sit closely aligned with governments. Companies in the creative industries, according to them, 'are not like this' (3) in that they generate their own income by selling their time and expertise. It is an insightful reading in that it points to what I have termed the *ideological expectations* of the role of art in society. Yet writers such as David Throsby dispute the point by Cooke and Lazzeretti around government involvement in the 'cultural' by quoting statistics that show governments are, in fact, taking less and less responsibility for this 'good'. Cooke and Lazzeretti's may also be creating a too clear-cut distinction between companies that create workplaces out of purely 'cultural' or 'art' projects and those that sell their time 'doing creative work' and so generate revenue for their companies. Artlogic, I argue below, falls somewhere in between these two modes of operating as a business.

The second approach to cultural economics tasks itself with understanding economically focused activity or the workplace through a cultural lens. An example would be a study of a stock exchange trader through a sociological, or anthropological analysis of his life, behaviour and circumstances, which is aimed at formulating a reading of the culture of his work – what kind of person he is, what kind of world he is invested in, and what kind of world results from his behaviour (Abolafia, 1996). Ortiz (2005) positions the difference that a cultural lens brings to the study of what Law (2002) insightfully terms 'economically relevant behavior' (35) as follows: 'While economists are concerned with how markets direct the actions of profit maximizing actors, anthropologists have been

interested in exploring how actors' perceptions, social relations and obligations affect their economic decisions' (59).¹⁷⁶

Both of the approaches discussed have a role to play in this study. Close attention is paid to the business model of Artlogic and the elements necessary to make the event sustainable. In these instances, the analysis is guided by the first tradition of cultural economics in the sense that it comprises a reading of the 'economics of the arts'. The substance of the analysis is, however, geared towards providing a cultural perspective on the economic behaviour within Artlogic, as well as the economics underpinning the Fair more broadly. By considering the 'values' at play within the event of the Fair; the people involved; and the ways people perceived the event, the cultural is foregrounded within a discussion that is generally more focused on economic aspects. All three chapters are composed of descriptions based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at Artlogic, an organisation that trades in 'culture'. As a result, this section draws on economic anthropology and recent sociological texts such as that of Du Gay and Pryke (2002). Economic anthropology is useful insofar as its 'main features are the concern to place people's economic activities, their thoughts and beliefs about those activities and the social institutions implicated in those activities, all within the context of the social and cultural world of the people being studied' (Carrier, 2005: 4).

In addition, the 'cultural' reading of the economic activities within this section draws on the influential writing of Certeau (1984) in its consideration of the workplace and the everyday. In recent studies of South Africa, Certeau's work has mainly been deployed in relation to writing on the city (Dunlop, 2000; Kreutzfeld, 2004; Nuttall, 2009) and has not yet been applied to the workplace. Certeau's work elaborates on the difference between a 'tactic' and a 'strategy' (Certeau, 1984: xix) in a way that is suggestive for understanding the way in which Artlogic operates as a 'big fish' in the small pond of the visual arts sector in South Africa, and yet a small fish in the big ocean that is the South African corporate sphere. The difference between a tactic and a strategy has everything to do with time and place: the strategy is devised in advance by careful 'calculation' of one's place amidst and in relation to external forces – it is how one positions oneself (35–7). In this context it is the way Artlogic devises a business plan to make the Art Fair

¹⁷⁶ The methodologies of Actor Network Theory (especially that by Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998 and Science and Technology Studies have possibly been the most influential in terms of creating modes of studying a workplace using sociological models.

sustainable. A tactic is of the moment, when one is in the 'space of the other', when a situation is in the hands of a 'foreign' and stronger power. This I translate to be the invasion of the stronger players that Artlogic does business with into their way of seeing and doing. I devote a section to a particular incident of how a negotiation is conducted in Chapter Four as a crucial survival 'strategy' of small companies where one relies on 'tactics' to get through the moment. For Certeau, the tactic is 'the art of the weak' where one would do anything to survive – 'trickery is possible for the weak' – resonating strongly with my experience dealing with corporate institutions. Certeau uses the terminology of war, which Ross Douglas incidentally often turns to for describing his business plan and interactions with clients.

This section considers the workings of Artlogic in order to bring to the study a behind-the-scenes view of 'a' Joburg Art Fair. This is offered as much to illuminate the ways in which small companies function within a given field, as to highlight how this company is unique in what it does – as are the circumstances involved in this particular event. The Fair, as articulating force of the contemporary moment, cannot be considered without taking note of the long period of planning, negotiation and partnering through which it is made possible. The analysis that follows responds to a call from Certeau (1984) to investigate 'everyday practices', 'ways of operating' or 'doing things' and from a more contemporary, actor network theory angle, Law's insistence on an 'investigation of practice; an investigation of the ordering of materially heterogeneous socio-technical economically relevant relations, their enactment and performance... an investigation of the constitution of relevant forms of agency and subjectivity' (Law 2002: 25).¹⁷⁷

Such analyses hardly exist to date in contemporary South Africa. While there is a fair amount of work that looks at management, or, for example, the effects of BEE on the economy, there is still a lot of scope for studying these analytic themes following a cultural approach. The workplace is often portrayed as a largely undefined evil force of anti-democratic or a-political profit-making that threatens cultural expression, and as such has not received sufficient, narrowly focused attention or theorization (see Jacobs

¹⁷⁷ Much work has been done in the field of cultural economic studies that examined the workplace in this way (Lash and Urry, 1994; Ray and Sayer, 1999). Recent studies that bear most directly upon the approach followed here, include, for example, those which look at the effects of modernity on the workplace (Sayer, 1999); studies on how workplaces are incorporating 'culture' (Allen, 2002); research on the kind of cultures that are created by specific workplaces (Law, 2002); and studies on the ways in which government regulations enable certain kinds of workplaces (McRobbie, 2002).

and Wasserman, 2003). Furthermore, the heads of companies and the stock market activity of large corporates in South Africa are thoroughly covered in the business media and often journalists take up the task of writing biographies, yet very little academic work looks at who the people behind the decisions are and how a cultural landscape gets produced by entities within the private sphere. While this is only one segment of this study and not in the least exhaustive, it aims to demonstrate that through the sheer amount of time people generally spend there, the workplace is one of the foremost places where 'cultures' are negotiated in present-day South Africa. Furthermore, the aim is to show how cultural production is intimately tied in with, for example, the ability to create functional workplaces, the ability to communicate with other more powerful players in the workplace for assistance, and the ability to navigate the corporate realm. Artlogic provides a small glimpse into these processes in practice.

South African writing that approach economics with this kind of cultural lens has been scarce. An informative, albeit less academic, example of a study of markets, marketing and the people within these structures is Muzi Kuzwayo's (2007) *There's a Tsotsi in the Boardroom*. Kuzwayo starts his volume with a detailed description of the township, Highlands, in which he grew up, where the streets were ruled by ruthless gangs. He prefaces his portrait of the South African market place on the behaviour of the Tsotsi as ever vigilant, ever ruthless negotiator on the township streets. Kuzwayo's volume is based on empirical research in South African boardrooms as well as numerous interviews. His description of the market place through the eyes of the Tsotsi renders a close and familiar reading of the culture of local economics that I experienced in my year in the field: 'If brands could talk, I have no doubt that they would talk about growing up in a bad neighbourhood, in say, the dangerous Pick'n Pay aisles. Checkers would talk about being stalked and eventually eaten by what was then a small company called Shoprite' (16).

Incidentally, Kuzwayo, at the time, head of marketing for the advertising agency TBWA, was the only black person who was not in government employment, with whom Artlogic met with in pursuit of funding for the Joburg Art Fair. This is important, as it implies that this study did not come into much contact with one of the most drastic changes in economic policy in the post-apartheid South Africa: that of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This policy would certainly have affected FNB and other

sponsors that Artlogic came across, yet never entered or manifested in the life of the project. By this I mean to say that none of the actors described in this part of the study gave insight into or brought into the discussion the role of BEE in modern South African finance. Duncan Innes (2007) describes the history of South African economy as a long tale of different forms of ‘economic empowerment’ or affirmative action measures for and against different groups. Black Economic Empowerment was so positioned to put *ownership* of the economy into the hands of black people in as short a time span as possible through share options (Innes, 2007: 68). Wendy Luhabe, one of the current BEE success stories, explains: ‘The idea of BEE is to integrate the value of ubuntu (I am because you are) into the economic psyche of our country, to have a sufficiently large black, middle class to keep the economy growing and ultimately become globally competitive’ (19). Luhabe’s opinions form part of a collection of essays edited by Hadland *et al.* (2007) titled, *Visions of Black Economic Empowerment* on the subject of BEE and is a valuable example of economic systems and economic behaviour being read ‘culturally’. This is achieved by asking their contributors to reflect on the BEE system ‘from a values perspective’ (Luhabe: 18) – thus, not the more popular information on deal-making and the slicing and dicing of large company ownership, but the culturally informed processes both behind and resulting from the way in which BEE has manifested in South African business. Mangcu’s introduction to the volume, as well as many other contributions, use words such as ‘value’ and ‘morality’ that signal the cultural angle that is under investigation. Mangcu states the ‘overarching theme’ of the volume to be ‘the role of social values in economic development’ (v). The absence of the processes of BEE from the life of the Art Fair in any immediate way, signals the slow pace of transformation in the areas touched on by the Art Fair, yet at the same time, might signify the fact that it is a less desirable sector of the economy for BEE. It also marks the edge of this study in trying to understand the contemporary moment in South Africa.

Part Two, then, encompasses three chapters. In Chapter Four, the focus is on the company behind the Art Fair, Artlogic. Yet, departing from the analysis centred upon the idea of ‘publics’, as was the case in Chapter Two, and the figure of Ross Douglas, as was the case in Chapter Three, Chapter Four enacts a cultural reading of the company’s business positioning and business practices. Using ethnographic material, I describe how a small company operates in the ‘economically’ private sphere to ‘sell’ ‘culture’, which, I demonstrate, requires a particular ‘cultural understanding’ from the outset as well as a

particular understanding of culture. By initiating the analysis from the foyer of the Art Fair, three 'markers' are identified that, in turn, reveals something about Artlogic's brand 'philosophy', its situatedness within the cultural landscape, and its relation with sponsors and galleries. This chapter analyses each of these markers in turn to come to an understanding of how the event embodies the way Artlogic would like to construct the world in which the company is situated and the many pitfalls this process entails.

Chapter Five looks at the financial partner to the fair, First National Bank. The focus is on the relationship between a 'cultural' project, its financial processes and its financial backer. The financial backer, a bank, is seen here as the ultimate embodiment of the 'economic'. The discussion explores the process of gathering 'economic' backing for a 'cultural' project. In the edited volume, *Limits to Liberation After Apartheid*, Robins states that 'ordinary citizens are often the primary authors of post-apartheid cultural expression' (2005: 15). While it is not clear what an 'ordinary citizen' is, this chapter assumes that those individuals who make everyday decisions in a bank are some of them. The bank itself is also a site for analysis as it is situated in a particular relation to both historic and contemporary economic culture.

Once the background to the funding and organisational aspects of the event has been laid out, I turn, in Chapter Six, to the ideological readings of the event in the local press and amongst the art community. In this chapter the focus is on the political that is evoked when art and money is positioned in close proximity within the South African context particularly, but also in a way that reflects some global trends and theories. This is a more historical look at the meetings of culture and economics in South Africa and considers responses from the interview candidates as well as the local press where opinions are expressed of sponsorship of the arts and ideas about art and money. These ideological and opinion-based observations are counter-posed to the financial data from the first art fair gathered during the participant observation period. What I intend to show in this chapter, based on my fieldwork experience, is the radical agencial work performed by numbers in general. I use the word 'perform' to suggest the ways in which numbers are manipulated and 'played' to communicate messages, to evoke the language of 'the real', and to substantiate positions of power. Often the numbers, by their very nature, are not contested, and equally often bear only tangential relation to what they are being used for. Within negotiations, often both parties assume a leeway in the

interpretation of numbers. These are numbers in budgets, in salaries, in sales of artworks, in people coming ‘through the door’, et cetera. Numbers, I have found, can be used to question assumptions people might hold about ‘sustainability’, as I do in Chapter Six by quoting the numbers from the Art Fair budget, but can also be used to back up an argument that is false. Numbers were the main language for bridging a divide that is set up from the start within Artlogic’s business model as that between the ‘art’ world, and the corporate, or business world. As the title to this part of the study suggests, numbers often designate monetary figures, yet, at other times also refer to numbers of people, or the size of a database, or the size of a market, used to demonstrate, for example, how many people came to the Fair on Saturday the 14th, which, in turn, was monetised and evaluated within the art/sponsor relationship.

While larger arguments are clearly at stake throughout these three chapters, the most powerful insight, I would argue, is the construction of a scaffolding for these arguments out of a series of episodes and incidents observed with a tight lens during the months of ethnographic work. It is, thus, an analysis that is highly reliant on descriptions of personal encounters. The challenge created by looking at the Art Fair in this way demonstrates what Certeau identifies as the ‘... gap between the atomization characteristic of research and the generalization required in reporting it’ (1984, xxiii). When relying this kind of research, it is furthermore tempting to get caught up in personalities and a degree of the journalistic. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that findings within this particular case are so positioned to speak to larger arguments regarding ways in which small businesses in the arts function; relationships with sponsors within the arts; and preconceptions that exist around large-scale art events such as art fairs.

PART 2

Chapter 4. Creating the Joburg Art Fair: Artlogic

At the time of my research the Joburg Art Fair was Artlogic's only business venture. It was, thus, at the Joburg Art Fair itself that one could learn most about this company. In trying to understand something of Artlogic from visiting the Joburg Art Fair, much information was contained in the foyer-area of the Fair, where earlier I described visitors bought their tickets to enter. The ticket booths were staffed with people available to attend to queries. Yet, apart from orienting a visitor to the Fair, these informational props contained 'markers' that signal and reveal something about the company behind the Fair: how they would like to position themselves, who works for them, and how they operate. This chapter aims to analyse the workings of this company as an example of a small 'art' business operating in the post-apartheid, in doing so theorising Artlogic deliberately as an everyday place of work. Three 'markers' in particular are used as structuring devices for the analysis undertaken in this chapter: The first is the small, but noticeable reminder that this is 'An Artlogic Event', found on the T-shirts worn by staff, the banners hung with ticketing information, as well as the brochures, or 'guides' handed out upon paying for the ticket. The questions raised here is, why this constant reminder? What is being communicated about the company? Who are they? The second marker is the logo or brand mark of the Joburg Art Fair. It was displayed, in the first Fair, above the ticket counters on a black background, and on a much enlarged white background at the second Fair. Here I consider the life of this brand mark: its coming into being and mutations, as well as what this says about processes of working in a company such as Artlogic. The third and last marker is jointly the map and the catalogue. Here the discussion focuses on the construction of the map, the client relations between Artlogic and galleries it speaks of and how Artlogic might function within a larger cultural field. The catalogue to the Fair, which could be purchased just before entering the 'gallery section' at both Fairs, I argue, embodies a way of working with galleries, art works and sponsors, as well as a particular decision-making process behind the consolidation of information for a Fair visitor

‘An Artlogic Event’

All promotional material for the Fair bore the reminder ‘An Artlogic Event’. Standing in the entrance area, one would have noticed it at the bottom of the large banner that presented ticket information. As noted, it was also printed on the sleeves of T-Shirts worn by staff. On the border between the lobby and the Fair gallery section, one of the first visible booths at both Art Fairs was simply called the ‘Artlogic booth’ – announced by a large, printed logo on the back wall of the booth. Inside the space were a table and some chairs only. At times, the booth was occupied by young art student volunteers, who were selling catalogues and handing out postcards, but never by the director himself or any senior member of the fair organising team. Nor was it here where general information could be obtained – there was a special counter called ‘Information’ for this. Its function was, thus, a mere physical reminder of the company that produced the event that one was experiencing. This constant reminder of ‘brand’ communicates a desire to instil in the minds of visitors a connection between the event and the company behind it – behaviour that suggests that Artlogic sees itself as a ‘brand’ and, like other brands, through constant physical visibility, aims to cultivate recognition and in time grow its market share. Not all art companies function in this way. In fact, in South Africa most art events never sport a brand this prominently, as many arts companies are not-for-profit organisations and the emphasis is placed on the events produced rather than on creating awareness around their brands. Other companies, such as the Joubert Park Project or The Bag Factory, simply seem to have a more sensitive relationship with the world of commerce and advertising that ‘branding’ belongs to.

In South Africa, there are currently very few other for-profit companies¹⁷⁸. Here I consider two that might be compared to Artlogic in as far as they undertake similar kinds of projects and have some overlapping business strategies in the field of contemporary art. The first is a company called Trace¹⁷⁹ established in 2004, fronted by Clive van den Berg. Trace describes itself as a ‘team of professionals in the field of heritage, research, exhibition and design’. Trace and Artlogic share comparable expertise, which becomes evident when one considers what Artlogic did for the Art Fair and what Trace lists as

¹⁷⁸ There are many established not-for-profit companies operating in the broad cultural field as well as in contemporary art specifically, such as the Joubert Park Project in Johannesburg and the Community Arts Project in Cape Town.

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.tracegroup.co.za/about.html>.

their 'practice' on the website: 'We work with clients on all aspects of exhibitions, publications and public programmes, including strategy, planning, design and implementation of projects, institutions and public spaces'. Their website and their products speak the jargon of a particular version of the post-apartheid public sphere which is concerned with re-dress, heritage and inclusivity: 'We have become specialists in extracting the stories hidden beneath the surface of South Africa and bringing them to life'.

The other comparable company is The Trinity Session, run by artists Marcus Neustetter and Stephen Hobbs, which was also launched in the post-apartheid period with their first projects occurring in 2001. On their website, they position themselves in a way that seems to lie closer to the objectives of Artlogic than those of Trace in that it mentions prominently working with 'businesses': 'The Trinity Session is a contemporary art production team that investigates the relationships between art and business, collaborative practice and network development'. Reading further in their mission statement, it becomes clear that this is an artist-led company, more interested in research, through 'local and global debates, networks and partnerships' and the academic foci of 'exchanges with Johannesburg, in relation to Africa and similar first world-third world contexts'.¹⁸⁰

Looking at the staff structure of these two companies it is explicit that both members of the Trinity Session are practicing artists and Trace consists of a team that 'come from the disciplines of journalism, film and television, fine art, architecture, education and history, and through our work in the heritage sector, we have forged a unique inter-disciplinary methodology'. This would be the first important distinction between the internal operations of Artlogic and these two examples. Artlogic does not consist of a 'team' of individuals who might do most of their work with the company in question, but have concurrent, independent careers. Artlogic has an internal structure much like a large corporate. It employs a director, project manager, a press officer and office manager on a full-time, 8am to 5pm basis; and brings in freelancers or contractors as and when a project requires it. The other, more significant difference between Artlogic and these two examples is the fact that Artlogic is engaged in a politics of the present that, largely, ignores this particular version of post-apartheid rhetoric, mentioned above, as having to

¹⁸⁰http://www.onair.co.za/broadcast/?page_id=2

do with re-dress, heritage and inclusivity in the case of 'Trace, and 'research'-based projects listed by The Trinity Session. Furthermore, while both companies have worked with or for corporate sponsors, both Trace and The Trinity Session do their most well-funded and well-publicised work in collaboration with, or in service of, some government sector.¹⁸¹ The rhetoric that I refer to is one that stems directly from a 'taking on board' of the changes necessitated by the country's new democracy and, thus, is closely aligned with government objectives.

Artlogic can be said to be far less interested in issues of 'democracy' than it is in those of marketing and consumption. In that sense the company is closer to local advertising agencies. However, it would seem that Artlogic interprets the business of selling contemporary culture through contemporary art as a rather more serious and less transient affair than would most advertising agencies in their creative tasks of constructing clever marketing angles for a client. Some of the most daring and progressive interpretations of the post-apartheid have, arguably, come from this sector (see Nuttall, 2009). Furthermore, the commercial relationship of an advertising agency is such that the client, or corporate, pays the agency a retainer fee upon entering into an agreement. This fee is fixed and paid out monthly, regardless of the amount of work done, and could be entered into for a number of consecutive years. There is no premium placed on having a particularly successful campaign versus one that was less successful – the exchange value between the 'creative' agency and the client is fixed and market-related. Artlogic's business strategy is not this transparent or measurable, a fact that, as I will demonstrate below, defines its very being and sense of self.

I have a vivid memory of the first meeting that I attended with Ross Douglas. It was November 2006. As I drove with Douglas, whom I had just met a day ago at my interview, he warned me that this meeting might have an acrimonious edge, but that I was not to take it too seriously. The aim of the gathering was to resolve financial disputes with a shareholder in one of Artlogic's very early projects. Funds to cover the costs of this project were raised by Douglas through the creation of a consortium of

¹⁸¹ The Trinity Session does a lot of work with the Johannesburg Development Agency through public art, or what they call 'cultural management'. Currently they are constructing the Hillbrow Berea Public Art programme which form part of regeneration initiatives for various parts of the city. Some of Trace's more famous work includes the conceptualising of elements of the new Constitutional Court and the Bara-link Taxi rank.

shareholders, amongst which was a television production company. The dispute set to be discussed that day was between the production company and Artlogic.

The large boardroom table was filled with financial spreadsheets, which Artlogic had sent to the company during the course of the project. I too had arrived armed with an inch-thick wad of excel spreadsheet documents. These were both our weapons and the field on which the battle would take place. The company was accusing Artlogic of two things which bear upon the character of the organisation that was to stage the first contemporary art fair in Africa three years later. First, Artlogic was accused of embezzling the money by paying huge fees to itself which diminished the profits due to be paid out to shareholders. Alternatively, but not concurrently, Artlogic was accused of being 'too useless' to run such a project, as they were under-staffed and 'administratively challenged' as one person present put it. Either of these accusations seemed plausible at the time and would be brought up again in different situations by different parties during my fieldwork. Artlogic never embezzled any money, of course, but it is hard to justify what fees such a company ought to charge for its services and, therefore, easy to accuse it of over-charging. Looking at the various spreadsheets, it was clear that the numbers bore little relation to each other, and, in fact, during the course of the discussion virtually took on a life of their own. Numbers were extracted from one piece of paper to substantiate one particular argument, then from another for a different purpose.

I understood by the end of that meeting that while the numbers were crucial as both buffer and ammunition, they were not at all what the dispute was about. The dispute, as is often the case, was a personal one where half the project's money was sitting in the bank account of the one party and the other half in that of the other without either trusting the other enough to unlock their share of the funds. It was a shocking experience of open accusation and extreme hostility. I was convinced that Artlogic, seemingly owing a quarter of million Rand to various parties, would have to close its doors – surely that would be the logical next step? However, somehow Douglas managed to overpower his opponent, in doing so not resolving the situation but stepping in to end the meeting with an agreement to reconvene at a later stage. It was a meeting that simply had to be had. In other words, I gathered that it was more important that it took place than it was to reach a resolution; resolution was not necessarily the desired outcome. None of the legal accusations leveled against Artlogic, such as the possibility of having

embezzled the money, were true and everyone knew this, as I was to realise only later. What is of importance here is my own assumptions, at the time, that when one is accused and treated in this way, that one should ‘close one’s doors’, which suggests my inability to see the ‘stand-off’ for what it was: merely a tactic. Important too was the nature of the accusations – being either lazy, under qualified, ‘useless’ or engaging in ill conduct such as stealing and being untrustworthy. Both are accusations that can only with much empirical research and attention to detail be rebuffed, yet are extremely easily laid against an opponent. As I mentioned it would not be the only time Artlogic would be accused of behaving in either or both of these ways. The other important point to take from this incident is the role of the spreadsheet, its numbers, negotiation and the ‘playing of the game’.¹⁸²

A second experience which helps to illustrate the character of Artlogic was the first meeting I attended with the eventual sponsor of the Joburg Art Fair, FNB in December 2006.¹⁸³ The objective of the meeting, Douglas told me many times, was to agree on an amount for the sponsorship of the Art Fair and secure an agreement for the payment of the first tranche before Artlogic closed its doors for the Christmas holidays. The weeks building up to the day the meeting was scheduled to take place, was a frantic rush to ‘produce’ documents on the Fair: what it would look like; who it would cater to; who the international buyers were that might be approached; who the local galleries were; a ‘budget’ of estimated costs – all forming a twenty-page document, the main function of which was to serve as evidence of ‘work’. This, in turn, would concretise the event in the minds of the sponsor – not as proposed event, but as an actually, ‘in the pipe-line’ conceptualised Joburg Art Fair. Throughout the document the sponsorship figure of R3 million was dotted so as to instil the amount into the minds of the readers. Here I learnt a further two lessons about this business: first, that more often than not, work is performed as opposed to ‘done’, meaning one needs to display a skill at working, at producing the right documents and ‘playing at’ being a real business (this, of course, is not always the case and does not mean that ‘real’ results are not produced). The second is that value, or what a sponsor might be prepared to pay, is relative and largely

¹⁸² Law (2002) writes insightfully about the analytical elements behind considering the excel spreadsheet as a tool that renders a complex set of variables, simple and readable at a glance.

¹⁸³ At this stage, I was not yet a researcher in the company, but a young employee looking for part-time work to pay for MA studies. My role subsequently changed to that of full-time employee and project manager.

unconnected to things like production costs, fixed rate salaries or ‘what it might be worth’.

The first lesson is crucial to the survival of a small business, as it makes up the ingredients of its everyday busy-ness and according to former CEO of Business and Arts South Africa (BASA), Nicola Danby¹⁸⁴, is precisely where many small arts companies falter. Danby, in our interview, referred to this as ‘corporate governance’. It entails putting in place a rigorous system that enables the execution of the vital tasks of paying VAT, company tax, keeping invoices in order and managing expenses. This is extremely challenging and could bring any small company that comes to the field without business, accounting, or management training, to their knees. Corporate governance is also, crucially, a skill that has to be *demonstrated*. The ability to simulate corporate environments might be the very key to the successes of small arts companies. Not only does it create trust and familiarity in the small company from the point of view of the large corporate, it is also, according to Danby, the main weapon used when seeking to criticise or terminate business with small companies. One of BASA’s main aims, with their relatively small budget for such an ambitious name, is to make arts organisations understand ‘who will be sitting on the other side of your proposal’. Danby, during her time as head of the organisation, did ‘hundreds of workshops across the country’ to teach small arts companies about governance: ‘governance relates to the organising structure of a company: tax, legislation and decision-making’. According to Danby many arts organisations either do not understand this, or do not pay it enough attention, which eventually is the cause of their downfall. This is not something that comes naturally to the individuals likely to end up as staff of these kinds of companies, nor in the case of Artlogic, to its director. Yet it is, as I mentioned above, crucial to communication with corporate or governmental partners.

Managing this administrative side of the business, as I mentioned came across as an enormous challenge on a day-to-day level. In fact, much of the time spent in the midst of this company brought home to me how extremely challenging it is to function within this economic space and how tenuous the business prospects sometimes are. In this regard I was often struck by how robust Artlogic seemed ‘from the outside’ in my interviews for this project. In the section that follows where aim to analyse this company, I devote a

¹⁸⁴ Interview, 29 October 2008, Nicola Danby, Former CEO of Business and Arts South Africa.

fair amount of space to describing some of these difficulties, perhaps due to my role as participant observer, they remain foremost in my thinking around Artlogic.

Looking closely at the name of the company, it became clear early on in my fieldwork that a strange ambivalence pivots upon, and is enabled by, the bringing together of the words 'art' and 'logic'. This coupling of words, I realised, allows for both terms to have a larger scope of possible interpretations while also managing to say 'less' than it could outside of the coupling. 'Art' is meant to allude to works of art, in the first instance to define Artlogic as a company that works with art. Yet, art also means 'skill', but this interpretation is hardly ever evoked in this particular configuration. 'Logic' encompasses all the terms of business, production and 'the corporate world' and signals a different set of practical processes than those of 'art'. Placed together 'art' and 'logic' aims to communicate a process whereby 'art' is made 'logical' or made to be better understandable, which evokes ideas around publics mentioned earlier – that there is a potential public for art that would appreciate it if art was easier to understand, or more logical. It further suggests that the worlds of sponsorship and money are regulated by logic that art does not possess. This is a meaning projected onto 'art' that betrays some of the gaps between the way Artlogic operates and communicates the 'art message' and the way those who are only on the art side of the dichotomy would. It further suggests that there are, in fact, those who reside 'only in the art side', and that business, or money, the stuff of 'logic', are virtually absent from that world.

One of my interviewee respondents offered that the combination of 'art' and 'logic' simply implies doing things within the arts sector that are deemed logical, here meant as, 'why has it not been done before? – it is so logical to have an art fair in Africa'. Another suggested angle is that the art fair itself brings a certain logic to the arts scene, partly, by forcing it into the grid format that is the floorplan for the Fair. Principally amongst the connotations evoked by the name Artlogic, however, as suggested above, would be that the two terms are somehow antithetical and that the company that bears this name could enter into a translation process between the two realms of 'art' and 'logic'. The company sees itself as straddling two worlds and that these worlds have different and divergent protocols, foci, goals and operational structures. Artlogic, thus, believes in the 'logic' of the corporate and its focus on 'numbers'. Accordingly, it has adopted the corporate model as a business strategy, but also as a way of understanding art.

If one looks at Artlogic's mission statement on their website, at the time of this research it would seem that 'logic' is primarily interpreted to suggest corporate sponsorship. The statement is unambivalent in this regard:

Artlogic is a pty.ltd commercial company that accesses audiences through art. We work with high profile companies that want to position their brand at the top of their industry through contemporary art. Contemporary art achieves this because it is about communicating ideas. In addition, art appeals to top earners and people at the cutting edge of concepts, trends and fashion.¹⁸⁵

This statement communicates some further assumptions, and hints at the ways in which art is 'used' and approached. It does not, for example, speak about the ways art can enhance a person's life or bring a new dimension to how 'life is understood'. Neither does it focus on art as pastime. It mentions only what use art can be to the 'positioning' of a brand and by extension the 'reaching of an audience', thereby suggesting that art has appeal and is cutting edge. The qualifier of being 'about communicating ideas' furthermore, casts the net slightly wider as it might signify the way in which art can be generally inspirational outside a given field as, in a sense, 'good to think with'.

What this means practically is that Artlogic works in the creative industries sector along with the broad range of activities that this term, or grouping, allows for: artists, galleries, advertising agencies, fashion designers, graphic designers, film makers, et cetera. As a business strategy, it further implies that Artlogic has business clients in both the 'worlds' of the 'arts' and that of the 'corporate'. How they would generally go about setting a project in motion would be to secure the arts and the corporate side simultaneously as the presence of the one is reliant on that of the other. However, within the business world Artlogic is seen as an 'arts' company, not a commercial business in the first instance. Artlogic also emphasises this aspect by stating that they can unlock the world of art, by 'placing your business in the arts space' as one of their adverts read. Their adverts are aimed at the business world and eliciting business opportunities from them, not at the art world. The art side of the negotiation is, thus, assumed to some extent to be a given. The corporate side requires more 'selling' and is what enables the art space to be

¹⁸⁵ www.artlogic.co.za

activated in the first place. Artlogic, thus, 'sells' something to a corporate in exchange for 'being placed in the arts space' and being 'put in touch with' their audience.

What do they sell? Unlike many companies sharing the economic sector of the creative industries, they do not sell their time, or skills, or experience, although those are secondary elements that are broken down into a budget document further down the line. Primarily what is being sold is 'access' attained through what is called, branding rights. It is a domino effect: this privileged access has a value, which is monetised, which, in turn, sets in motion the production of an event, which then ensures that the audience can be reached. In this sense, the company does not fit the profile of a sponsorship company such as those that operate in the sports sector. These companies do not produce the events that they sell branding rights to, but merely broker the deals, which, in a similar way to that of Artlogic, unlocks access to a market.

The notion of selling a 'value', not time, or a product, is the main determining factor in what Artlogic has become as a company. Here it is important to keep in mind that nobody who worked for the company, at the time of this research, had any experience in the fields of art, event production or sponsorship. This had the effect of learning on the job through experience and shaping the company accordingly over time. What this means is that the company had adjusted its mode of operation, as well as its sense of self, in relation to the 'value' that corporates had attached to their products. The reason why the 'value' is so determinate is because it is essentially fabricated; no external measuring system applies. The result is a devilish, sliding scale, where a product can be worth R5 million one day in one set of circumstances, and double or half that the next day in another, depending on how it is viewed by the potential sponsor. For example, if FNB decides that art sponsorship is a powerful and vital entry into a substantial growth area for the bank, they could 'value' an event such as the Art Fair higher both in terms of budget allocation and allocation of resources. Yet, should the decision makers in the bank see the same product as somehow 'good for the community' and not directly related to their own core business, they would allocate far fewer resources and less money. The product being sold, in this case an art fair, is the same product regardless of how the corporate sees it, meaning as sponsorship or as 'social good', needing the same amount of money, it is just the way in which it might be viewed that changes. I have come to term this a 'crazy-making' system, not unlike a form of gambling.

Artlogic's first strategy of survival against this 'devilish sliding scale' is to 'package' something to corporates that is in essence immaterial – an experience. I found in this mode of operation an affinity with that described by Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006) in his research in the biotechnology and genomics industry. Sunder Rajan explains that the biotechnology industry relies on 'elaborate systems of valuation' and 'speculation', which essentially suspends the industry, even in its more physical form as pharmaceutical sales, in a system of hype. The companies that are engaged in the 'creation of value', 'only indirectly depend on (the) actual manufacture and sale' (9). In a similar way, Artlogic uses the 'hype' of art, yet themselves have very little to do with art. Sunder Rajan uses Marx's notion of the difference between 'industrial capital' and 'merchant capital' to explain the manner in which he has come to understand modern capitalism as plural. Looking at the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries in the United States he explains that 'merchant capital' is the circulation of capital, or 'commercial activity' for its own sake, not attached to the production or industry of objects as is the case with 'industrial capital'. Merchant capital, thus, has to do with money itself circulating, and what makes this circulation possible is speculation and hype. Artlogic can be seen as such an entity: one that specialises in the creation of hype, speculation and valuation. Their 'product' is as immaterial as that described by Sunder Rajan, which, when it is going well is its strength, and when not, is a debilitating weakness, as there is very little that is 'measurable' to fall back on. (David Throsby (2001) identifies this as an overarching feature of 'cultural initiatives' (29)).

One of Sunder Rajan's chapters bears the title, 'Vision and Hype'. Here I found some striking similarities between the 'language', what he calls the 'grammar', of the Art Fair and that of genomics. One of the reasons would be the fact that there is a constant element of speculation and 'hype' that drives and values the market and the product. This he relates to Marx's notion of 'material' versus 'abstract' (18) or 'commodity' versus 'commercial' capital (8). Following Marx he notes that it is the special relation between the 'material' and the 'abstract' that 'enables the commodity, which is a rather banal thing, to become the mediation of social bonds' (18). This, in turn, '... the promise(s) of biocapital, provides the conditions of enablement for a certain type of present'. He calls the language used a 'promissory discourse' (116). Making a similar point in the context of 'commodities', Arjun Appadurai (1986) sees the system of value creation as always more

or less in flux. For him, ‘... exchange of sacrifice is what economic life is all about...Economic value is not just value in general, but a definite sum of value, which results from the commensuration of two intensities of demand. The form this commensuration takes is the exchange of sacrifice and gain’ (4). Following Simmel, for Appadurai value is not fixed in what an individual is willing to pay for it as is in the marginal utility theory (Campbell, 1987; Throsby: 2001), but rather is part of constant *negotiations* of sacrifice and gain and the value of the object itself lies in its movement between people and places (3). Appadurai’s point is that the notion of not being able to fall back on measurables is inherent in any commodity situation, yet Sunder Rajan explains that industries that are especially tied to an emotional quality, such as the biotechnology industry in his case, with all its connotations of ‘life’ and ‘value’, are hyperbolic instances of this aspect of modern capitalism. Artlogic’s method of attaching monetary value to an ‘audience’ works in a similar way, by ‘promising’ ‘social bonds’ and enabling a ‘certain type of present’.

It is in this version of value calculation that Artlogic deals: the semiotics of creating value through negotiations and, in turn, through trading in the immateriality of an idea, or an experience. Value is, thus, constantly being constructed and depends in very large measure on the value that a particular person is willing to ascribe at a given time in a given situation. The difficulty of this system of valuation is precisely, as Douglas pointed out to me, that ‘the measurement is quite vague’. While this is a tactic that allows the company to virtually ‘make it up as they go along’, it is also the cause of much of the relationship deadlocks and frustrations between the small, agile company and big, cumbersome corporations. Being a small company, it can respond quickly to opportunities that arise, for example, creating an impromptu press conference for its events. Once, when Artlogic did just that, it was accused by the employees of First National Bank of not ‘caring about the FNB brand’. Nothing in the contract between the two parties could or had stipulated that Artlogic, because it uses FNB money, has to ‘care about’ its brand. The failure ‘to demonstrate caring’ is interpreted, however, as an undue arrogance on the part of Artlogic, suggesting the hierarchy of power between the two parties.

This structure, as I mentioned, resembles a form of gambling in that the financial ‘upside’ could be substantial, or by the same token, rapidly diminish, making it extremely difficult

to plan ahead. Artlogic, however, when compared to other similar companies, is best positioned within the South African arts space to reap this possible 'upside' as a result of their own business strategy, and the networks and connections that Ross Douglas brings. Douglas' background at Michaelhouse and some of his other life experiences have rendered him very close to the South African corporate world which could have a powerful effect on his business. Accordingly, Artlogic is a significant player in the local art world. However, there are some clear drawbacks to their positioning, apart from the sheer unpredictability of this model, year on year.

One such possible drawback (sometimes working in their favour and sometimes against) is the fact that Artlogic operates in a self-proclaimed arena of privilege, often stating in its sponsorship documents that it 'speaks to' high net-worth individuals and groups. This deliberate positioning, apparently counter-transformation, makes the company the target of easy criticism, some of which is well founded, considering the economic realities of South Africa. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis the government and, in some ways, the general sentiment in the country post-1994 is one of re-dress and redistribution of wealth, where privilege, especially white privilege is frowned upon.

Often Artlogic's projects do not fall within the marketing plan of a possible sponsor but rather within corporate social responsibility due to its nature as 'art'. Yet the fact that it caters to the privilege almost immediately disqualifies it from this segment. One of the contradictions of contemporary South Africa is that the company might theoretically have been financially better off had it decided to enter the realm of not-for-profit; NGO, or Corporate Social Investment (CSI), which on the whole, addresses development of skills, social upliftment, and is more in line with the discourses of transformation. Companies, by law, have to allocate a certain amount of profit to, what is termed, corporate social investment, some of which would be seen as 'arts'. However, in practice, as local businessman and art collector, Jack Ginsberg,¹⁸⁶ who sits on the board of charitable foundations explained in our interview: 'I think it is just that there are so many other social things that need money in this country. You know if somebody sits on a foundation that gives away money and you get requests for dialysis machines and artists, you know where the money is going to go. There is just so much that is needed here, in the way of education, and medicine'. Similarly young arts entrepreneur, Melissa

¹⁸⁶Interview, 22 September 2008, Jack Ginsberg, Private collector.

Mboweni,¹⁸⁷ explained this situation of raising corporate social responsibility funding for the arts as one where corporates are merely ‘dipping their toes into the water, not swimming, really’. She ascribed this to her sense that ‘the social-political is so much greater, the sort of needs areas, unemployment’. Her experience with corporates in South Africa, even within the CSI sector is that ‘if you push them about stuff, they would state: ‘we are more interested in looking at already established social issues than art’. One company that Artlogic approached confessed to having allocated R10 million a year to CSI of which R100,000 could go to the arts, yet none of their marketing budget could be spent within this field.

In order to sharpen the promise of what it could offer clients, Douglas¹⁸⁸ took a strategic decision not to speak the language of CSI, and rather claims to give the sponsor a ‘real’ financial return. This he thought was crucial precisely as a means of diminishing the ‘emotional’ side of what the business offers. However, as we have seen, he simply sells a different version of the emotional. He describes the frustrations between the realms of CSI and marketing sponsorship in the following way: ‘I mean, the market for sponsorship is difficult because if you go in and you say this is an arts sponsorship programme, you are competing against corporate social investment. And corporate social investment will always have the moral high ground in a country of need’. Artlogic responds to this situation by making it clear ‘we are not CSI, this is not a feel good thing, this is branding’. Branding is, thus, seen as less ‘emotional’, yet what it probably implies is ‘less patronising’ and, therefore, a less risky business strategy, as he explains:

I think for people who are trying to sell sponsorship as art, that is important for art’s sake, they are going to have an incredibly difficult time, unfortunately in this country, because the appetite for sponsorship for sponsorship’s sake for the arts has diminished; companies have less marketing budget of which sponsorship is part of it, and the country’s needs seem to increase every year, not decrease, in other words there are more Aids orphans every year; there is more need for proper education, et cetera, et cetera, not less and less. So you know I don’t see a time when suddenly companies can say well we don’t need to worry about primary education, primary health, Aids, et cetera, we can now really focus on bringing in a really good ballet and growing ballet in the country.

¹⁸⁷ Interview, 18 August 2008, Melissa Mboweni, Independent art administrator.

¹⁸⁸ Interview, 25 April 2009, Ross Douglas, Director of Joburg Art Fair.

However, Douglas himself has found that while *he* might be able to draw a clear line between his objectives and views on arts sponsorship and that of CSI, often neither the sponsor nor the 'art world' are able to share this binary. Douglas had come to understand that there are 'parallel tracks' at which art is understood: 'on the one level you have this sort of thing of corporates saying we are about making a better South Africa and we are about what is good for the arts; and galleries saying it is all about good for Joburg; good for educating people, but both galleries and sponsors at the end of the day are businesses'. By this he implies that much of the external messaging around art in this country speaks the language of 'social upliftment', yet the mechanics are those of pure business.

Forming another leg of Artlogic's business clients, apart from corporates, are art galleries – they pay for their booths at the Art Fair. Here the relationship is more transparent as Douglas simply promises an increase in sales as a result of drawing attention to contemporary art and drawing large crowds into their booths. The increased amount itself, as a target, has not been set, however, and so, once again, leaving substantial scope for interpretation and disappointment. For Douglas, what enables him to bring galleries and sponsors together is 'not the good idea and the good will, it is the fact that you have something that they both want commercially and once you have something that they both want commercially, they then behave and lock into a system that is a commercial system that has been around for thousands of years and works and everybody knows the drill'. By this Douglas means that he 'promises' a commercial return on the investment of both galleries and sponsors to sharpen the measurability of his product, even though as we have seen, this is virtually impossible and highly contingent on what angle of approach is being utilised to measure. 'The return on investment' remains elusive even if one would use such established methods as valuing press and PR that the sponsoring entity received for the event.

The different ways of viewing the arts sponsorship arena described above has other repercussions for how Artlogic is perceived as a business in the arts and corporate worlds. Sunder Rajan found in his study a dissonant relationship between notions of sharing of information akin to what he calls a 'communist' approach and the raw capitalism that drives the system of genomics through the system of patenting (117). In his case it manifests as the difference between sharing genomic information freely within

academic environments and beyond, versus the ‘trading’ of it on the stock market (117). He, thus, found discrepancies and competing logics between ‘communism’ and capitalist privatisation in relation to both sentiments and beliefs over how the genomics field should be governed. The former holds that the knowledge should be made available and shared; the latter is geared towards the patenting and trading of the knowledge that is generated around genomics. He gives evidence that legislation in America makes the terrain far more conducive for the latter to occur (117). There exists a similar ‘regard’ for the ‘knowledge’ produced by the visual arts. This regard is best exemplified by a journalist asking Ross Douglas whether the local art world will be ‘selling our souls’ in the event of an art fair. This displays a disregard, sometimes a disdain, for the market place of art through the notion that the art should be freely available. An initiative launched in July 2008 by a group calling themselves *Open Office*, entitled ‘Joburg Art Bin’, related directly to such a notion. They launched an appeal for corporates and private art owners to give back their art so that it could be ‘enjoyed’ by more people.¹⁸⁹ I believe the proximity of the two titles – Joburg Art Fair and Joburg Art Bin – is no coincidence. What the discrepancy between viewing art as ‘social’ versus as ‘private’ and commercial suggests is an ideological response to the notion of branding and buying the art, at the heart of Artlogic’s business which I take up in Chapter Six.

Another hindrance to Artlogic’s business model, would be that due to their BEE status (they do not qualify as a Black Economic Empowerment company), it has proved virtually impossible to access large amounts of government funding. Artlogic has no black directors, shareholders or senior-level managers. The nature of the business also makes it hard to attract black staff because skilled black people, much like skilled white people, seem more inclined to go for higher paying offers that can provide more company benefits. Transforming the company profile is, thus, a constant struggle. It is also true that as a white man, Douglas, has far more in common with the South African corporate world as it exists at this present moment, than he has with various government sectors, and, therefore, finds the corporate realm easier to navigate. Yet in terms of an economic pecking order, it is a small business that struggles with cash flow and for the most part is seen as dabbling in what for many corporate employees falls in the category of ‘hobbies’.

¹⁸⁹ *Open Office* convened a discussion at the Bag Factory in July 2008 to discuss how art could be given back to people to be viewed freely. Douglas was invited to partake in the discussion. He was out of town and could not make it.

Artlogic worked on the first Joburg Art Fair for one year, yet for nine months of that year only two staff members worked on the event. In the last three months leading up to the event, Artlogic employed twelve staff members: a director, a creative director, a web and design specialist; a production manager, a fair architect, a technical director, a guest relations specialist, an office manager, a press and marketing officer, a financial manager, a research and publishing officer and an intern. Only the fair architect and technical director were contracted staff members. Most of the others had employment contracts with the company that terminated after the event. I referred in Part One to Karel Ankerman, the journalist from the Financial Times in Holland, who made his way to the Joburg Art Fair as part of the sixteen art fairs that he visits annually to report on. He mentioned that Art Basel works with 250 staff members and that he cannot believe what the company (Artlogic) achieved with so few resources, as his comment below demonstrates. I position his comment so as to conclude this section on the business model of Artlogic relating to sponsorship, to illustrate that, regardless of the many pitfalls that I have discussed, the company still managed to achieve a substantial amount.

...this art fair I found extremely well organised, it was like a mini Basel – if you observed the first day, it was so well organised, that I thought this looked a bit like mini Basel. In terms of how you did it. If I look at other fairs, they have considerably more resources, money and so, what you did, is amazing.¹⁹⁰

The Life of the Logo

With this analysis of the company in mind, it is now possible to move to what transpired during the 'life' of the Joburg Art Fair logo. Artlogic, the company, was discussed first because it was necessary to have this foundational knowledge about how it operates in order to understand the politics of what comes next. However, the second marker of the fair undoubtedly took visual and cognitive priority over that of the Artlogic brand from the vantage point of the entrance area to the Fair. The Joburg Art Fair logo was one of the prime terrains on which the battle about the identity of the Fair was waged, and its trajectory embodies much of the long, drawn-out negotiations between Artlogic and its main sponsor, FNB. It is also a visual reflection of what Artlogic imagined for this event

¹⁹⁰ Interview, March 2008, Karel Ankerman, Reporter for FT Holland.

in terms of a 'look-and-feel', which, in turn, articulates a certain vision they had for themselves. The manner in which the logo embodies much of the negotiations between Artlogic and its sponsor is not in the least unique to this event or this sponsorship relationship. And so, while the accounts below are particular and anecdotal, they are interchangeable with many other experiences in the field with other sponsors and other projects.

The story of the logo starts at Design Indaba¹⁹¹ in Cape Town in 2007. I attended, with Ross Douglas, this annual conference of international cutting-edge design where we both heard Andy Stevens present the work of his London-based company, Graphic Thought Facility. Amongst the projects they had done was the on-going design for the Frieze Art Fair, which was the model that Artlogic was using for their event. Graphic Thought Facility agreed to take on the project of the Art Fair for a slightly reduced fee as they thought working on a South African product would be 'exciting'. Douglas still insists that Artlogic's fee to Graphic Thought Facility was some of the 'best money spent' in the first year, regardless of the fact that it would equate to roughly three times what a local design agency would have charged. The result of the 'London influence' on the first African art fair 'look' was that it follows carefully the style for any international art fair: in their pitch to Artlogic, Graphic Thought Facility explained the logo had to be composed of some classical elements, since an art fair generally has to stretch to incorporate conservative tastes; at the same time it has to be 'youthy', bright, 'contemporary', and embody some irreverence which comes with the blatant association art fairs have with consumption and the market – like ipods, nikes and other more popular consumption goods. The font used for the main logo is a derivative of a *Bedoni* font, which I was told, is one of the oldest fonts ever invented; in contrast, a more contemporary font was used for all general information on the Fair. The majority of the surface area taken up by the logo is black and white, with about a third dedicated to brightly coloured blocks or stripes that contain the fair information (such as dates, times and contact details). None of these colours were those of FNB, which the FNB team, after many long negotiations, agreed was not a prerequisite. It was, however, imperative that no 'ABSA red', or 'Nedbank green', or 'Standard Bank blue' were used in any of the colour configurations – the names and colours of the four biggest banking brands in South Africa. The international

¹⁹¹ Design Indaba was founded in 1996 and comprises a very highly acclaimed international conference and a tradeshow of local design and craft. It is held annually in Cape Town.

design agency found this an absurd set of restrictions, yet, standard for any of the sponsorship projects I was exposed to through Artlogic.

FNB insisted that their in-house design team should also make a presentation for the logo, regardless of the fact that Artlogic had clearly decided to hire the London company. Interestingly, all the FNB designs put forwarded tried hard to incorporate into the design 'African' elements that would bridge the worlds of 'high art' and 'African craft' as they understood it to be. Douglas found all these attempts 'too local' and insisted that this event had to speak the language of the international.

Initially, promotional material was so designed as to incorporate a black and white version of the main sponsor's logo in the bottom corner of the design. This Graphic Thought Facility knew to be the convention not only for art fairs, but also all art events that they had worked on. When Artlogic and FNB reached their first, potentially fatal, deadlock, it was over this point of logo placement. FNB was particularly concerned that their logo would be the same size as Artlogic's, which suggested that the bank considered sponsorship for the event, and the production and conceptualisation of the event as occupying separate positions in a hierarchy of importance. A meeting was called with all the most-senior FNB staff that had been involved in this project and it was decided that the Joburg Art Fair logo would incorporate into its design a line, 'presented by', as well as the black and white First National Bank logo. Visually this implied that the Joburg Art Fair logo would become attached to that of FNB. Douglas felt this to be a set-back, a concession he had to make, yet it was clear that he had no choice. Apart from breaking the strong affinity with an international trend, he felt that it diminished the chances of 'selling' the event to any other sponsor should FNB not renew their contract for the second Art Fair. The FNB logo was, thus, thereafter 'part of' the Joburg Art Fair logo and so would be scaled in proportion to that of the Art Fair regardless of the size of the media it would appear on. Once again, at the time, this seemed like an anomaly when comparing the logo to that of international fairs and given the small amount of experience I had then, yet, I now know, it is fairly standard procedure in arts and other sponsorship properties in South Africa.

This incident in the life of the logo is primarily one that demonstrates the extent to which 'ground is won' and decisions were taken based on rigorous negotiations. One literally has to fight for one's vision every step of the way. This is not to suggest that the sponsor has no sympathy for the causes of the arts company, but rather, that they too

have causes that they fight for and that these are often not the same as those of the arts company. In fact I often found a dissonance between the extent to which the sponsor saw the property they were supporting financially as somehow theirs and not Artlogic's, and so imagined a far greater degree of collaboration than did Artlogic. Often, this assumption to be part of the process, rather than a mere funder, was benign and the result of enthusiasm, yet struck me as counter to how Artlogic operated. It sometimes came across as if Artlogic, the 'arts' company, could not be trusted to act in the best interest of a sponsor whose money was their life-blood, while also acting in the best interest of the event being produced, which would impact on their own reputation and place in the market. Douglas mentioned countless times that in order to attract the best galleries to his fair it is of the utmost importance that the event speaks a certain international, contemporary language and is seen to have 'integrity'. Integrity, is a fluid word in this context, as I discuss more fully below, but here has a lot to do with not seeming too commercial and 'vulgar'.¹⁹² The ability to negotiate and fight for 'one's vision for the project', thus, became a skill as integral to the life of this small company as is the payment of VAT, tax and salaries.

Important parts of the structure of the first Art Fair was negotiated around the contract between Artlogic and its sponsor, every inch of which was fought over and then locked down in the contract. The ability to negotiate seemed to require a combination of confidence, eloquence, energy and charm, and I began to notice after some time, resembled a form of game in which there were 'many ways to play it'. Most preferred amongst corporates that I came across would be the strategy of making a radical accusation against 'the other side' in front of everyone else involved and watch him or her sink or swim. An example would be: 'We are a *Proudly South African* bank and want to use South African labour, you obviously do not care about creating employment locally by contracting with a foreign design company'.¹⁹³ Alternatively, some enjoyed starting a meeting by making it clear how unimportant and of negligible gain one's event was to their brand, and that, in fact, they were unsure whether they should proceed with the relationship at all. This would prompt Artlogic to have to re-state the case for the sponsorship and the benefits to the sponsoring brand – they would have to do a

¹⁹² This word, 'vulgar', was the preferred description in my interviews and through my fieldwork for an over emphasis on brand, or consumption, or the market.

¹⁹³ The former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, through the International Marketing Council (South Africa's government-funded, PR company) created a brand called *Proudly South African* for which a logo was designed and products produced locally were marked as such through the incorporation on the packaging of this logo. The aim was to bring attention to, and encourage, the purchasing of local products.

presentation. This happened especially upon the event of having to re-sign a contract. If one had arrived at a meeting ready to walk away with a re-signed contract, such a statement throws you way off balance and suggests that every negotiation that you thought you had resolved in the previous contract would be a new conversation.

The most astonishing element of the negotiations phenomenon I witnessed was the manner in which things of tremendous importance and consequence would be manoeuvred into a position within the drama of one meeting (often you only get one chance), and will thereafter find its way into the minutes drawn up by the personal assistant diligently making notes to be emailed off to all parties present, the following day as 'an agreed upon and, therefore, closed' matter. Most corporate companies I came across were extremely adept at keeping such minutes and remembering what was promised or decided upon, while Artlogic, often focussed elsewhere, would not be taking notes and so be in a weaker position.

The story of the Joburg Art Fair logo consists of a series of such stand-off encounters. Artlogic was of the innocent impression that since it owned that Art Fair brand, it would have lee-way to design the corporate trademark, corporate identity and logo, hence, its decision to employ a British design team who had experience in designing logos for art fairs.¹⁹⁴ Looking back on that time it now seems almost absurd that Artlogic took this liberty, which implies that even as ground is won in negotiations, it can be clawed back by the 'other side' at a later stage. It also testifies to the relationship with FNB being one of the first the company undertook, and the first I witnessed for this research. After the fourteen month period and many other sponsorship negotiations I know see how naïve this assumption perhaps was.

Douglas fought hard, in the first year, for the freedom to choose the colours in which the logo design would appear and this was granted. This, however, came up for re-discussion and negotiations when the time came to sign a contract for the second Joburg Art Fair. I consider this a particular moment in the fieldwork crucial to understanding something of the power relations between small companies and large sponsors. This incident over the discussion of the logo for the second Art Fair struck me personally as a turning point in my own relation with the Fair. By this time in the fieldwork, through a

¹⁹⁴Graphic Thought Facility designed the logo for the Frieze Art Fair in London.

daily ethnography of time spent at the office and attending meetings, I realised, I had come to be sympathetic to Artlogic's points of view on how the event was to be executed. When I say 'Artlogic' attended meetings, it would be Ross Douglas and I and sometimes a production manager. None of the shareholders or directors other than Douglas played an active role in the running of the company, nor did they draw salaries. I had attended meetings with galleries, and other sponsors, and started not just knowing, but feeling the impact that a certain negotiating process can have on the delicate balance that is Artlogic's 'translation' between the worlds of 'art' and 'business'. I had experienced the criticism the company received for its emphasis on hype and consumption of art, as well as its questionable integrity given their close relation with a bank. The anecdote I relay in some detail below describes a moment of fatigue within the ethnography.

When it came time to renegotiate the contract for the second Art Fair, Artlogic had been given a new 'bank contact'. This person was not privy to any negotiations that had happened before he became involved, and considered it a clean slate. The FNB sponsorship office sent Artlogic a new contract that was 'ready to be signed'. Changes made to the existing contract were all marked in red as having been changed and could easily be found within the legal jargon of standard procedure. Upon going through the contract, Artlogic noted a small insertion into what came to be known as 'Clause 4.2': all 'Promotional Material will at all times be in the primary colours of FNB and shall include FNB's Branding and incorporate the Event logo'. This was clearly a major change in the way the logo would look for the second Art Fair.

The new sponsorship contact was a very busy man as he oversaw all the bank's sponsorships and was based in Cape Town. When Douglas insisted on discussing the change to 'Clause 4.2' with their lawyer, the bank conceded to a telephonic conference which could last no more than thirty minutes as that would be all the time that could be put aside for this issue. The morning of this 2pm phone call, Douglas was the victim of a 'bike-jacking' on his morning cycle with his friend. This was a violent and humiliating experience for Douglas in which he lost his prized mountain bike and was assaulted across his back with a rifle. He had spent the whole morning at the police station. On entering into the telephonic conversation with the sponsorship committee, he engaged in the obligatory small talk before moving on to the sticky issues of business. They had

heard about Douglas' incident through the corporate grapevine and took the opportunity to state their views on South African crime, the government and an intense sympathy for Douglas' ordeal. This took roughly fifteen minutes of the thirty that Artlogic had been allocated, and I would say softened Douglas' bruised heart and ego after the violent incident. There were other less controversial issues around the contract to discuss briefly before moving on to the issue of the 'Clause 4.2'. As Douglas started to describe the journey of the logo, that it was agreed upon to exclude the FNB brand colours from their design, which Douglas thought was essential for the integrity of the Art Fair brand amongst the local art community, but also amongst international art fairs, the bank simply stated that the turquoise was not something they were willing to negotiate over anymore. When I turn to a closer investigation of the bank in the next chapter, it becomes clearer why they would insist on this positioning. Artlogic was forced, due perhaps, to the limited time allocated to this discussion, to concede to the changed Clause 4.2, which rendered the second Joburg Art Fair turquoise and orange (the FNB brand colours). Once this was implemented, Douglas knew, he would never again be able to return to a 'neutral' logo.

In a subsequent interview, the sponsorship manager at the time explained to me that he considered the recognition of brand and brand identity as one of the primary features in all sponsorships for FNB, and that while he understood that I might have a different point of view, it really was integral to how he manages sponsorships. Another FNB employee also assured me at a later stage that the initial decision not to use the FNB colours was highly irregular from the beginning. In response to this point, Douglas argued that the same was true of this event in the portfolio of First National Bank as the only international, contemporary art event the bank sponsors. So it was that the second Joburg Art Fair had a colour scheme that adhered to the clause quoted above in turquoise and orange. It is worth adding here, just in order to demonstrate the sheer frustration of such a situation (one which I think embodies the everyday of Artlogic) that Artlogic would then enter into lengthy discussions with their designer in which *they* would now have to explain and substantiate the choice of colours decided upon by the sponsor and have to endure the designer's opinionated tyranny on 'compromised design'.

Catalogue and Map

Beyond maintaining a workable relationship with the sponsor and a brand positioning within the 'art space', Artlogic's survival was reliant on eliciting the trust and confidence of the galleries that rent space at the Art Fair. As was demonstrated in Part One, the majority of these galleries are South African, most of which, like Artlogic, are based in Johannesburg. Gallery relationships, especially in the first year, were no less onerous and contentious than that with the sponsor. Attending the Art Fair for them was, after all, a sizable financial risk, especially so since this was the first one in this country. Where the logo, to my mind, exemplifies the site over which ground with the sponsor was lost or won, with the galleries this site was the 'map' or floorplan: where a gallery would like to be positioned in relation to the entrance, or in relation to other galleries, or whether it would be possible to put sufficient distance between themselves and their enemies within the confined space of Exhibition Hall 2 of the Sandton Convention Centre. The catalogue for each of the two Art Fairs operates in conjunction with the floor plan to give flesh to the grid structure of the map and so is considered here within the same section. The way the catalogue functions and the way it gives a reader information on the galleries, I argue, is a synecdoche of Artlogic's relationship with galleries. I explain this point more fully below.

Most large art fairs have an application process, a prestigious selection panel, and various appeal processes should your gallery not be selected, to ensure that the process is monitored and more or less transparent. In the first year, when constructing the Fair, Artlogic did not use this method. Rather, they invited galleries that they thought would be appropriate and hoped that they would agree to participate. In Douglas¹⁹⁵ opinion, his problem was not 'to keep galleries out', rather, it was to get them in. Where Frieze received 450 applicants in 2006 from which they selected 150,¹⁹⁶ Artlogic could only count twenty three that could be deemed 'appropriate'. Douglas decided that twenty-three galleries would be a good target for a first year; the floorplan was designed based on that target; and spaces were sold to the galleries off the floorplan.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, 2 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director, Joburg Art Fair.

¹⁹⁶ Goodwin, James. 2007. *Art Fairs and Art Markets, 1988–2007*, Published online by AXA Art Insurance.

Douglas set out to sell the art fair to local galleries in March 2007. He knew that if he could persuade the 'top 2' he would have no trouble getting the rest to commit, since once those were in, the others would realise 'if they are not at the art fair, they do not exist'. The top two galleries were the Goodman gallery and Michael Stevenson Gallery. Both these galleries had been exhibiting at international art fairs for some time. He assured galleries that the R2million marketing campaign he was undertaking in conjunction with FNB would bring a new and bigger crowd to the galleries. Needless to say, no single gallery could afford this kind of campaign for themselves. Within the sphere of top, commercially successful, local galleries, Everard Read Gallery, could also be considered amongst the 'inner circle', although many would argue that they are not 'contemporary' in the strict sense of the word. The decision to include them in the fair was often raised against the organisers when questioned on their 'curatorial strategy'. According to Michael Stevenson¹⁹⁷, 'Everard Read Gallery will be the Joburg Art Fair's Achilles' heel in any attempt at becoming one of the 'great international art fairs'.

Selling the spaces was a lot harder than Douglas imagined. He did an initial round of local galleries on his list, discussing the fair and 'selling' the concept to those he wanted to invite. These were long, tiresome meetings. Many were sceptical, having just experienced the disappointment of *Cape07* which I discussed earlier in this study. Then, a month later, he went around with the floor plan. Seeing the map seemed to give the Fair legitimacy and served to actualise it in the minds of galleries. The discussion around placing on the map was highly animated and passionate. Here I was intrigued to find how galleries superimposed their gallery positioning as brand onto their positioning at the fair. The different views held by galleries on where to physically position themselves were remarkably divergent. I had imagined that they would all be vying for the same two or three booths, but this was not at all the case. For example, the Goodman Gallery, as I explained in the tour of Chapter 1 is an anchor of sorts to many smaller galleries in its positioning in Johannesburg's suburb of Parkwood. In a similar way, the Goodman chose to position themselves not at the entrance to the event, but in the far back corner, taking the whole corner space of 200 sq.m, and so seemed to anchor the smaller galleries packed in front and to the sides of them. This was a non-assertive move, yet powerful in that they could 'draw visitors' right into the very back of the Hall with their wares. The Everard Read has a large, ornate space in the same suburb, and so opted for the largest

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Michael Stevenson, 31 April 2008.

stand in the very middle of the Fair, perhaps in this instance to assert that they did indeed belong at the Fair. Some galleries were intensely curious about the placing of all the other galleries which rendered the process of creating the map virtually endless with up to 40 variations before it was finalised.

The next round trip to galleries was with individual contracts and invoices for 25% deposit of the full amount. This sparked a long process in which galleries were suddenly unsure again whether they should commit, or whether it would be money well spent, or whether Ross Douglas could be trusted to deliver on his word. So much so, that by June 2007, he had only signed up three galleries. It took another month of roundtrips to sign up all the galleries. At various stages leading up to Fair, each of the three 'big' galleries threatened to 'pull out': one gallery believed Douglas was in professional conflict with the fair by buying art for a large collection; another because he objected to the fact that Douglas was selling the work on the curated show, thereby placing himself as fair owner in direct competition with the galleries at the fair; and yet another due to an article in the *Business Day Art Supplement*. The article reported, as a means of introducing the art scene to its readers, that Goodman Gallery and Michael Stevenson Gallery used to be 'the big fish' but that these two had now been replaced by younger galleries. The fact that he neglected to mention this specific gallery as a 'big fish' was what caused the upset. The gallery opined that even though it was not a quote from Douglas and that Douglas explained most respectable newspapers do not allow for a 'proof reading' before publishing (seeing this, in fact, as an insult), Douglas had neglected to look after his interests in this regard. Each of these instances caused Douglas and the office staff untold levels of anxiety, and it took personal visits where possible to rectify the relationships.

After the second Joburg Art Fair, I asked Douglas¹⁹⁸ what he had learnt about his business model from the first two Art Fairs. He replied as follows:

I think the things I have learnt are that a lot of the stuff is about a position of power, so it is not about a good idea. You can go and say I have a good idea of doing an art fair, but if you are not in a position of power, ie., you haven't got the money, you haven't got the credibility, galleries don't need you, it is an incredibly difficult thing to undertake.

¹⁹⁸ Interview, 25 April 2009, Ross Douglas, Director of Joburg Art Fair.

Douglas had a certain amount of power over galleries as he could promise to expand their audience in a way that would be unprecedented in the local context. This 'lesson' was meant to suggest that the Fair is not the result of anyone doing anyone else a favour and nothing is taken lightly. Rather it is a constant process of 'selling' and convincing, which meant that any relationship could 'erupt' into a drama at any given point.

Throughout this process I found the art world to be filled with interesting, yet suspicious and dramatic individuals. For a long time Artlogic had to prove that it was a credible business and that it had the best interest of 'art' at heart. In most of the cases where this position was put in doubt by a gallery, or member of the art world, the word used to criticise something they had found offensive in Artlogic's behaviour would be 'integrity'. Questions of integrity were never put to rest and used to mean many different things. This fact was drummed home to me in my short interview with one specifically powerful gallery, after the first Art Fair. I focus on this specific incident here to demonstrate something of the 'negotiating' process and constant *work* required on the relationship with galleries that resulted eventually in the Joburg Art Fair map. When I asked the director of this gallery how she felt about the Fair, she replied:

I think that it has got its pros and its cons, I think that if the integrity of everybody involved is 100% there, it would be something quite amazing in terms of helping to grow the audience in South Africa and exposing them to contemporary art, but it is about all the participants and the integrity of what they are doing that is very important.

I assumed she was referring to participating galleries in a general sense. Yet further repeated mention of the word, 'integrity', made me suspect, eventually, that perhaps she meant to make more than an obvious, general point and might be referring to a specific instance. So I asked her whether this was the case. It then transpired that she was highly concerned about rumours that Artlogic might be planning a contemporary auction (which they were at that stage) and that this would compromise the company's 'integrity' as it would position them in direct competition with galleries. As the extract below demonstrates, the language is closely aligned to that of 'social upliftment' for the arts, as well as general goodwill towards Douglas, masking much more serious and threatening facts about business and survival:

I think integrity covers a whole lot of things, some of which I have discussed with Ross upfront which is an issue, you know for me it is about ... we should all support each other, our goal is the same, it is basically to grow an audience and make contemporary art more accessible.

Still not sure what she meant I asked her if she was referring to Douglas in particular, to which she answered:

So ok, I understand Ross needs to make a living out of this (the Joburg Art Fair), it is a massive thing and it could be huge, I want to see him make a living out of it, whatever he needs to make, if he feels he needs to make R1 million a year or R4 million a year, whatever the number is that he feels comfortable with, I would like to see him make, ok, and I would like to support him in doing that, whether it is helping to get more sponsors on board, whether it is, whatever it might be,

Finally the real concern emerged:

but I have a problem with the fact that Artlogic, where we are the key customers of Artlogic, their galleries, for them to be in conflict with galleries with who are your key clients by trying to now have a contemporary art auction, it is ... you can't be in conflict you know, if you look at how things work ... there has to be an absolute integrity'

'Integrity' is, thus, meant to imply Artlogic is not to create competition between itself and the galleries. In this instance, the interview material is so biased to this point, that all information given on the Fair itself seems tainted: I got the impression that the interview was seen as a conduit through which to communicate with Ross Douglas. This is just one example among many where a gallery had suspicions around Artlogic's conduct, which had to do with the protection of their own business. It is worth noting that the staff that constructed the first Art Fair had not been to any other Fairs and so made many 'mistakes' in their general dealings with galleries, the press and the sponsor. One gallery came to name the company 'Art-illogic' due to their exasperation at how idiosyncratically the Joburg Art Fair was being run. This particular gallery had substantial experience participating in international art fairs against which the local version could be judged.

The local gallery landscape in South Africa is robust and for the most part the strongest element of contemporary art, especially so since there is no single contemporary art museum in the country. It is therefore, perhaps understandable that they take the

business of displaying and making money out of contemporary art seriously and so not only keep a keen eye on possible competition, but also look down upon most that have not ‘done their time’ in this field. Understanding this was key to how Artlogic operated in the field and it was often necessary to humble themselves in the face of galleries. The manner in which the catalogue manifested, I believe, is a result of this reverence, or the importance of displaying this reverence in the face of galleries.

Artlogic’s positioning vis-à-vis the art world as we have seen is one of translation between two worlds, that of art and that of business. The above examples demonstrate that often they failed to understand the language of either of these worlds and would be held accountable in the severest of ways. This positioning is, of course, self-imposed and at the heart of their business strategy. It is a positioning that resembles traits of a model Bourdieu (1998) developed in *Distinction*. In the course of studying ‘taste’ in France he encountered what he calls ‘the new cultural intermediaries’ who ‘have invented a whole series of genres half-way between legitimate culture and mass production’ (326). The Art Fair certainly fits this description as does Artlogic’s intentions with it: to grow the market and make art more accessible. The cultural workers, Bourdieu continues, ‘Assign(s) themselves the impossible and therefore unassailable, role or divulging legitimate culture ... they have to make themselves, as Kant puts it, “the apes of genius” in a conspicuous refusal of the heavy didacticism and grey, impersonal, tedious pedantry which are the counterpart or external sign of institutional competence – and all this must be done while living in the unease of the inherently contradictory role of a “presenter” devoid of intrinsic value’ (326). Bourdieu is referring to the relationship between what he terms ‘legitimate’ culture, such as avant-garde painting and classical music, and the petit-bourgeois taste for imitations, or ‘dumbed-down’ versions of legitimate culture such as ‘popular arrangements of classical music’ (323).

Artlogic is such a presenter of culture as exemplified in the combination of the words ‘art’ and logic’ discussed above. I would argue that it is a positioning that is never so clearly articulated as in the decisions made around how the catalogue for the Fair would function and look; the way in which the catalogue functions gives an indication of the stance Artlogic takes as ‘intermediary’. It is important to note too, that Bourdieu specifically understands the role of the cultural intermediary to be ‘devoid of intrinsic value’, thereby capturing much of what I have been analysing above in this chapter as the way Artlogic operates in its field. The Joburg Art Fair catalogues for the years 2008 and

2009, as noted above, I believe, are a synecdoche for Artlogic's mode of operation in relation to the galleries and their imagined public, as cultural intermediary in the local arts landscape.

The 2008 and the 2009 catalogues were conceptualised and designed along a shared set of constraints and aims. Two different designers worked on the two different years' catalogues to which the two different 'looks' in terms of paper stock, fonts and general lay-out decisions are testimony.¹⁹⁹ Yet for the purposes here, I will consider them as one document, where the 2009 catalogue is simply a continuation of the 2008 one.²⁰⁰

Foremost amongst the characteristics of the catalogues was that Artlogic does not create any content themselves. What this meant was that, after the 'welcome letter' from the company in the beginning of the book, all remaining images and text were merely aggregated into a set grid format. Artlogic, thus, presented information that had been passed on to them by galleries without themselves 'framing' the content or giving any conceptual briefing such as, for example, a desired style of writing. The brief to galleries simply stated the amount of words they could write on their gallery, or their artists, and the amount of images they should supply. The catalogue consisted of different sections: the first was a general 'Information' section, the second, a 'Gallery Directory' section, the third was an 'Artist's Profile' section, and thereafter a 'Special Projects' section' and 'Advertising' section. The 'Gallery Directory' section was ordered to mirror the booth numbering on the floorplan, placing 'Booth 1' first and 'Booth 25' last, for example. Here each gallery was granted a certain amount of pages in relation to the size of their booth at the fair – the bigger the booth, the more pages for the gallery in the catalogue.

A decision was made to not follow the format of most exhibition catalogues in which large images dominate the design, but rather to create a hybrid between the generally different models of auction catalogues and the exhibition catalogues. The structure of the auction catalogue was borrowed from the local one for Stephan Welts in Association with Sotheby's, with which Artlogic imagined their audience would be most familiar. It is a structure in which one would find many smaller images on each page, rather than the

¹⁹⁹ Artlogic outsourced all design elements to a local company after the initial CID (Corporate Identity) was designed by Graphic Thought Facility in London. In the second year, an in-house designer was hired whose aesthetic sensibilities were different from the 2008 company.

²⁰⁰ The one big difference between the two documents is the insertion in the first year of a substantial section on the *As you like it* curated show by Simon Njami. This feature was not repeated at the second Art Fair and so that section in the catalogue fell away.

more iconic layout of large images flooding the page in the exhibition catalogue model. Accordingly, a layout was devised that prohibited less than two images per page in the Art Fair catalogue. The result was that each gallery could 'publish' many images to showcase more of their artists, and the catalogue, on the whole, was dominated by images rather than text. In the 'Artist's Profile' section, each gallery could submit one artist whom they would like to profile, where each artist would be 'discussed' in whatever way the gallery chose for a maximum of 400 words, together with one image of a work by the artist. Gallerists could then purchase more pages in the catalogue if they wanted to 'profile' more than one artist. Once again, the gallery would be responsible for submitting image and text. Similarly in the 'Special Projects' section the project involved would supply all text and images. The decision to create an aggregate of already existing content supplied by galleries and clients resulted in the text for the catalogue bearing divergent styles of writing and approaches to artworks. It also demonstrated a 'hands off' approach that Artlogic adopted in relation to art, where art was the prerogative of galleries and artists, and Artlogic merely brought it all together. The process of bringing together was where the 'translation' work or the work of the intermediary came in. How it was translated in this instance was in the form of an image-dominated document with very little information on artists, history of art, styles, theory, et cetera. In this sense the catalogue accurately articulated the role of the intermediary who made very little artistic decisions, but rather saw their role as just as 'presenter'.

Between art and business

After the first Art Fair, Artlogic owed various suppliers, such as small design companies, the manufacturers of the walling system, the PR team and many more, a combined total of R2.5 million. The company desperately needed a bank loan or it would have had to declare bankruptcy. Naturally it approached FNB for this loan, only to learn the sponsorship department has no leverage with the credit department. Before the New National Credit Act, brought into existence to regulate borrowing and debt in the post-apartheid economy, relatively wealthy individuals like Douglas could borrow money against the value of assets such as property. This was no longer possible; the main criteria for borrowing money was through what was termed 'affordability', which meant that the bank looked at whether a person's monthly salary could afford the monthly bond debit order. In the case of a business, affordability was based on the projected monthly cash flow. A bond application typically required hundreds of documents, in the case of a

business, this would include annual audited financials. At that point, the middle of 2008, Artlogic had not been audited since 2006. Douglas explained that this was due to the fact that it is a small, under-resourced company that had been focusing on accruing clients and raising operating funds, and had, therefore, left the administration behind. One can well imagine many small companies, perhaps started in someone's garage or living room, suddenly blossoming to new heights and leaving the administration this growth requires to lag further and further behind. The result for Artlogic was that it could simply not get the loan from the bank until financials could be produced. Douglas had to resort to borrowing money from friends, a moment that he always refers to as one of his lowest points.

I position this incident here to conclude this chapter so as to demonstrate some of the hard-hitting realities of this business. In the first instance, it highlights the absolute make-or-break importance of having 'corporate governance' in place. Secondly, it makes clear that the members of the sponsoring bank could demand of Artlogic to 'care for their brand', but when it came to helping the business to remain sustainable, the problem was quickly outsourced to another department, and to people that have no familiarity or affinity with the Joburg Art Fair or what it 'was doing' for the bank. This meant that the suspicion that galleries and the art world had of Artlogic 'being in bed with' or compromised by the bank really has very limited effect on sustainability, or what Douglas referred to as 'power'. Lastly, it demonstrated the extent to which the company was enabled by connections that Douglas held, which, while doing him and the company a disservice in some instances, on the whole created a much-needed safety net that many younger, less experienced individuals or companies wanting to operate in this field, might not have access to. During my time in the Artlogic office first as employee and decision-maker and then as researcher I have seen dynamics of 'power' swing between parties in completely unpredictable ways and came to see this 'industry', or business model, as precarious in the extreme. In many ways, this precariousness results from fairly well-researched small company constraints, as well as that of sponsorship relations, especially those within the arts. Yet many of the struggles of Artlogic were tied up with operating within the uncertain time of the local post-apartheid, and the state of art, government and business at this time. Conversely, many of the company's triumphs resulted from operating at this precise moment of relative uncertainty as a 'big fish in a small pond' –

something which would arguably have been much harder to achieve in a bigger market, in a different place, or at a different time.

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PART 2

Chapter 5. Cultures of Sponsorship: First National Bank

The previous chapter discussed in some detail the company that produced the Art Fair. It looked at their business strategy, dealings with gallery clients, as well as interactions between the company and their main source of revenue, the sponsor. In this chapter the focus is specifically the ‘cultures’ of sponsorship engaged in, and created by, First National Bank. The aim is to analyse the circumstances that enabled a relationship between Artlogic and the bank at this particular time, while also attempting to reveal the bank’s particular positioning within the South African landscape. The arguments I make in relation to this specific case, I believe, have larger implications for the way one could theorise sponsorship of the arts within South Africa at the moment. Thus, while the drama here is that of Artlogic and First National Bank, it could well be related to other such instances. However, I did find within this specific case that the combination of the individuals working at the bank at the time, the way the bank aims to position itself in contemporary South Africa, and the context of post-apartheid formed an enabling constellation for the Joburg Art Fair to ‘get off the ground’.

A large part of this section is concerned with the way a form of capitalism intersects with the arts through sponsorship. It is a form of capitalism, I have found and discuss in the following chapter, that there is much resistance against, especially within the arts community. Demonstrating a commonly shared and frequently aired point of view, Sean Jacobs and Herman Wasserman (2003) caution against the forces of modern capitalism:

South Africa cannot escape the era of accelerated globalization that on the one hand impacts on the ways in which culture and identity are being worlded, and on the other, hegemonises locally dominant political and social discourses. This means that culture and identity have been privatized, commodified, branded and become functions of a distinct form of economic organization, namely market capitalism, with profound impacts for forms of social and political order (2003:16).

Jacobs and Wasserman are alluding to the global phenomenon where individuals are said to have apparently less freedom of expression as a result of globalisation and market

capitalism. This, of course, is true in many ways, some of which I look at in more detail in the next chapter. Here, however, I would like to point first to the manner in which such a statement has become a truism and second, how often it is not substantiated by an empiricism informed by a *practice*, which would add a necessary nuance to the situation described by the authors. I would like to argue for a view of this amorphous system of 'market capitalism' that allows one to ask questions about who the individuals are that work within such a system on a daily basis, and what some of the results of their 'work' might be. South African artist, Willem Boshoff²⁰¹, frequently comes into contact with big corporates over commissions for his work and has formulated a sobering point of view: '... these are structures and within these structures, there are people. And there are nasty people who refuse to see that art has a place in society and everybody must just drive around in a BMW and they are just people and people are also stupid and willful and nasty, everybody has a chance to be good or bad'. The Joburg Art Fair relied on 'people' within 'structures' for its existence every step of the way, and looking into their conduct, sometimes 'good' and sometimes 'nasty', can shed light on ways of 'making' culture.

Methodologically, this chapter considers First National Bank as a kind of 'object' that can be approached from different sides: first, from the point of view of it as organisation with a particular history and internal legacy and 'culture'; thereafter as a social entity that has power to alter aspects of the social fabric of the country, the government and so the social sphere; next as an entity that is governed by someone, a person with personal interests which happen to overlap with that of the Joburg Art Fair. Based on this approach, the specifics of the Art Fair/FNB relationship will be clarified, as well as the general differentiation that exists in such an organisation between arts sponsorships and sport sponsorships.

Accordingly, I place some focus on the influences certain individuals have had on the life of the project in ways that are suspended in larger networks and are at the mercy of larger forces – those of the local economy, the global economy, general corporate management, and many others that might have been more personal. The chapter considers the FirstRand Chief Executive; the FirstRand brand executive; the FirstRand art consultant; First National Bank head of sponsorship; and a First National Bank events coordinator, in turn, as 'enabling' individuals positioned somewhere on the

²⁰¹ Interview, 14 October 2008, Willem Boshoff, Practicing South African artist.

continuum between the galleries, Artlogic and the sponsorship of the first Joburg Art Fair.

Sponsorship is the process of buying the rights to be associated with an event, or object, or person, based on an idiosyncratic system of valuation. In the process of sponsorship, an entity sets a monetary value on a non-commodity in order to be associated with it. This arrangement is different from patronage or the giving of a donation in the eyes of most of the marketing personnel that I have questioned, in that sponsorship comprises of the buying of 'rights' to something together with the commitment to 'leverage' those rights and the association with a product that it brings. The value of the sponsorship is a negotiation which cannot be quantified through regular economic models such as cost calculation.

Literature on sponsorship from the non-economic fields is scarce and there is no consensus on what exactly the definition is or how to distinguish it accurately from 'patronage'. Harvey and O'Hagan (2000) concede that much of the material around why companies would choose to sponsor events 'appear(s) to be based on what marketing/promotion personnel "at the coal face" state are the reasons for promotion and what opportunities sponsorship offers in this regard' (208) (See also Kirchberg, 1995, for an outline of factors influencing corporate arts sponsorships). Their survey-based study of companies in Ireland as well as a 'content analysis' study conducted in Canada found that the most important reason for 'undertaking sponsorship was to alter public perception of the company, followed by contributing to society and aiding staff relations' (208). They refer to the single dominating motivation as having to do with the 'image' of the company and its product. In their study of arts-specific sponsorships, they found PR and hospitality opportunities to be close second motivating factors to that of 'brand image'. PR, they define as '(a) particular attraction of sponsorship in enhancing company or product image is that such sponsorship may enable the company to obtain publicity that is not sold in the market place, such as access to media coverage. A company may buy media coverage in the form of advertising, but this is not the same as having articles or news time devoted to the event' (210).

An important distinction in art-specific sponsorships, they found, is that more often than not, there might be no direct link between the company's products and the nature of the

event. This differs, for example, from a tire company sponsoring a motor race, thereby showcasing its product. Artlogic, in its sponsorship proposal documents, refers to this element as 'going beyond product placement to pure association with an art'. My findings have shown, as I demonstrate below, that different motivations resonate with different departments within the corporate structure (such as the marketing department, or the sponsorship department) involved in the project, but more importantly, that the emphasis on different aspects of the sponsorship could be shifted in order to justify a given sponsorship product or opportunity. What this implies is that it might be a highly individuated process that one might not easily be able to capture through the survey method, but rather requires a deeper understanding of surrounding circumstances at a given time. While it might be true in many instances that the wishes of decision-makers or heads of companies might be hamstrung by other elements (Kirchberg, 1995), in the particular case of the Joburg Art Fair, perhaps also having to do with how South African businesses function, individuals might well have the power to activate things, or, to push them aside.

In the time that I attended sponsorship 'pitches' with Artlogic, they had proposed various sponsorship opportunities for the Art Fair to between thirty and fifty companies. In the majority of cases Ross Douglas had some kind of a 'contact' at the institution, sometimes as tenuous as having met the wife of some decision-maker in the organisation at a dinner function. In these cases, the chances of 'getting a meeting' are about 30% higher than 'going cold'. 'Going cold' implies simply getting the name and contact detail for a company's marketing manager off the company website and going through the bureaucratic process of 'applying' for a meeting. This strategy has never yielded any results for Artlogic. The former strategy, however, of knowing someone who knows someone and who would make a 'recommendation' had about a 50% success rate in terms of either being granted the opportunity to meet with someone, or of having the assurance that a written proposal document would land in the appropriate hands at the appropriate level. The first scenario was preferable. In the majority of these cases Artlogic would be granted a meeting with the marketing, PR, events, or Corporate Social Investment department. Sometimes, as in the case of BMW, Grolsch Beer and Absolut Vodka, numerous meetings, countless drafting and redrafting of proposal documents and hours of contract negotiations would eventually lead to some relationship.

This was the long way round and could take up to 15 months to yield any kind of result or agreement. In these cases the focus would be on 'measurables', since the marketing woman would have to on-pitch the idea to her superiors and would need an absolutely watertight 'business' case to do so. Measurables include audience profile, advertising exposure, and in some extreme cases, the percentage chance of actually selling a given product to the audience members of a given event. The event coordinator of a car brand brought this concept to the table in no uncertain terms when she asked Artlogic what her percentage chances were of DISC? When met with baffled stares from the Artlogic side of the giant boardroom table, she explained what it stood for: 'Does It Sell Cars?' These are, for the most part, immeasurable measurables especially so in the case of arts and culture where almost no market research has been done, since it is mostly desperately under-funded and cannot afford the high costs of market research consultants. During the course of my time in the field, Artlogic became adept at navigating this realm through the careful use of corporate jargon.

The other, far more efficient way of 'getting a meeting' was to have the resources, or social capital, to go directly to the head of the company. These kinds of exchanges were more likely to happen after hours and in private spaces. However, even when a company found itself in this privileged fast track, it remained crucial that the project somehow fit with a general company ethos, 'vision', or what Du Guy and Pryke (2002) refers to as its 'culture' (1). I argue here that this was undoubtedly the case with the holding company of First National Bank, FirstRand and the Joburg Art Fair. In order to provide evidence for this argument it is necessary to understand something of the FirstRand brand positioning, some of which can be found in newspaper and magazine archives, some of which was relayed to me in my interviews, but much of which has been learnt from a FirstRand internal publication to celebrate their ten years of existence in 2007. What struck me upon reading this corporate publication was the frequent appearance of the word 'culture'. 'Culture', I realised, within the jargon of this kind of communication, meant the ethos of the company; the way it is run and managed; and its vision for itself and the world.

FirstRand

Upon opening the publication, the first ‘article’ is a general introduction and interview with then CE, Paul Harris. The very first sentence reads: ‘Much of the group’s success can be attributed to its entrepreneurial and empowering *culture*, which has made it unique on the South African banking landscape’. The next sentence is explanatory: ‘The *culture* which permeates throughout the group and is understood by every staff member, has its roots in RMB and it is this innovative *culture* which will probably be the most powerful legacy the founders GT Ferreira, Laurie Dippenaar and Paul Harris leave behind’ (3). Later in the same article the configuration ‘corporate *culture*’ is used by Harris to describe the ‘*culture* and philosophy’ of the group; and later still the notion that the group operates through a ‘unique *culture*’ of ‘management’ which dictates that their ‘people selection process is one which identifies people who will fit in well with our *culture* which provides for entrepreneurial, self-motivated, passionate individuals able to make their own decisions in an empowered environment’. In another section of the publication, Mike Pfaff, CE of RMB (Rand Merchant Bank, a division of First Rand) at the time, mentions that upon joining the group Paul Harris said to him that he ‘should do whatever I thought right. But the one thing which was not negotiable, was the *culture*’ (emphasis my own).

It is this ‘new’ tendency amongst managers to not only take into account, but also to communicate ideas around ‘culture’ in the workplace, that Du Guy and Pryke use as introduction to their edited volume on cultural economics. They refer to a ‘cultural turn’ that has seen ‘senior managers (finding) themselves turning to “culture” as a means of attempting to improve organisational performance’. They continue to qualify this cultural turn as bearing the ‘central feature’ of ‘renewed interest in the production of meaning at work’ (1). As evidenced by the publication by FirstRand, it becomes a manifestation of an epistemological shift away from the utilitarian, instrumental, bureaucratic and towards notions of ‘lifestyle’, ‘environment’ and ‘happiness’. This has an impact not only on management style, but also as the publication states, is what is required of employees. Similarly, skilled workers or managers seeking employment, according to Du Guy and Pryke, ‘are encouraged to view the most effective or “excellent” organisations as those with the “right” culture’, which they define as ‘the ensemble of norms and techniques of

conduct that enables the self-actualizing capacities of individuals to become aligned with the goals and objectives of the organization for which they work' (1).

The FirstRand 'culture' was not merely constructed for internal contemplation and group morale. A reading across the company archive gives the impression that the 'culture' had actively been fed to and circulated within the local press so as to become synonymous with the mentioning of FirstRand. The *Financial Mail* calls it 'the golden touch (of) Firstrand's three founders', who 'dazzled investors', and 'made certain their bank was the most dynamic'. The article goes as far as to refer to the three founders as displaying 'incandescent management' that made 'analysts gush'.²⁰² Some of the traits of this 'culture' have already been quoted as the recruitment of 'entrepreneurial, self-motivated, passionate individuals', all of which signal an approach within the group that had been crafted by the three founders. Harris gives some further information by stating that 'corporate politics never came into play', suggesting a 'playing' by their own rules within a well-defined friendship, rather than a mere work colleague relationship. He elaborates: 'We have a set of values – all the things your mother taught you. Mutual respect, deal on a handshake, a win-win philosophy'.²⁰³ Lourie Dippenaar, the second other founding member of three, explains 'we like to think of ourselves as, not a "rule-driven" group, but a "value-driven" group'.²⁰⁴

Furthermore, the second issue of *Maverick* magazine, self described as 'the South African business magazine for people with brains and money'²⁰⁵ had three different front covers: one of Paul Harris, at the time the incoming CE of FirstRand, one of Laurie Dippenaar, at the time the outgoing CE of FirstRand; and one of GT Ferreira, FirstRand chairman. Fischer French explains '(i)n less then 30 years they have gone from running a penniless start-up to bestriding a R90 billion company' they famously started trading with R10,000 credit.²⁰⁶ Paul Harris, in the same article describes the three founders of the bank as

²⁰² Rob Rose. 'First... Now Last.' March 20, 2009, *Financial Mail*.

²⁰³ Maya Fischer-French, 'Three Men and their Incidental Empire'. December 2005, *Maverick*.

²⁰⁴ http://www.decisionprocesses.com/results/firststrand_interview.asp

²⁰⁵ www.maverick.co.za

²⁰⁶ Of course, the founding years of Firstrand coincides with a time when South African finance and economic systems were crumbling in the face of world sanctions against apartheid and expensive domestic racial regulations: 'The year 1985 was traumatic for the financial sector. The Rand collapsed, American banks cut off credit to the country, what had previously been regarded as a manageable volume of overseas short-term debt suddenly and dramatically took on the appearance of a nightmarish mountain, the continuing recession produced an unprecedented total in internal bad debts, the rate of inflation soared to over 20 per cent, and the final financial blow was the end to the year unilateral announcement of the four-month debt standstill' (Munro, 1988: 130).

‘hustlers’; Fischer-French calls them a ‘cowboy outfit’. Given all this emotional jargon, I would argue that the ‘culture’ in question pivots upon three distinct personality traits which together gives the impression of dynamism that the aforementioned article ascribes to the trio and their brand. The first is that of the entrepreneur, signaling the risktaker; secondly is the behaviour of the cowboy, signaling a distinctly male, camaraderie-led fearlessness; and lastly the notion of patriotism. The three ‘personality traits’ listed above are firmly embedded within the history of the group as well as, in a way that strikes me as uncanny, in both the banks that the trio acquired to build their empire: Rand Merchant Bank and First National Bank. Furthermore, these three traits are evident within the motivations for funding a Joburg Art Fair as I describe more fully at a later stage in this chapter.

The first two members to team up were Lourie Dippenaar and GT Ferreira – a partnership in which, I have been told, Ferreira had the broad-brush-strokes vision and easy way with people, and Dippenaar was the numbers man. Ferreira knew Harris from Stellenbosch University and brought him in when they formed Rand Consolidated Investments, circa 1977, a time when the government was favouring Afrikaans businesses. The three founders’ big break came only in 1995 when they bought Johan Rupert’s Rand Merchant Bank at the time when Rupert was asked by his father to join the Rembrandt Group. The Rembrandt Group, Johan Rupert, and his Rand Merchant Bank are all material residue of Anton Rupert’s tenacious business philosophy of empowering the Afrikaner and local industry at a time when, he felt his kind were being discriminated against. Rupert, in the history of South African economics and business, is the ultimate risktaker and entrepreneur, although he did not seem to have had any ‘cowboy’ characteristics. The Rembrandt Group and by extension Rand Merchant Bank embodies an ethos of patriotism and showcasing the strength of the local to the international (See Dommissie, 2005; Luhabe, 2007: 20).

First National Bank, too, is a bank with roots in patriotic ideology and risk taking, but here cow-boy behaviour did play a role. The in-house publication, referred to earlier, quotes Harris as saying: ‘Though it is true that the core of the culture was influenced by RMB, we shouldn’t forget that FNB has a history dating back almost 170 years’. He is referring to the roundabout way in which FNB is the descendant of the National Bank formed by the Kruger Government, which had close ties to the Rand and the Union

Government until Volkskas, the Afrikaans-led bank of the apartheid state, took over all government contracts in the 1950s. The history of banking in South Africa is one that mirrors socio-political change and says a fair amount about where FirstRand finds itself 180 years after its parent company was founded. Arthur Webb in his *Early Capitalism and Financial Organisation* (1988) traces the origins of the Eastern Province Bank (a faraway relative of First National Bank) back to 1839, and provides a detailed account of the rise and fall of local and imperial banks from the forming years of the country to the time of the state-led apartheid hold on the economy.²⁰⁷

Jones (1996) states: 'Banking in the Transvaal has always been closely intertwined with politics' (43). This was particularly true of the National Bank (also, in a roundabout way an ancestor of First National Bank), which had originally appeared, not as a response to market forces, but as a move to create a national, Afrikaner bank that had no ties to imperialism. Striking a familiar and similar chord to contemporary analyses of banking behaviour, Jones explains '(b)etween 1918 and 1920 reckless expansion, accompanied by a policy of granting easy loans at a time of boom conditions, brought about the downfall of the bank (National Bank) when the depression struck in 1920. The size of the disaster, tantamount to the collapse of half the country's banks, would have been almost as great as the collapse that confronted the United States in 1932/33' (43). The Union government could help the National Bank to survive until 1925, yet when it finally had to face its demise 'the only practical solution was the unthinkable one of allowing the National Bank, the darling of the Kruger and the old South African Republic nationalists, to be taken over by an Imperial Bank' (46).

²⁰⁷ This was one of the first financial institutions in South Africa, established in Grahamstown to service the early wool industry. In 1873, the bank was amalgamated into the Oriental Banking Company (Webb, 1988: 65) at the time of the Great Depression. Five Imperial Banks entered South Africa in the nineteenth century and one in the twentieth century. Two of the nineteenth century banks, the London and South Africa Bank and the Oriental Bank, went under. The Bank of Africa was taken over by the National Bank in 1912 and the African Banking Corporation was absorbed by the Standard Bank in 1920. By that date only Standard Bank remained. When the National Bank got into difficulties in 1925, Barclays came to the rescue with the formation of Barclays Dominion Colonial and Overseas (Barclays (DCO) to take over banks in South Africa, the West Indies and Egypt. As a result, by the mid-1920s two banks totally dominated banking in South Africa, a state of affairs that was very different from Australia, where the imperial banks were losing ground to their local competitors (Jones, 1996: ii). The above mentioned two imperial banks settled in South Africa later than they did in other colonial countries primarily because of the extraordinary expansion that the wool industry was experiencing prior to the discovery of diamonds and gold. The National Bank was one of Paul Kruger's steps towards anti-imperialist subsistence living in the Transvaal.

It was this National Bank that was bought by Barclays Bank and much later, by Ferreira, Dippenaar and Harris when they felt the need to expand into retail banking which is where they thought the next big growth area would be in the financial world. At this point FirstRand was formed as holding brand, and many other companies were bought and structured underneath this umbrella. These included Momentum, a life insurance company and Discovery Health, a seller of medical-aid policies. At this time it was decided that the company should be run, not in the conventional ‘command and control’ strategy as it is referred to by Dippenaar in an interview,²⁰⁸ but by creating, what they call ‘profit centres’ which are virtually autonomous to make their own decisions and are allocated their own internal budgets to spend at their discretion. A profit centre is not just the different banking ‘brands’ of FNB, Discovery and Momentum that sit under the parent company, but divisions within these units, such as ‘marketing’, ‘sponsorship’, and ‘premier banking clients’. This means that sponsorship itself is a ‘profit centre’ that operates completely independently of the heads of the umbrella brand, or other profit centre. In interviews and articles much is always made of the FirstRand management style of creating these profit centres. None of the other three big South African banks have adopted this approach to management, opting rather for a ‘command and control’ from the central CEO position. Part of what this means is that FirstRand underplays its own image in the public by not taking any high profile sponsorships on themselves, which has the effect of fashioning the separate brands with separate identities, while also shrouding the holding company in a sense of ‘working in the background’ mystery. This management structure, as I explain below, had an impact on the relationship between Artlogic and its primary sponsor, First National Bank.

When it comes to communicating the different brand positioning of the companies that FirstRand owns, sponsorship is one of the most effective ways of doing so. Ross Douglas often quotes the marketing manager for MTN at the time, Santie Botha, as saying to him ‘advertising winks at your target market, but sponsorship shakes its hand’.²⁰⁹ Sponsorship could be used to illustrate the ‘culture’ of the company behind the

²⁰⁸ http://www.decisionprocesses.com/results/firststrand_interview.asp

²⁰⁹ The notion of banks having to compete for personality or ‘culture’ is a fairly recent phenomenon that only became necessary when competitions between banks became tangible. This occurred in the late 1970s with the beginning of ‘cultures of marketing’ becoming necessary due to the possibilities of electronic transfers – thus retail and commercial banks had to offer specific products to the specific target markets. This placed a ‘growing emphasis on marketing’ and for the first time, banks developed individuated slogans (Munro, 1988: 127). Writing in 1988, Munro in *Monetary Policy and Commercial Banking* saw these changes in finance structures in real time as ‘in part the consequences of the revolution in the technology

sponsorship, which would explain why such a large proportion of funds allocated by a company towards sponsorship actually does not go to the production of the event or 'rights fees', but towards what is called 'leveraging' of the sponsorship. Francois Pienaar²¹⁰, head of sponsorship for First National Bank at the time, explained it as such: 'we pay (Artlogic) a rights fee to be the presenting sponsor of the event and then you have to pay an activation fee as well, depending on how you want to profile yourself as a bank that is involved in art and how much that costs'. The word 'activation' is an industry term for advertising a sponsorship product. Through 'activation', Pienaar suggested, the brand aims to impact on the connection the public makes between sponsorship project and brand, or between product and brand. It is, thus, not enough to pay a rights fee and then leave it in the hands of the production or events company. 'Activation' suggests the active unlocking and inscribing of value. Pienaar explained that in 'international terms' the ratio of rights fee to activation 'can go as high as 3:1; so you pay R1 to be the rights holder and R3 to tell everybody what you are doing. In South Africa it varies between 80c:R1 and 30c:R1'.

Before moving on to demonstrate how the internal structure of FirstRand and First National Bank impacted on the Joburg Art Fair, it is necessary to cast the lens wider to understand how the bank interacts with the social and political of contemporary South Africa. Banks in South Africa, as elsewhere, are intertwined with politics, mainly because governance and finance are regulating features of societies. For this reason, the decision-making centres of financial institutions are both interested in, and informed about, political developments. These affect them in terms of business confidence in the country, exchange and monetary controlling regulations, emigration, and the availability of competent staff members for employment within companies. While the South African corporate world is large and remains the life-career providers of countless South Africans, increasingly of all races, in 2007, 75% of the value on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange remained in the hands of white South Africans. However, various Black Economic Empowerment and affirmative action incentives by the government have served to render corporate life a new space of mixed race, whereas before it would have been almost exclusively white.

and in part the response to competition from other types of financial institutions. The credit card, automatic teller machines (ATM) and networked computers are radically changing consumer banking' (115). Since that time increasing importance has been placed on differentiating the personalities of various banks as brands that influences the banking choices of the public.

²¹⁰ Interview 3 November 2008, Francois Pienaar, Head of Sponsorship FNB.

Considering the culture of this workplace, Steven Robins (2005) argues that South Africans are increasingly a-political and states that post-apartheid inequalities ‘... include new types of socio-spatial segregation whereby (predominantly white) middle-class citizens have retreated even further into the privatized public as well as ‘safe’ private space. For the majority of white middle-class South Africans, citizenship generally involves a withdrawal from the public sphere and limited participation in political life’ (13). Robert’s opinion would, thus, indicate a move in the opposite direction to what the national government aims to create: the building of a non-racial civil society and public sphere. Corporate employment, considering its scale as a possible career option for individuals might be one of the foremost sites of inequality in South Africa and, therefore, serve as example of what Robins might be referring to²¹¹. The white owner-manager team of FirstRand has, however, involved their various child-companies in many sponsorship initiatives that display political involvement as I shall illustrate below. What I aim to demonstrate is how in many ways decision-making, corporate executives are very much involved in and knowledgeable on politics and so negates sweeping statements such as that made by Robins. It is, however, also crucial for these businesses to integrate themselves in some ways with the ‘new South Africa’ and the politics of the day, to survive. Thus, while Robins’ statement might be true of many South Africans, high-ranking decision-makers cannot afford to divorce themselves from the politics of the country.

The FirstRand stable of sponsorship projects produce ample evidence of what I refer to above as an engagement with the politics of post-apartheid South Africa, with many of the projects displaying a certain patriotism and pro-activeness in relation to this present. A first example is that of the ‘Outsurance Pointsmen’. It is a project launched by Outsurance, one of the FirstRand companies that sell all kinds of insurance, to regulate traffic in Johannesburg when necessary – either as a result of power outages, construction work, or whatever the cause might be. This is generally the responsibility of the metropolitan centre or the Department of Transport. South Africans started seeing traffic regulators bearing Outsurance vests around 2007. In January 2008, when the country started experiencing powercuts these pointsmen were indispensable. The in-house publication referred to earlier explains the campaign: ‘The project, which is run

²¹¹ It is worth mentioning in this regard that the condition Robins is describing might well be true to an extent across demographics and not only characteristics of ‘whites’ as he argues.

with the support of the Metro Police Department, involves the deployment of *sponsored* pointsmen and women to the busiest intersections in and around Johannesburg. Given the ongoing problems with traffic lights, the pointsmen have proved to provide invaluable support at some of Johannesburg's major intersections' (emphasis my own). This would be a first example of this private company involving themselves in matters of governance, thereby behaving in a political manner.²¹²

Perhaps most revealing of an attitude of patriotism for the sake of ensuring a healthy business environment is First National Bank's 'Homecoming Revolution'. This project is important to consider in relation to what I discussed in Chapter Two as an emigration 'movement' amongst South Africans at the time of the research. Homecoming Revolution is a predominantly web-based project that aggregates press material which discusses the state of affairs in the country. It provides opportunities for ex-pats to blog out their nostalgia, anger, insecurities, resentments and celebrations of their country of birth. It also gives browsers practical information on how to go about returning to live in South Africa, as well as opportunities to open a bank account, purchase insurance and other services offered by the sponsoring entity. The website is connected to public events abroad and locally where, for example, Francois Pienaar would address a gathering of ex-pats to discuss the pros and cons of returning to South Africa. Pienaar explained to me in our interview that in his experience 'there is a yearning' amongst ex-pats to return to the country, yet they want to know 'are things better?' These are people, Pienaar said, who 'love South Africa and they want to return to South Africa, but they want safety and security, that is the main thing'.

The website offers a forum for debate pertaining to the country and does indeed focus on both positive and negative elements in the public domain. A posting from 7 July, by Itumeleng Kgaboesele,²¹³ 'CEO and co-founder of Sphere, a South African black-owned and managed investment company' and 'president of the SA chapter of the Entrepreneurs Organisation' reports on one such a Homecoming Revolution gathering

²¹² Another, much more controversial example would be that of the 'crime' letters that had a very short life and mainly exists as rumour now. Kevin Bloom (2009) mentions it in his *Ways of Staying*. It was an incident sparked by the murder of David Ratray, a friend of Paul Harris. Harris devised a campaign in which readers of the Times Newspaper would receive stamped envelopes addressed to the then president Thabo Mbeki in which they would relay their individual stories of crime in South Africa. This never got off the ground. The rumour circulating was that the government threatened to retract all its banking from the FirstRand group should they go ahead with the campaign.

²¹³ http://www.homecomingrevolution.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1952

in May 2007 in London. ‘... seventy South Africans, ranging from engineers, accountants, doctors and nurses, teachers, bankers and IT specialists, many of them in their 20s and 30s’, attended and were addressed by Paul Harris, Nick Binedell, a true entrepreneur in the business education field and the founder of GIBS; and Kevin Vermaak, the man who started the Cape Epic mountain bike race’. The global economic crisis has made it more difficult for foreigners in many areas of the world to remain employed, leading many to apparently consider coming back to South Africa. Kgaboesele states: ‘Concerns raised by the participants included black economic empowerment and its implications for white entrepreneurs, the availability of funding for early stage businesses and support for entrepreneurial endeavors, areas of potential opportunity and, inevitably, crime. It was clear from the nature of the discussions that people were seeking reassurance that SA remained a land of opportunity for all’. Kgaboesele’s general views are in line with the philosophy of the Homecoming Revolution:

it is important that business and the government give them the reassurance they need as we can all benefit from the international skills and experience acquired while working abroad. Our national interest is best served by continuing to encourage South Africans to return and make a positive contribution to our future. The way in which our economy is structured means that to create jobs – in particular jobs for low or poorly skilled workers – we need to increase the number of skilled people within the economy. The government and business community should aggressively encourage these skilled professionals to return. And we should use the appeal of the South African story to lure them back.

Much of what the project offers benefits the bank directly: how to open a bank account when you move back, insurance, job offers, et cetera. Yet the idea of bringing skilled citizens back into the country has further-reaching significations than merely those of growing market share. The government currently has no such ‘project’ and many complain that they have no interest in what Kgaboesele clearly sees as a valuable sector. In this regard a comment by the leader for the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, Helen Zille when she addressed a group of students at the University of Cape Town campus is insightful. Here she made a well-known point, which I believe, dovetails with some of what First National Bank aims to achieve with the Homecoming Revolution. She used the example of the South African tax base, adding her own political slant, to demonstrate the economic strength of her party. In her view, the South African Revenue Service desperately depends on the tax base of a handful of South Africans –

many of whom contemplate futures abroad.²¹⁴ The South African Revenue Service, famously pulled into one of the most efficient government departments by Pravin Gordhan, is sustained through revenue paid by approximately 5 million individual taxpayers registered with SARS²¹⁵ in a country of 40 million citizens. A clear argument could thus be made for broadening this tax-base by enticing skilled South Africans to return to the country to start businesses and so create further employment. In my interview with South African businessman and prominent buyer of local art, Jack Ginsberg²¹⁶, he illustrates some of this practically:

Well, there is no doubt about it there is a huge number of South Africans who have left, which is a tragedy, an absolute tragedy. And recently because of affirmative action a lot of other people are leaving. First of all they left for political reasons, now they are leaving for different political reasons. And it is a tragedy, because every single person who leaves impoverishes the country and also the jobs disappear. I have a cousin who used to employ thirty people in Johannesburg and went to live in Australia, those thirty people were tax-payers, and he was a major tax payer. So not only have they lost those skills, not only of himself, as a professional person, an engineer in his case, but all his employees, I don't know how many have managed to find other jobs, et cetera, et cetera, but it is crazy. They should do anything to keep South Africans here. I think the people whose sentiments are all over the place are people with school age, school-going children, who are worried about their future and their education.

Keith Hart (2005) explains how the system of tax revenue exemplifies the marriage between state and business which 'for all its conflicts of interest underlies the continuing

²¹⁴ Helen Zille is of the opinion that a significant number of tax payers from this sector are in fact DA supporters and uses this conviction to demonstrate that when the ANC pays social grants 'almost 12-million' of them, out of tax payer's money, those grant are in fact paid by the DA (<http://zubeidajaffer.blogspot.com/2009/03/zille-does-anc-favour.html>). She outlines the situation in the following way: 'A very significant percentage of those 5.5 million registered taxpayers were DA supporters. If it could be said that the ANC pays people social grants, it would be fair to say that the DA pays even more of their grants'. Commenting on this incident on her blog, Zubeida Jaffer explained: 'She based her analysis, she said, on the following information drawn from the SARS annual report 2007/2008. According to this report, the total tax take in South Africa is R572.8 billion. The biggest single category of taxpayers are the personal/individual taxpayers registered with SARS 29,5 percent of the total tax take. The corporate tax base comprises contribute 24.7 percent of the total tax take. Together they contribute 54.2 percent of the tax take – more than half. This information she says underscores her point that the ANC does not pay people's grants. The taxpayers do and many of the biggest category of taxpayers in South Africa do not support the ANC'. Jaffer disagrees with this analysis as do many others, yet what this points to is the necessity felt by South African corporates to 'create' a home for immigrating South Africans, many of them white, not only to foster their own business interests, but also, ultimately to sustain development in the country by enlarging the tax-base.

²¹⁵ <http://zubeidajaffer.blogspot.com/2009/03/zille-does-anc-favour.html>

²¹⁶ Interview, 22 September 2008, Jack Ginsberg, Private collector.

alliance between corporations and government' (171). Yet I would argue that the relationship is more entrenched than that, since both have vested interests in a country's brand and have to invest in mythologies of identity and place.

During the field work, I realised that the Joburg Art Fair, in some ways, has been crafted to be an event that could cater to such ex-pats and make South Africa a more desirable place to live and work. In a similar way, it can be said to be geared towards exactly that section of society that makes up the 5 million tax payers. This provides for a particular reading of the Joburg Art Fair as communicating a political message from the private sphere to that of the public, or state. Gallerist David Brodie²¹⁷ drew, in our interview, a connection between what he calls 'a fairly well-publicised butting of heads with government over, for example, recent crime stats' and the sponsoring of the Fair. He understands the connection in the following way:

I feel like there is something quite political about a bank being prepared to sponsor something like an art fair, because, if you approach the government and say what do you think, they will say, where is the social development aspect? Are you going to bus in rural kids, is there going to be a section set up for home craft and bead work and wood carving? Because all of those things, and let me be clear about this, I am not dismissing those things, because they have a particular place, they should be recognised, acknowledged, embraced. But with the logic of the kind of contemporary art fair as it exists in other parts of the world, those things don't really come into the picture. Because art fairs are not about social upliftment, they are about, this ridiculous thing on the wall, it means something to you, or it doesn't, it is worth this much, buy it, put it in a collection, take it home. I keep feeling like there is something political about a bank saying we will sponsor it like this, we will do it like this.

For Brodie it is the inherent message of 'privilege' that an art fair sends out that flies in the face of what the government has prioritised for itself, and expects the citizens to follow. His point is that by sponsoring an event that caters to the tax base referred to by Zille above, a political statement is being made. Brodie went on to connect the 'responsibility' taken by the corporate, in this case FNB, and that 'expected' by citizens of their state. He drew a picture of life in South Africa where one does not rely on the national police force to be 'protected', rather 'you probably have a private security company, and if you don't then your family does'. This implies for him that one can no

²¹⁷ Interview, 28 April 2008, David Brodie, Director Brodie Stevenson Gallery.

longer rely on 'an old school version of citizen and state – there is a certain kind of obligation, the state would protect and guard their citizens, it does not happen here'.

When FNB CEO, Michael Jordaan, states: 'Being Proudly South African is one of the core values of FNB and our involvement in the Homecoming Revolution is really a culmination of a number of exciting projects that FNB has implemented to help South Africans realise the value of this great country'²¹⁸ he is making a political statement (sometimes relating to actual governance of the country) and a pragmatic one to do with creating fertile ground in which to do lucrative business. I would argue the Joburg Art Fair is attractive as a sponsorship precisely because it aligns, in the minds of the decision-makers, with notions of creating a more 'livable' South Africa and might ultimately provide bait for people to return to living in this country.

The decision to get involved in the Fair, however, did not come from Jordaan as the head of the sponsoring bank, nor did it go through the corporate channels of sending a proposal. Rather, it was from within the holding company, FirstRand, that the interest in the event came.²¹⁹ At the time that Artlogic was starting to conceive of the Joburg Art Fair, Paul Harris²²⁰ was the reigning CE of FirstRand, tasked with keeping the 'culture' alive. Demonstrating some of his own point of view, in our interview, Harris explained some of how he sees life in South Africa:

... in South Africa there are all these tensions, it is such a highly charged environment. Whereas in other places, where things are pretty easy, ... you are not going to starve, one might contrast it with Australia. You know, Australia is a safe place, you're never going to get angry, you are never going to get particularly happy, it is very much a ... how I can describe it, ... is a zoo versus a game reserve. You know in a zoo you get fed and the guards come at the right time and you don't go hungry; if you are a buck and you break a leg, you are going to survive. But in a game reserve, you know, you have to be sharp; you will get eaten if you stumble. And there is a lot of excitement, and there is a bit of danger. And that makes things exciting. And that is what South Africa is all about.

²¹⁸ www.fnb.co.za

²¹⁹ When first introduced to the concept of an art fair, the discussions with First National Bank was of a sponsorship attached to a joint venture between Artlogic and FNB. Artlogic and FNB would join business forces for an event that could sustain itself beyond the sponsorship amount through recouping the money spent on the art fair each year by buying and selling work in the FirstRand collection. FNB sent a staff member and Ross Douglas to Art Basel on a research trip after which the staff member reported that the 'joint venture' option would not be sustainable and that FNB should approach the art fair as a 'straight' sponsorship.

²²⁰ Interview, 20 March 2008, Paul Harris, CE Firstrand.

Working closely with Douglas, I had learnt ethnographically of Harris' hand in the decision to sponsor the Art Fair. Given the strong connection between the founders of the brand and the 'culture', and the way in which sponsorship is regarded as one of the most effective ways of positioning a brand, it is not surprising that many sponsorships originate from the higher ranks of corporate management. FirstRand brand executive, Beth van Heerden,²²¹ explained it to me in the following way: '... you quite often find that the people who would talk about a suite at the rugby, it might make perfect sense from a marketing perspective, that you are entertaining your clients and that you can take them to a suite and all the rest of it but if the chairman is not interested in rugby, you will not have the suite'.

She did concede, however, 'that is happening less and less in business as businesses are becoming more transparent', yet she stressed that even within such supposedly more transparent operational structures 'you do need somebody that feels passionately about something to make it work'. She gave the example of karate as potential sponsorship property, where you would often find a connection between the sponsorship project and 'somewhere along the line there was someone who had some connection with karate, or a child who had some connection with karate'. Van Heerden, as I discuss below, was the contact person for the Fair inside the bank in the first year. According to her, one of the main reasons for sometimes inevitable personal interests in sponsorship opportunities, was because people working at banks are generally very busy with their the work, thus taking on sponsorship projects outside of that scope needs a fair amount of enthusiasm – this beyond the fact that it is easier to see the logic in sponsoring one event above another if you yourself are sympathetic towards it.

I believe that the Art Fair, as a bold, international, contemporary art event fits perfectly the profile of the entrepreneur, the risktaker and the patriot that I outlined above in relation to the FirstRand 'culture'. The first and the second traits are also present in Ross Douglas' personality, and the third relates to what I termed earlier 'creating a more livable South Africa'. In fact, not only does the Art Fair fit the profile, it could not have been brought into existence if it was not for this particular risktaking personality of the brand, and, probably, Paul Harris' love for South Africa and its art. Harris has business

²²¹Interview, 11 May 2008, Beth van Heerden, FirstRand Brand Executive.

interest in a South African gallery, and as I describe below is an avid buyer of South African art.

The First Rand art consultant, Steve Bailes²²², explained in our interview that the bank had to think creatively to get the funds necessary for the sponsorship property to be realised. This for me demonstrates a particular commitment to the project from the sponsor, to which the Joburg Art Fair owes its existence. In this particular case, the decision was taken to sell some of the company's corporate art. I was told that not only was this the only way in which such a large sum of money could be made available in such a short time, but it was also a move to give the bank a chance to make their current corporate art collection more contemporary – through the selling off of some 'old' works and buying new, contemporary ones at the Art Fair. The money, thus, did not come from First National Bank, which was deemed the most appropriate sponsor for the event, but from FirstRand. This changed in the second year where FNB owed this money back to FirstRand and from thereon would fund the project themselves to bring the sponsorship back in line with the logic of 'profit centres' described earlier.

Bailes explained that he had no choice, given the time constraint but to sell some of the bank's prized art works in the form of some works by Jacob Hendrik Pierneef, now considered a South African master from the previous century. He was able to do this because prices for this artist's work had been rising steeply on the auction market. Bailes did feel that his actions were justified as 'Pierneef has made his name, doesn't need to be recorded and nurtured because he is already there' and that he personally approved of the money being used to 'nurture' young local talent. Yet, he laments, 'you will never get the quality back'. He managed to raise a substantial amount of money by selling five works, the highest prices for one was R2.8 million – these had been bought for R30,000 some time ago, and had a 'book value' of R600,000.

Steve Bailes has worked for the bank for forty years. Before it became First National Bank, he worked for Barclays where his father was also the Chairman. Of my interviewees, Bailes is the most emphatic about the change that was brought about within the organisation when the three founders of FirstRand took over Barclays: 'Total change in culture, from the old days, the old era, to the three people that started and

²²² Interview, 17 September 2008, Steve Bailes, Firstrand Art Buyer.

created the bank as it is today'. By way of demonstration he explained that the art collection, for example, used to be dominated by what he refers to as 'typical South African narrow-minded, old fashioned way of thinking - if it is a buck or a beast then it is good and then it can be shown on the wall ... the fur and the hooves ... was a fixation; it was wildlife or lekker landscapes, as I always call them, or nothing'.

Throughout our interview, Bailes expressed an unwavering respect for Harris, as did Harris' hotel manager, Nick Dreyer²²³, when I interviewed him in Cape Town. Dreyer, described Harris in the following way: 'Paul is such a patriot, he is just incredibly passionate about South Africa'. A portion of Harris' impressive private art collection is housed at his hotel, Ellerman House. Harris²²⁴ focuses on the buying of South African work, his reasons for doing so, he stated in our interview to be: 'I am a busy chap, I have lots of things that occupy my mind, so I haven't got unlimited time to spend on my hobbies and interests. So long ago I decided to stick to South African art, because it is part of me, it is my history'. Artist Beezy Bailey²²⁵ had this to say about Harris: 'it is so nice that we have a businessman here who *sees*. Yes, he sees, and he buys art ... isn't this wonderful, because it doesn't really happen in this country. He has Ellerman House which is worth R100 million upwards as a property, with an art collection inside it that is worth more than the house. He has a whole room full of Pierneefs, he has a Naude, there is just no end, Sterns, all South African, worth more than the house'.²²⁶ Ellerman House is located in Bantry Bay and offers further evidence of both Harris' personal commitment to what Dreyer describes as 'all the best of what is South African' which he makes available at the hotel in the forms of art, wine and 'landscape', as well as his drive to showcase this to a foreign audience – the hotel caters primarily to international guests. Asked about the function of the impressive collection of, mostly, South African modernist art within the hotel, Dreyer answered that the artwork is part of the brand identity and it is one of the reasons foreigners stay at this expensive and exclusive hotel. He also peppered the conversation with 'Pauls incredible love of art'.

As the above demonstrates, Harris' keen interest in South African art and the notion of celebrating and showcasing the 'best from here' to the world might well have had an

²²³ Interview, 2 November 2008, Nick Dreyer, Art manager at Ellerman House for Paul Harris.

²²⁴ Interview, 20 March 2008, Paul Harris, CE Firstrand.

²²⁵ Interview, 1 November 2008, Beezy Bailey, Practicing South African artist.

²²⁶ Interview, 1 November 2008, Beezy Bailey, South African artist.

impact on the involvement of First National Bank in the Fair. Added to this is the general commitment from FirstRand and First National Bank to speak to high-net worth individuals from business locally, potential business should emigrants return, and to making South Africa 'livable' to this sector of society.

First National Bank

It so happened, then, that First National Bank became the 'presenting rights sponsor' for the Joburg Art Fair, which implied that it contributed funds necessary to produce the event, and spend over and above this amount to promote the event and their association with it. At this point the discussion becomes more technical and has to do with how First National Bank specifically 'make sponsorships work' for them. This information gives further insight into the form and life of the first and second Joburg Art Fairs, as well as the ways it differs from other art sponsorship projects in South Africa. The vast majority of other corporate art sponsorships in South Africa are 'art prizes'. Because of the nature of the 'art prize model' the audience for these events are often an already-interested art public. The funding for these projects often comes from the corporate social investment divisions of the corporate sponsor, which, in many ways, resemble 'donations'. In contrast, the Joburg Art Fair relies on sponsorship from the general marketing budget of First National Bank. For this reason, once the event is taken on board as a commitment by the bank, it has to 'work' for the bank's banking clients and conform to general sponsorship objectives that would, for example, also apply to sport sponsorships. The particular divisions within FNB that focussed on the Art Fair are their 'premier' and 'private' clients, which is referred to as the A-income bracket. To be considered a 'premier client' of the bank one has to fall in a R350,000–700,000 earnings per annum bracket; 'private clients' earn R700,000 and upwards.

First National Bank also sponsors the FNB Ballet, the FNB Whiskey Festival and the FNB Dance Umbrella. None of these events, in the words of one of the FNB employees, bring the same 'quality' of people as can be found at the Joburg Art Fair. The opening night of the Fair, as discussed previously in this study, is an exclusive, invitation-only event for which there are between 1500 and 2000 tickets. It is described as a 'pre-buying' opportunity and most of the work sold at the fair sells during this opening night event. Roughly half of the available tickets FNB distributes to invite their clients, and the

rest of the tickets would go to the participating galleries and other partners. In 2008, the 'premier' clients division distributed 500 tickets after an initial larger call to assess general interest. The 500 went to those described by the employee in charge of distributing tickets, as 'about 80% white males, living in and around the Sandton area that responded as yes'. She added 'this is also reflective of our base, however'. According to Robert Keip.²²⁷ Head of Premier and Investment Banking at the time, the amount of interest for the event 'was much higher than we had anticipated'.

The two contact people allotted to Artlogic to run the first Joburg Art Fair were Robert Keip and Beth van Heerden. Keip had an interest in art, headed the profit centre within FNB that contained the most desirable client base, and crucially could 'speak for' FNB, the brand, should press opportunities arise. Van Heerden was the main contact person and being an employee of FirstRand could not comment on anything that had to do with FNB because of the hands-off approach of the umbrella brand towards its profit centres. Van Heerden²²⁸ explained the experience of working on the Joburg Art Fair as: 'I thoroughly loved it, I absolutely loved it', although, she also admitted that working with Artlogic on a project where she did not have the final say, since she was not 'from' FNB, posed substantial challenges. Van Heerden grew up in Bloemfontein where her mother was involved in the local arts scene.²²⁹ She had very little to do with art herself outside of her own art classes with friends, and taking her two daughters to art exhibitions. She had never run an art event nor a cultural sponsorship programme, and was only a part-time employee of FirstRand, which meant that many meetings between Artlogic and 'the bank' took place in coffee shops, when not at FirstRand's ornate premises in Sandton. Van Heerden exclaimed: 'the greatest thrill that I have had in a hell of a long time' was being granted the opportunity to '(go) with Steve (Bailes) with the corporate budget and buy art'.

In one of our discussions, Van Heerden explained to me that the sponsorship of the Art Fair 'worked' for the bank at two important levels: The first had to do with what Harvey and O'Hagan (2000) describe as the 'image' of the bank (208). Van Heerden positioned it

²²⁷Interview, 13 March 2008, Robert Keip, Head of Premier and Investment Banking, FNB.

²²⁸ Interview, 11 May 2008, Beth van Heerden, FirstRand Brand Executive.

²²⁹ Van Heerden elaborated on her upbringing in the following way: 'And people thought my mother was very odd in Bloemfontein. It was not a comfortable fit in Bloemfontein, they spoke about her as a 'culture culture' and not in a nice way. She worked for the Streekraad vir Uitvoerende Kunste van die Vrystaat. And she was involved with exhibition openings and the rest of it'. She explains that she had been interested in art her whole life 'from childhood I had Hundertwasser, I grew up with him in my room'.

as ‘a branding opportunity, creating an association with art, which is an up-market activity and environment, and, therefore, for those types of clients and potential clients, creating a like-minded view to a certain extent Like “you are interested in art, we are a bank that is interested in art, so maybe we can get together”’. She felt, however, that the more important motivating factor is one of ‘retention’, where the bank is creating events specifically to impress and instill loyalty with their already existing client base. She explained that for the Premier and Private clients ‘to be one of 200,000 people who could possibly win a soccer ticket is not that relevant to them. But if one could create something where the pre-buying, VIP night event becomes one of those things that you look forward to all year and you are dying for a ticket...’. It is strategy, she explained, which would make ‘our own clients say it is worth while staying here, as ‘they are doing something for us that we cannot get anywhere else’.

Robert Keip, in our discussion, agreed with this motivation as it has special relevance for the wealthy individuals whose portfolios he oversaw, and since one of the primary aims of his division, he explained, is to create ‘an exclusive club feeling’. His specific strategy he outlined as follows:

... so preferential entries into these types of events in particular is what we see as beneficial, you know, anybody can get into an event and end up paying ... But what we want to do is create events that are opportunities for them to come, so this one, preferential buying, it really works as a corporate event for our clients. My feeling on that is that the brand has to work across all market sectors, obviously the bulk of our customers are in the mass market because that is how the market pyramids look like. I mean we have 3 million mass customers, 2 million middle market customers, et cetera. So most of sponsorships are around soccer, et cetera, that absolutely works to that market. When you begin to stretch the brand to the upper end of the market, with this type of event where it is good to associate your brand with because you get to access a smaller but very important, I think, upper market segment. To cover 90 % of your customers you need soccer, but to cover 10 % of the market you need art fairs...

This begs the question of how it ‘worked’ for the clients. Below are some email responses sent to the Premier Banking division all of which clearly demonstrate the success of their strategy:

(1.) I just wanted to say thank you for a most enjoyable evening on Thursday at the Joburg Art Fair. Not only was it exceptionally well done

but it was great to see just what is going on in the art world in SA. As a client of Barclays and then FNB for 38 years this is the FIRST time I have ever received anything from the Bank (other than a plastic cheque book cover!) so thank you very much – may it be the start of many good things in the future.

(2.) Thank you, again for the invitation; it was quite interesting, some times quite surprising, some other funny; some times disturbing, some other beautiful; very interrogative: but it is the spirit of art; to make you think! I was very impressed by some of the photos: it is one of my hobbies. And also by the organisation of the event: many thanks to you all at FNB, not to let down art in this country, I can say you are one of the very few.

(3.) Thank you so much for a fantastic evening last night. The cocktail was sumptuous. The fair was of an excellent standard, with some of our (SA) top artists work there and it was encouraging to see a lot of them sold almost immediately. Thanks a mills for a great evening. Please pass on my congratulations to FNB's organising team, they did a fabulous job.

Both Van Heerden and Keip were convinced that the bank, thus, received a good return on their investment by involving themselves in this kind of event. Keip, however, mentioned that FNB could have done with more brand exposure.

In order to grasp the significant changes to the brand identity of the Joburg Art Fair in the second year, it is important to note that the relationship between Artlogic and FNB (through Robert Keip) changed when it was handed over as a national sponsorship project of FNB. From one that was 'made to happen' by Firstrand art sale money. This is a point I explored in relation to the Joburg Art Fair logo in the previous chapter and do so now through the views of Francois Pienaar, at the time, head of sponsorship for First National Bank.

Francois Pienaar, Rugby and How Sponsorship 'works' in First National Bank

Francois Pienaar²³⁰ was asked by Harris to join the bank in 2004 after a stint in England playing rugby and starting his own sports sponsorship business. He is physically big and takes up a lot of space in any discussion. Most South Africans would know him as the captain that led the National team to victory at the Rugby World Cup in 1994 – the same year that South Africa had its first democratic elections. In terms of his personal profile he explained to me:

²³⁰ Interview 3 November 2008, Francois Pienaar, Head of Sponsorship FNB.

I think when I shared the stage with Madiba, when I was very lucky to share the stage with Madiba I became an ambassador for South Africa almost by default. There you are, you are shaking hands, you are a white guy shaking hands with one of the most, the best known, people in the world. And given apartheid we were on the World Cup and he was wearing a Springbuck on his chest, which was then a symbol that they fought against. And Madiba sharing his stories about when they were at Robben island how they tried to convince teams not to tour South Africa, the British Lions not to come here. And then when we became a democracy, we had the vision, foresight and humility to put a Springbuck jumper on and say now we won, you know, we are going forward. Then I became sort of, an ambassador.

Pienaar spent much time in our interview elaborating on this aspect of his personality and career, but was equally insistent on explaining how, in his view, sponsorships should work for a brand.

Sean O'Toole, one of the respondents to this study, interviewed Pienaar for the *Business Day Arts Supplement* that was dedicated to the second Art Fair. When he asked Pienaar why FNB might get involved in the art fair, Pienaar conceded that: 'Firststrand CE, Paul Harris, is a big art collector. A minority stake holder in the Everard Read Gallery, he has assembled the impressive Ellerman House collection. FNB CEP, Michael Jordaan, also has a passion for art'.²³¹ He quickly moved on from there to what O'Toole describes as 'textbook MBA': 'Pienaar emphasizes it is important to distinguish sponsorships from donations, personal interests from the needs and requirements of a national brand ... I asked what FNB's motivations are in sponsoring the Fair: brand positioning, exposure and relationship management, and lastly outreach, or giving back...'.²³²

The formula quoted by O'Toole captures Pienaar's version of 'measurables', which he was at pains to describe and demonstrate to me on his computer when I interviewed him in November 2008 at his office in Cape Town. One of the direct consequences of Pienaar having replaced Van Heerden as FNB contact person for the 2009 Art Fair was the renegotiation of the Art Fair logo which I discussed in the previous chapter. About this change in the relationship between Artlogic and the bank, the FNB events coordinator pointed out to me in our interview: 'it's history, who knows how it

²³¹ Sean O'Toole, 'A whole new ball game'. March 2009, *Business Day Arts Supplement*.

²³² Sean O'Toole, 'A whole new ball game'. March 2009, *Business Day Arts Supplement*.

happened; whatever, there is no turquoise in the logo, and the turquoise is our primary colour and that is our identity. So however that was agreed to, no idea... it is very uncommon'. Branding, Pienaar made it clear to me, is the first of his three 'measurable': '(with) every sponsorship we do, the branding for me is so important. If you look at the Art Fair, you need to see it is FNB, and we have a difference of opinion about this (referring to Artlogic), ... but I am comfortable to leave the creative, but I want to see it is FNB, that must be unmistakably. That is how you position your brand'. Accordingly, it was this element, some of which is the logo for the Art Fair, and some the signage at the event that had to be brought into closer alignment with the bank. Pienaar did however concede that he 'loves art' and understand that the 'creative' side of it is not something he would like to mess with. Yet by demarcating the colours for the brand logo and signage, the 'creative' would be quite radically altered.

Pienaar's schedule was packed with overseas trips and important meetings, so the task of being 'on the ground' and ensuring the event runs smoothly from the inside was delegated to the 'Sponsorship and Events' team. In the case of the Art Fair, this was a young woman called Penelope Morris.²³³ Morris, in her early thirties, had only ever worked at the bank and had done so for the last ten years of her life.²³⁴ Morris was the Art Fair's main contact in the second year of the event. She was in charge of catering at all official events, such as at press launches and the opening night; and she managed the branding on billboards in conversation with Francois Pienaar; in short, she looked after FNB's interests in the event. Morris did not have any particular feelings about art. Asked whether she had ever been interested in art she replied: 'No, I don't understand art. No, for me, I look for a painting, I cannot see the emotion and the everything else that goes into it. (At the Art fair) there were a couple of pieces that I must admit, I was like "O my word" and some of the art I didn't see how that was art, if that makes sense. There was a picture last year of a whole lot of ties I don't see how that is art' (She was referring to a piece by artist Willem Boshoff at the Michael Stevenson stand). In terms of benefitting from the 'culture' that FirstRand so proudly cultivates amongst employees, she doesn't really like going away for team-building weekends with her colleagues, and would rather

²³³ Both her parents also worked for the bank, so that when she finished her marketing management course at local training college Damelin, her father made a call to someone in the bank. Morris states 'you know looking for a job, going to interviews, et cetera, et cetera, and you don't really find anything because you don't have any experience, so my dad kind of gave Vicky a call and said, please help her out and I don't think ... I didn't get the job because I knew somebody, but so that is how I landed up here'.

²³⁴ Interview, 10 March 2009, Penelope Morris, Event Co-ordinator Brand Segment, FNB.

be given a week away with her partner. Neither has Steve Bailes' careful compilation of the FNB art collection made much of an impression on her. She explained the art collection to be mostly 'like a few geese, it is like old art'. Yet conceded that, while she has never noticed it herself, since she doesn't 'go around looking for it', that 'on the 6th floor where all the CEOs sit... I am sure there is quite a lot there', and concluded 'to be honest I don't know, but next time I go up there I will have a poke around and notice'.

Asked how, in her experience events get measured, she answered: 'PR, but it probably does boil down to budget; is there budget available?'. In her ten years at the bank, Morris has seen many arts sponsorships get taken up and then cancelled either because the company involved was 'too disorganised' or because the return for the bank was too hard to measure - this being less so with sport sponsorships.

This issue around the comparison between arts or cultural sponsorships and that of sport is worth exploring in further details in order to lay a foundation upon which, in the following chapter, I consider general 'ideas' that exist around the relationships that 'art' and 'money' ought to have. All my respondents at the bank emphasised to me that 'art' is an expensive sponsorship for the bank. Van Heerden explained: 'Yes it is a very valuable cultural event for the bank, but it is an expensive event. That is something that you have to realise, this is an expensive property for the bank. Art sponsorships are more expensive than other sponsorships'. I prompted her to comment on the presumably large amount paid to the Federation of International Football Associations for a sponsorship of the 2010 World Cup Soccer to be held in South Africa, to which she replied:

Ignore soccer, if you look at Classic Clashes, school and varsity rugby and that is around the country, all known universities, TV coverage, so free exposure is much bigger than you can get with an art fair and packed out stadiums. And both of those cost about R16 million. Compared to this which is R5 million.

During my interview process within the bank, four out of six bank employees made the comparison between the Joburg Art Fair and what they affectionately call the FNB 'school boy rugby' (Classic Clashes). The 'Classic Classhes' provides a good example to illustrate practically the difficulty art projects face when compared to sport regarding 'measurables'.

According to Francois Pienaar, ‘the sponsorship market in South Africa is about R6 billion which is divided almost 50/50, maybe 60/40 in rights fees and activation, and 65% of that would be the three main sports – rugby, cricket and soccer – of which soccer is now, for 2010, huge and has grown by 15%’. In comparison, ‘If you look at arts and those it would be around 20% it would be very, very low in that whole sponsorships strand’. ‘Classic Clashes’, a local rugby tournament, was the first project launched by Pienaar when Harris asked him to join the company. Pienaar’s team motivated for this particular project based on internal research on ‘banking behaviour’ of consumers. They found that when young people open up a bank account for the first time, they usually ‘migrate’ to the bank that their fathers bank with and that 90%, after opening a bank account, will never change banks again regardless of frustrations they might have or endless marketing campaigns that banks might throw at them during their lifetime. Accordingly, they chose to target the Classic Clashes at high school kids and university students. During the time of the games, FNB would ‘activate’ with a focused drive in the local town by involving local branch managers. By so doing they would ‘unlock’ the unique knowledge of the locality by running independent promotions in each town that would be tailored to its specificities. This fits into the second of FNB’s sponsorship measurables which is ‘relationship building’. The bank manager works with and invites headmasters, parents and community leaders to the events. This is a strategy that Pienaar believes to be directly in line with FNB’s brand slogan of ‘How can we help you?’.²³⁵

The many ways in which Classic Clashes manages to fulfil Pienaar’s measurables for the bank, in the opinion of most of my bank respondents, rendered this sponsorship project far more valuable to the bank than the Art Fair could ever hope to be. When it came to the renewing of sponsorship for the Art Fair for the third year, some decision makers within the bank explained to Douglas that, in fact, the Art Fair going audience was not

²³⁵ Classic Clashes consists of a competition between eighty-four schools in total of which half take place in Gauteng, and the rest in the Westerns and Eastern Cape. The games are broadcasted to a combined estimate of 250,000 spectators and they believe reach over 500,000 parents. All events are heavily branded as are all games televised. In contrast to their ‘presenting rights’ for the Art Fair, here FNB has naming rights: The FNB Classic Clashes. Some of the games in less advantaged regions fall under what Pienaar terms ‘outreach or giving back’ – the third and final of the sponsorship measurables: ‘In the Classic Clashes programme, we have schools of the Classic Clashes that do not have close to the profile of the Paarl, when you’re at Paarl and Boy’s High plays against Gammies it is 25,000 people. But we have got schools in the Eastern Cape that gets 3000 people and it is amazing and we showcase that too, because it is important that sport in that area grows and they are so, I mean they are so grateful for our support in those areas and we profile them and we put those games on television and all of that costs, but we do that because a. we want to, you know we want to be there, and b. we want to tell people what is actually happening in those communities. There are amazing things happening, and sometimes they will be oblivious to what is happening in a community. So outreach is a focus’.

that powerful in banking terms, as ‘they’ are a lot of ‘academics’ and ‘artists’, and, in fact, if one were to look at the Classic Clashes game between Michaelhouse and Hilton, (two private schools in KwaZulu-Natal) the audience comprised of 25,000 parents that are the top earners in the country.

This constant comparison with sport in terms of ‘measurables’ was one of the many challenges Douglas²³⁶ felt he faced in what he called the ‘sponsorship game’. He ascribed the popularity of sport as sponsorship avenue to what he described as a particularly South African trait of being ‘emotionally up and down’. This condition, in his view requires and thrives on ‘quick fixes’, and notions like ‘we are the champions’. Here his point is closely aligned with that of Britten (2005), that sport enables a sponsor, or in the case of Britten an advertiser, to mythologise the New South Africa. Douglas believes that the contemporary moment, especially, is marked by needing ‘that sort of camaraderie that sport can give’. He explained: ‘We win the rugby and we slap each other on the back, Castle brings out an advert of a black guy, white guy and a coloured guy drinking in a bar together and sport can give you that very instant sugar high that lifts your energy up’. ‘Art’ he continued, ‘is a much longer, much slower release of energy, that more mature economies and cities can start investing in, but if you want a quick bang for your buck there is nothing quite like sport and art isn’t able to match that’.

Throughout the fieldwork, there was thus the notion that ‘art’ should be grateful when it received sponsorship at all – as if ‘against all odds’. I also learnt in this regard that while sport might be able to tick all the appropriate and necessary boxes, when it came to deciding on one sponsorship above another, ‘measurables’ could be manipulated, should enough pressure from the top or elsewhere internally be applied to make it happen. This was true for all the sponsorships that Artlogic managed while in the field. For example, when Grolsch beer became interested in the Fair in its second year, it was because Grolsch internationally, in completely different markets to South Africa, had started to align its brand with contemporary art.

What seemed much less easily manipulable was the availability of budget - access to funds remained an insurmountable precondition. As I described earlier, in order to raise the funds for the first Art Fair, the sponsor had to think creatively; it wasn’t simply

²³⁶ Interview, 19 March 2008, Ross Douglas, Director Joburg Art Fair.

available – because, as many believe, banks have ‘lots of money’. This is a relatively little-known fact for those who don’t work for banks as I found in my conversation with local artist, Dorothee Kreutzfeldt²³⁷. She stated that if you run into ‘budget’ difficulties with your banking sponsor you say to them ‘you have to give us more money, because we know that you have more money’. It is difficult to know if this would work, banks after all are publicly listed and answerable to shareholders. In the case of the FirstRand business philosophy outlined above, budgets are dispersed to business units which have decision-making powers over how those are spent and have to submit these for planning purposes at the beginning of financial years. Beth Van Heerden had this to say about budgets when asked if they could be reevaluated mid-project: ‘No you can’t re-evaluate that. That is your guide, you plan once a year for money and there is no more thereafter, there simply is not more. If you do go over budget, it is seen as a negative. It is one of the things that you are measured on, particularly in a pressurised and tough climate. If we say to our clients you are in arrears you have to pay up, you have gone over budget, and our collection department is doing that now vigorously, and we don’t do that at the inside, it is sort of “skynheilig”²³⁸.’

Penelope Morris, who constructs budgets for sponsorship projects for Francois Pienaar to approve, stated that annual increase in sponsorship amounts are fixed to CPIX, or consumer price index, and is not related to whether or not the event is being perceived as having grown in ‘value’. I asked her what the main criteria for re-evaluation of a project would be around the time that Artlogic was hearing rumours that the Art Fair might not get renewed for a third year, to which she replied: ‘You know the bank would look at things like what was the profit this year, are we looking at retrenchments, if we are looking at retrenchments, the first place they should cut down are sponsorships, before they retrench’. I conducted this interview with Morris in March 2009, as it happened, on the day after the bank’s results were released for that year, and one month before the second Art Fair was due to take place. She was markedly nervous as she had not yet heard what the repercussions of what turned out to be shockingly bad results would be on her and her job.

²³⁷ Interview, 27 April 2008, Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, Independent artist and member of Joubert Park Project in Johannesburg.

²³⁸ ‘disingenuous’

Recession Repercussions

It was at this time that South Africa was first declared to be heading for a recession in the manner that America had around six months before. At around the same time I conducted my second interview with Beth van Heerden²³⁹. I asked her what the mood was towards the Art Fair in the corridors of FirstRand to which she simply replied, ‘the results are being released the next week and nothing else has been thought of’. She was referring to what many South Africans had come to see as very troubling financial times. Directly after the Art Fair, the South African Reserve Bank would start cutting interest rates to ease the pressure on consumers, but at that stage, it was the first sets of results that showed the impact the global recession was having locally. FirstRand’s performance over that particular quarter turned out substantially poorer than those of the other three major South African banks, some suggested as a result of the very same maverick style of management and decision making that made the FirstRand group ‘famous’ and desirable in the first place.²⁴⁰

One of the immediate effects the results had on the Joburg Art Fair was that all business divisions in FirstRand saw massive budget cuts.

There is no denying that the effects of the recession reverberated almost immediately in the local art market. Speaking to artist Sam Nhlengethwa²⁴¹ just before the second Joburg Art Fair, he expressed: ‘At the moment, the market is, compared to maybe a couple of months ago, or a year ago, I think it is a little bit weak, because everybody is too sensitive when it comes to the recession we are talking about, and as you know the arts suffers the most, because people think it is like, if you have to save money it is to avoid buying art’. Sales figures at the second Art Fair dropped by half, a fact the press was quick to pick up on. Gallerists expressed that one had to ‘sell hard’ and that many sales were ‘pushed through reserves’ meaning a buyer would place a reserve, be called up later and convinced to make the sale on the phone. Some galleries did not sell a single piece of art,

²³⁹ Interview, 6 March 2009, Beth Van Heerden, Firststrand Brand Executive.

²⁴⁰ FirstRand’s exposure to the global banking market seems to have greater than the other banks, while Nedbank was worst exposed to local bad debt in home loans. Rose explained in the *Financial Times* that ‘banks’ exposure to the international credit crises resulted from the high value mortgages the banks dished out in the last years of the credit frenzy. These can be identified as loans exceeding 100% of the value of the underlying security – the house’. It became clear during 2008, and especially after the bank results were released at the end of March 2009 that FirstRand was under tremendous pressure – evident in the 45% drop in its share price from R22.20 to R12.

²⁴¹ Interview, 24 March 2009, Sam Nhlengethwa, South African artist.

while others sold the same amount as the year before. Ross Douglas maintained throughout that the increase in audience numbers from 6500 to 10,000 illustrated a hunger for art, similarly expressed in the large amounts of art books sold at the second Art Fair – this he saw as an indication that people wanted to learn about art even if they did not have the money available at the moment to buy it. However, successes of art fairs are often judged by the sales achieved. The fact of the dampening in sales is one factor that impacts on sponsors resigning sponsorship contracts for the following year's event, as are, of course, their own internal dynamics and 'results'.

The information relayed in this and the previous chapter could not be gained without the long period of ethnographic research within, and in contact with, these organisations, and have been positioned here so as to add nuance to what sponsorship might mean for the arts. This latter section aimed to demonstrate the many other ways in which 'events' are at the mercy of external factors quite unrelated to the 'value' of their product. Chapter five looked at the influence on the project by key individuals. It further argued that the positioning of the bank, particularly in relation to the post-apartheid moment, and as brand, impacted on the event being considered in the first place. Both Chapters Four and Five have been aimed at providing background information on how a small arts company runs and what a relationship with a sponsor might be like. The following chapter looks at the ways sponsorship and sponsor-relations to art events are perceived within the local art community, most of whom might not have had any direct experience with the inner working of small businesses and their relation with large corporates.

PART 2

Chapter 6. Money Matters: The Joburg Art Fair's Finances

'Art should not cost so much to see' was a comment from the 2009 batch of surveys conducted at the Joburg Art Fair. This comment came from a respondent who gave his or her age as 'under 20' and was made in response to the open-ended question: 'what did you most like, or dislike, about the Art Fair?' Captured in this one sentence are some clearly formed ideas about the relationship that audiences ought to have with art: in this view, art has to be easily accessible and affordable. A discursive reading of reportage around the event suggested to me that such a view seemed to also have purchase with art publics and art commentators. Anthea Buys, a journalist, wrote in the *Mail and Guardian*: 'It is not uncommon to find contemporary South African artists and critics who are still suspicious of the infiltration of money into the local art scene. Perhaps this is why it has taken the initiative of the entrepreneur Ross Douglas, who lacks purist artistic commitments, to realize an event such as the Joburg Art Fair'.²⁴² Buys, like the young survey respondent, insinuates an opinion about the relationship between art and money; that there is something as distinctly definable as 'purist artistic commitments', which the Art Fair organisers lack, and which stand in opposition to 'the infiltration of money'. So too, Michael Smith, editor of the online South African art publication mentioned earlier, *Artthrob*, seems to be alluding to something either normative or intrinsic that is at stake: 'The question of whether art and money can coexist has long been put to bed; the gnarly hippies that ran the SA art world in the '80s and '90s seem to have faded from view, giving way to a slicker, better-smelling caste of gallerists, dealers and artists. The question, thus, becomes, can art and money co-exist productively, without art having to compromise its cultural edge?'²⁴³ He does not explain what 'the cultural edge' is that art possesses, neither does Buys elaborate on the qualities that define 'purist artistic commitments'. Yet both are suggesting that these things exist, are recognisable, and are brought into question by the Art Fair.

This chapter looks at some of what sits behind the 'tension' between art and finance which proliferates in the literature around art fairs (see Thornton, 2008). The South

²⁴² Anthea Buys. 'The Art of Selling Art March.' 7, 2008, *Mail and Guardian*.

²⁴³ Michael Smith. 'Big Money, Big Stakes: the Joburg Art Fair rolls into Town'. March 2008, *Artthrob*.

African version was no exception, yet here I argue that many of the reasons for this tension are specific to the local context. A reading of media material surrounding both the 2008 and 2009 events highlights this as an almost insurmountable issue in the public culture of local art criticism and the more popular, business press. The vast majority of articles covering the Fair from both 'popular' and 'arts-oriented' press give far more attention to the economics of the Fair, or the art/money relationship; in short to the structure or 'concept' of the event, than it does the art itself, nor is much consideration given to the presentation of the art by various galleries. In this section of the study I rely heavily on the voices of my respondents and those of journalists reporting on the Fair. The reason for doing so is essentially to demonstrate the degree to which the dynamic I spoke of earlier, where art is considered either a 'pure' thing or something that somehow has to be free of money, is at work within the local context.

In order to examine the financial aspects of the Fair, I aim to breathe life into what often presents itself as a one dimensional debate that negates the realities of art's entanglements with money.²⁴⁴ I do so by analysing comments made in interviews, as well as in press material. In an attempt to add depth to a well-rehearsed ideological discussion, I position the 'ideas' I came across in the interview process and their relation to larger debates, next to a detailed account of the 'actual' numbers for the Joburg Art Fair. By 'actual' numbers I mean what the event cost, what money came in and what the sales figures were. These numbers are discussed in the first part of the chapter as 'data' on the Joburg Art Fair that serves to illuminate an aspect of event production rarely accessible when opinions around sponsorship and sustainability of projects are discussed. Thereafter, I identify undercurrents that emerge in the ideological discussion around art and money. These undercurrents, drawing on long traditions of literature on the role of art in society, have specific local historical legacies. They reveal important connections between a global phenomenon and the particularly local set of circumstances into which the Art Fair casts itself at this moment. In this regard, there seems to me to be three key issues at stake: The first is a discussion around the patronage of art. The second is concerned with the very nature of the event, which is saturated with questions of ownership of art. The third is a general notion around access to art and exclusivity. All three of these undercurrents are politically weighty in the South African context and all

²⁴⁴ Ian Robertson makes the point that, in fact, there was never a time when art and money did not have a relationship in the West in his essay, *Art, Religion, History, Money* (2005: 37).

can be positioned to speak to sustainability of arts projects such as the Art Fair. These issues can further be clustered as those of privatisation, the role of the state in enabling opportunities for cultural 'expression' and what that 'culture' might be; notions of class and inequality inherent in forms of ownership of art; and access to art as embodying stratification in society. Each of these key issues is connected, in ways that overlap, to the three streams of revenue that the Art Fair depends on for sustainability: sponsorship, gallery rental and ticket revenue. Below I situate the data on these three streams as they relate to the first Joburg Art Fair, before moving on to an analysis of how these revenue streams are viewed.

The Budget Document

The Joburg Art Fair was budgeted to be a R7 million event. It cost R7.6 million and brought in R5.1 million of revenue. In the first year of its production, Artlogic, thus, accrued financial losses to the value of R2.5 million. Yet, compared to other arts events, this event was relatively 'cheap'. The Spier Contemporary Young Artist' Award in 2007, a competition for South African artists sponsored by the Spier wine estate, for example, I was told, cost around R10 million, while the 2007 Frieze Art Fair in London cost R35 million.²⁴⁵ The sponsorship amount for the Joburg Art Fair was R3 million.²⁴⁶ FNB then spent an additional R1.4 million to market the event and their association with it, plus a further amount on the opening night and various promotional functions. These amounts were agreed upon on the basis of a budget drawn up by Ross Douglas at the initial stages of the sponsorship negotiations. In this document, Douglas counted possible expenses against possible revenue and calculated that if this event was to break-even, FNB should put forward a sponsorship amount of R3 million. The expenses in the budget included entire company running costs, event costs, travel, and limited marketing. The cost estimates were made on the basis of speculation, since there had never been an equivalent event in this country, nor had Artlogic had much time to do thorough research on costs. How the budget was spent was at Artlogic's discretion, yet, the budget document was an appendix to the contract, and contractually, the accounts of the company could be audited should FNB felt this necessary.

²⁴⁵ See interview with Frieze directors Mathew Slotover and Amanda Sharp http://www.bmivoyager.com/2006/10/01/bus_fun_fair/

²⁴⁶ For the sake of brevity and clarity I outline here only the finances of the first Joburg Art Fair. Most of the amounts are rounded-off figures.

The sponsorship model followed that of sports or live performance events where the headline sponsor advances the bulk of the sponsorship money and additional 'sub' or secondary sponsors are allowed to 'buy in'. The size of logos of companies on marketing material were determined by the relative amounts of money contributed to the project. The revenue amount in the budget that Douglas gave to FNB included R500,000 from the government and an amount of secondary sponsorship to the value of R1.5 million. Neither of these two amounts had been secured at that stage and, one could argue, should not have been included in this projection. The revenue budget further included R900,000 from gallery booth rental, R800,000 from ticket sales, R250,000 from catalogue sales and R500,000 in partnership exchange deals, for example, an advert in the catalogue placed by an airline, in exchange for some complimentary flights. All these amounts together brought the 'guaranteed' revenue to R7.45 million.²⁴⁷

The final numbers differed substantially from those in the budget. Gallery rentals brought in R1.2 million, thus, far more than the budget estimate, but ticket sales only contributed R400,000, half of what was projected. No large amounts of government money nor any of R1.5 million projected secondary sponsorship income materialised. A small grant to the fair was made by Business and Arts South Africa of R15,000. This was used to market the event. In exchange for this money BASA received prominent branding on many Joburg Art Fair newsletters and invitations sent out for promotional events. Similarly, the French Institute contributed R25,000 towards advertising. Both of these amounts were secured through personal visits to these bodies, rather than through the formal procedure for 'event' or project funding. Artlogic further secured a R75,000

²⁴⁷ In order to create a comparison with other art sponsorship endeavours, I will briefly outline the 'economics' of another Artlogic event. Six months prior to the art fair, in September and October 2007, Artlogic produced *The Magic Flute* Opera directed by William Kentridge. The sponsorship, unlike the one for the art fair was offered to numerous sponsors, the highest bidder being Rand Merchant Bank for R2 million and an additional R2 million that they spent marketing the event. The actual event costs amounted to R12 million. In this case Douglas, never having done an opera before, asked Cape Town Opera to draw up a budget for the event. They came up with an amount of R3 million needed. Douglas, having seen the project in Naples thought this amount to be far too little and redrew a budget that came to R10 million. It was on the bases of that amount that the project would have broken even. It did, however, make a substantial loss, but the loss was that of the bank's in the form of an unsecured loan of R2 million. In this case the bank gave the company an additional R2 million with the condition attached that, only if the project breaks even, or makes profit, that this loan will have to be paid back.. The remainder of the costs was covered by ticket revenue. Based on this experience, Douglas felt strongly that he would not have been able to get more money from FNB than the R3 million he did manage to secure.

grant from the National Arts Council by applying through their application submission channels.²⁴⁸

One of the companies Artlogic approached for secondary sponsorship was Siemens. It transpired, though, that their company sponsorship policy did not allow for marketing budget to be spent on arts or culture, and that such grants could only be made from the Corporate Social Investment branch. The rules of this branch stipulated that money could not be paid to a for-profit company. A compromise was reached where Artlogic negotiated that the FUNDA arts centre in Soweto be allocated a booth at the Art Fair for which Siemens gave them a budget allocation, paid over to Artlogic. This amounted to R50,000. Siemens spent a further amount on framing and transport for the Fair for FUNDA and bursaries to FUNDA students. All the above, rounded off amounts, came to a total of just under R5 million.

After the FNB sponsorship contribution to the budget, the money from participating galleries was the second largest source of revenue for the project. Galleries rented booth space at R1000 per square metre in the first year and R1400 in the second. The total revenue from galleries, as I have mentioned, amounted to R1.2 million. According to Douglas, all galleries received a 10% discount in the first year, thus, paid only R900 per sq.m. He was of the opinion that this space rental was very affordable in comparison with South African trade events such as Design Indaba or Rooms on View, as well as international art fairs such as Frieze, where the booth rental was R2930 per square metre.²⁴⁹ Some points of controversy around the issue of booth rentals were that the commercial, New York based, African contemporary gallery, Jack Shainman, was invited free of charge; October Gallery from London, a commercial, yet not-for-profit gallery paid only 50%, as did the Ames d' Afrique gallery from Strasbourg. The Townhouse gallery from Cairo and the Apartment 22 gallery from Morocco, both not-for-profit galleries, were fully subsidised by Artlogic for space at the Fair. In the cases of some smaller local galleries such as Art Extra, which opened just prior to the first Art Fair and

²⁴⁸ Artlogic gained a contact at South African Tourism through its contracted PR-company, FD Beachhead who does the PR for SA Tourism. SA Tourism could not give any financial support or assist in bringing some high profile art and other journalists to the event of Artlogic's choice. They did however use their networks to bring journalists of *their* choice from England, Angola and India to cover the fair proceedings. This delegation was entertained to a cocktail of South African tourist activities including a visit to a game farm.

²⁴⁹ http://www.bmivoyager.com/2006/10/01/bus_fun_fair/

KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts Gallery, which is a not-for-profit, special arrangements were made to exchange booth rental fee for an art purchase credit from the gallery.

Gallery rental paid to Artlogic would 'buy' three walls, lighting, press coverage and inclusion in the fair catalogue. Galleries were also given a certain amount of entry passes and tickets for the opening night. After settling the bill for the booth space at the Fair, galleries would have to spend money on any extra walling they required, as well as extra lighting or booth furniture. These were to be ordered through Artlogic. Galleries would have to ship, store and install work at their own expense and staff their booths for the duration of the event. All revenue made by galleries at the Fair was, however, theirs to keep and there was no system of sales commission paid to the Fair owners. Conversations with the galleries during the first year's event suggested that all managed to cover the costs of participating through the three days of selling, and that all but one gallery made medium to substantial profits. The total sales in the first year amounted to between R25 million and R30 million – this remains an estimate as Douglas calculated these numbers simply through asking galleries what they thought they had sold on the last day of the Fair when most had not yet done accurate recons of the event. It is worth mentioning that the local, Johannesburg-based galleries were by far the most successful, while the international galleries did less well. Both the Townhouse Gallery from Cairo and Jack Shainman Gallery from New York commented on the fact that the visitors were surprised by the high prices of their work.

The Joburg Art Fair's third stream of revenue was ticket sales at the door. The budgeted amount estimated that 9000 visitors would attend, yet only 4000 paying visitors did, which brought this amount to R400,000. The visitor numbers quoted in the press as 6,500 included ticket give-aways and all guests to the opening night event. The ticket cost R100 for visitors in 2008 and 2009, and as discussed elsewhere, would be a prospective visitor's first barrier of entry to the event.

Costs against the company in the first year included R2,5 million of 'fixed assets', or materials that could be reused annually. These were the physical walling structure, the website infrastructure and the design of the Fair's corporate identity – there were costs which would not have to be repeated the following year to the same extent. All design work for the fair came to around R500,000 of which R204,000 was spent in London, and the remainder on a South African design team. The total cost for the built component of

the event, including lighting, ticketing system, extra staff, furniture and signage came to R2 million. The Sandton Convention Centre charged, for the period from Sunday to Thursday for set-up, the running of the event and the Monday for break down, a sum total of R550,000. The catalogue cost the company R500,000, of which R300,000 was recouped through sales and advertising. Staff and running costs for twelve months amounted to R1.75 million, thereafter the budget was split into local and international travel costs of R200,000, marketing costs of around R600,000, what was referred to as VIP costs (give-aways, transport, and special events) and the Art Party, which came to R400,000. Other miscellaneous expenses that are hard to track amounted to about R200,000. The reason why these elements are hard to get exact breakdowns for is that most of this portion of the budget was spent in the week leading up to and during the event. At this point Artlogic was working with a team of thirteen individuals, only three of whom had any production experience. Given the incredible truncation of the time period in which the event happened – three and a half days for setting up, three days of trading and one day to strike – finding all invoices and making connections is a task I leave to the auditors.

Apart from these ‘logistical’ costs, a major part of the budget was spent on the Curated Show by Simon Njami. These costs amounted to R1.1 million. Furthermore, FNB agreed only to pay for the catering at the opening night for their invited guests which were a total of 900 people. They negotiated with a local, highly regarded, catering company for elaborate cheese plates and wine, and settled on a R250 per head amount. Regardless of the fact that the opening night was seen as ‘belonging’ to the sponsor, Artlogic had to ensure that the right buyers and collectors, academics and media people attended the event at their own cost. Ordinarily, according to Joost Bosland from the Michael Stevenson gallery, at other art fairs the gallery would receive in the region of 200 tickets each, a strategy devised to use the gallery networks to bring the ‘right’ buyers. Artlogic, by this time running out of available funds, could only give each gallery between ten and thirty tickets to the opening night, depending on the gallery size. The galleries were given the option of purchasing more tickets at cost, yet only one gallery took this offer up and bought extra 100 tickets for their guests.

The R2.5 million losses from the first year’s Joburg Art Fair produced caution on the part of the sponsor and jeopardised the re-signing of the sponsorship contract. When

Artlogic approached them for a loan as a first measure to avoid bankruptcy, FNB suggested a straight commercial loan to the company, which would be assessed on commercial grounds. As I mentioned in Chapter Four this loan was virtually impossible to attain, yet in exchange for Douglas bonding his private property, the company was granted a R300,000 loan that had to be paid back within six months. This commitment from Artlogic put the minds of the sponsors at rest about possible bankruptcy. Artlogic was further granted a R250,000 credit facility, the interest on which was roughly 15% as was the interest on the R300 000 loan. Both these amounts were incredibly costly for the company to bear each month.

In the face of this, Artlogic had to come up with drastic measures to ensure not only the realisation of a second Art Fair, but their survival as a business. In the second Art Fair, the FNB sponsorship amount was increased by 10%, which was agreed upon before the signing of the initial, first contract. BMW 'came in' as a secondary sponsor, as did the Gauteng Provincial Government. The National Arts Council once again approved Artlogic's application and granted R60,000 towards the project. Artlogic furthermore introduced a third tier of 'supplier sponsors' with whom small 'deals' for small amounts of money were made. These included Grolsch Beer, PG Glass, PG Byron and Twice International (a furniture store). Through these relationships and various bartering exchanges, as well as an incredibly lean budget, R2 million of the loss was covered in the second year.

Such were the facts around numbers of producing the Joburg Art Fair. It should be clear from these numbers that sustainability of the event rests on a knife's edge. What this means is unless the market doubles in size and there is an increase in galleries that the Art Fair deems appropriate, or more international galleries want to come to the Joburg Art Fair, or if suddenly there is a massive turn away from sports sponsorships towards the arts, or if the government decides to fund the event in a substantial way, it is not a very profitable business²⁵⁰. Artlogic did, however, launch its own brand off the back of the Art Fair and managed to run the small company year on year with the money the project brought in. As I discussed in Chapter Four, the company never knows if a

²⁵⁰ The Department of Arts and Culture was a partner in the *Cape07* arts event towards which they contributed R4 million.

sponsor would still be interested in the event in the following year, or if external factors would lead them to pull out, making planning virtually impossible.

The notion of sustainability is closely connected to ideas about art and money and generates a fair amount of emotion in the public realm, sometimes definitional, sometimes ideological. Gallerist Warren Siebrits²⁵¹ was the most outspoken around his understanding of the finances of the Fair, as can be gleaned from the extract below:

I can't understand why people make such a big fuss of it being funded because you are paying so much money, our individual exhibitors, I actually think it is pathetic, I actually just think it is ridiculous. I really don't understand the sponsorship thing, some people must be getting wealthy somewhere along the track, but I can't understand why the galleries are paying top dollar prices and then it is being sponsored.

Within this exasperation is captured a misunderstanding of the business model of an art fair. Siebrits aired these views in our interview, but also put them into an article, which he posted on one of South Africa's online art websites.²⁵² In his view, the sponsorship money (which he did not know the amount of) should make a difference to *his* finances when getting involved in the fair. He made the point that he did not 'feel' sponsored, rather he felt that he was 'footing the bill'. The statement that 'someone must be getting wealthy' is unambiguous in its accusations towards the fair organisers of foul play, suggesting that sponsorship and gallery revenue together, not only make the event sustainable, but highly profitable. What is important here is the underlying suggestion that there might be something wrong with the accrual of profit through charging art galleries a high rental fee, and by extension 'getting rich out of art'. Journalist Mary Corrigan, in an article she wrote on the second art fair, similarly confuses the difference between sustainability and sponsorship:

That the Joburg Art Fair has proved not to be the economically viable model that Douglas proposed seems to have also gone unnoticed in the art press and mainstream media. If Artlogic's model is so sustainable why is it that their survival depends on FNB's sponsorship and why have the fair's takings diminished by half? Douglas proudly boasts that of the 10,000 visitors that visited the fair only '200 bought works'. This further suggests that the art fair is not fulfilling its primary function, which is to sell art and

²⁵¹ Interview, 25 March 2009, Warren Siebrits, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary, Johannesburg, co-owner and director.

²⁵² <http://www.artthrob.co.za/09apr/opinion.html>

attract new buyers. In this context wouldn't FNB's money be put to better use for an exhibition which contributes to art historical discourses, is more inclusive of artists who are not represented by galleries and audiences who are at a loss in a giant art supermarket?²⁵³

This extract exemplifies the many ways in which sustainability is an opaque aspect to those ignorant of the economics of the Art Fair. The most significant assumption Corrigan makes is that the sponsorship money somehow sits outside of 'sustainability', that sponsorship, in a similar way to how Siebrits understands it, is the stuff of 'profit'. She further assumes that sales equate directly to sustainability, yet sales of art works are only a secondary consideration as the fair organisers do not benefit in any direct financial way from those. She further assumes Artlogic has infinite agency over how FNB spends its money. Lastly, although unrelated to the notion of sustainability and more to do with projections onto the public, she assumes that the audience does not like the idea of a 'giant supermarket for art'. Sustainability of an art event, as this section of the thesis is dedicated to illustrate, is far more complex than merely counting on a sponsor. Being 'inside' the company that organises the event and experiencing what it 'feels' like to be accused of embezzling money or becoming 'very wealthy' when one knows that in fact it takes tremendous effort to merely stay in business might add a certain exasperation to the accounts of how money is viewed by the art community below.

Earlier I identified the three-pronged undercurrents to ideas around art and money to be those of patronage, ownership and access. I now turn to an analysis of these as they stand in relation to the three streams of revenue for the Art Fair – that of sponsorship, gallery rental and ticket revenue. It is worth noting from the outset that in the case of art fairs, these three undercurrents are symbiotic. Art fairs, like art competitions, offer vehicles for sponsorship and have become almost synonymous with sponsors. The Basel Art Fair in Switzerland is sponsored by UBS; Frieze Art Fair in London is sponsored by Deutsche Bank; and TEFAF in Maastricht is sponsored by AXA Art, an insurance company. Art fairs globally are not, in the first instance, about inclusion either, as the case of the Maastricht Art Fair having to raise the price of admission from 25 Euro to 55 Euro 'to draw serious buyers and deter window shoppers' demonstrates.²⁵⁴ It is also clear from what I described in the previous chapter in connection to First National Bank, that the bank is drawn to the client entertainment opportunities offered by the fair, as well as

²⁵³ http://www.arttimes.co.za/news_read.php?news_id=896

²⁵⁴ Harris, G. 1 March, 2008 *Financial Times*.

the idea that money flows through the event. As gallerist David Brodie²⁵⁵ put it in our interview: ‘if you guys had gone to FNB with the same proposal and it wasn’t a commercial venture, I simply do not believe they would have sponsored that’. Brodie is of the opinion that the bank has no interest in simply showcasing art, rather, what they are after, is the consumability of it.

Arts Sponsorship

In the previous chapter I mentioned that one of the most important reasons for a company to undertake a sponsorship is to improve its image in the eyes of the public, or a specific segment of the public. This is necessary precisely because of the negative connotations that many left-leaning citizens attach to the accrual of wealth exemplified by corporates (See Savage and Williams, 2008). This position was demonstrated by one of the writers in the daily newspaper that was produced at the Joburg Art Fair:

We live in a culture strangled by the power of toadying corporate freaks. They are funders, and they put their company stamp on everything they touch, till it reeks of office park cheese. They absolutely cannot see beyond the crap ‘team-building’ that tries to force the entire nation into the kind of sport-jock mindset that makes stupid square-chinned boys into school prefects and ultimately leaders of men. They have striped shirts and blow-waved rugs and everything they ever say is a sporting platitude. ‘Playing ball, leveling the fields, shifting the goal posts, S.A.B.’.²⁵⁶

The journalist alludes to the absolute pervasiveness of the corporatising of culture and its tendency to homogenise in the pursuit of creating consumers for their products. Her strong sentiments remind one of Theodor Adorno’s warnings in *The Culture Industry*: ‘...what appears as particularity and individuality is not so, and what might emerge as a point of resistance to the all embracing unity of the system is immediately integrated and repressed’ (1991: 9). For Adorno the culture industry, exemplified at that point by films and especially the sound film (107), was intent on making docile citizens by feeding them false promises of ‘universal happiness’, thereby obliterating any chance of actual happiness and ‘freedom’. He saw fundamental changes being brought about by ‘culture’ becoming the *products* of a *culture industry*. Adorno’s view, while in many ways being very specific to his time and context, is still widely held by segments of the art community.

²⁵⁵ Interview, 28 April 2008, David Brodie, Director Brodie Stevenson Gallery.

²⁵⁶ Lizza Littlewort. ‘How to Steal a painting, and other great stuff about the fair.’ March 13, 2008, *Artheat*.

Demonstrating that such sentiment towards the arts are frequently global, as much as local, Peter Pelzer²⁵⁷ (2006) states: 'For me art and management are not equal partners mutually influencing each other for the best of both worlds, but bad bedfellows... the danger is clear, that the emancipatory potential of art might get lost on the way into top management's shining offices. Where is the critical potential of art left when it prostitutes itself?' (66). Pelzer situates this debate in direct relation to the use of artworks by managers of companies, and sponsorship of the arts in particular, and sees the use of art for marketing purposes through the lens of Naomi Klein's (2000) *No Logo*. Klein's influential work was intent on laying bare the degree to which brands have insidiously occupied public and private spaces in pursuit of profits while masking a complete disregard for humanitarian causes. Pelzer understands art sponsorship as responding to a possible 'negative feedback loop' that might result from too much in-your-face brand advertising, seeking rather a form of 'seamless integration' of the marketing of products into the daily lives, or lifestyles, of individuals and groups. He believes this was exactly the motivation for corporates to fund the arts, and that this, in turn, makes the public believe that corporate sponsorship is inevitable and indispensable: 'We became collectively convinced not that corporates are hitching a ride on our cultural and communal activities, but that creativity and congregation would be impossible without their generosity' (62).

In considering the function of art in society it is useful to turn to Walter Benjamin's (2003) *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* for a moment. Benjamin crafts his argument by tracing the 'reproducibility' of artworks from being essentially 'authentic' to a certain point in 1900 when any work of art could be reproduced. Through this process, each time a new technological advancement was made, art's function in society changed. For a very long time, and in some instances still, however, art has remained 'ritualistic': 'in other words the unique value of the authentic work of art has its basis in ritual, the source of its original use value' (256). Photography, he explains is the first truly 'revolutionary' technological advancement to come along to challenge this ritualistic nature. It has to do with the move from art as having a cult value, the consecrated one-off, confined to one space, to it's having 'exhibition' value, meaning, not only could it easily move around, but could be multiplied with no reference to the 'original'. Some

²⁵⁷Pelzer, P. *Art for Management's Sake: A Doubt*. In *Culture and Organisation*, March 2006, Vol 12(1), 65–77.

proponents of the art world at the time saw this change in art's function as a crisis, and responded with a 'doctrine' of art: 'art for art's sake'. Benjamin calls this a theology of art, which 'in turn gave rise to a negative theology', in the form of an idea of 'pure' art, which 'rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational context' (256).

Sobering in this account of art as having fluid and changing functions in society, is the manner in which it debunks any fixed idea of 'pure' art: Benjamin sees art as something that seeks relevance and currency in the contemporary moment in which it finds itself. He positions the notion that this kind of art (film, in his case) is no longer 'pure' as 'Clearly, this is in essence the ancient lament that the masses seek distraction, whereas art demands concentration from spectators' (268). This concept is often at the heart of many objections to the art fair, yet interpreted with far less nuance and attention to context than Benjamin allows for. Although, writing for the *Sowetan*, Patience Bammalele seems to enjoy this very aspect of the fair: 'Art enthusiasts will agree that art fairs are undeniably the most interesting shopping venues left in the country'.²⁵⁸ Drawing on Benjamin, one could frame an argument in which the art fair caters to a particular familiarity with supermarkets and consumption (as was discussed in Chapter Two), many might, however, argue that it is a too generous reading of the violence done to the art object by putting it in service of 'marketing' or 'management'.

Through a demonstration of Volkswagen's use of brand association with art, Pelzer explains how the phenomenon of art 'in service of management' might be working against exactly what Benjamin is trying to explain contemporary art seeks to do, which is to move with the times. For Pelzer, once art has been usurped by brands, only its simulacrum remains, so as to replace the original. Art, thus, plays into romantic and nostalgic versions of itself as 'pure' and 'authentic'. Pelzer goes as far as condemning even the buying of art by corporates as 'an attempt at filling money with meaning'. There are plenty of examples (See Savage and Williams, 2008) of elites using art as such 'meaning creating devices', like networking opportunities and to announce a certain status. Locally, Dick Enthoven, patriarch of the Enthoven empire that owns Hollard Insurance, Nando's and the Spier Wine Estate, was the patron of the *Seasons South Africa* in New York during the ten years of democracy celebrations in 2004. He told Ross

²⁵⁸Patience Bammalele. 'Joburg Art Fair was a big success'. April 8, 2009, *Sowetan*.

Douglas he uses art as a 'calling card' to open doors in business. Following a similar line of thought, government representative Andries Oberholzer²⁵⁹ describes his views on this kind of marriage of art and management in the following way: 'The way I see it their sponsorship of the arts has given them prestige. It has made them more accessible to people like the Oppenheims,²⁶⁰ you know, and it gives them something to talk about when they are in these people's houses and when they are at these functions'. Oberholzer is alluding to the power art has to augment one's status in a way that pays very little attention to the integrity of the art object itself. Much of my own research found this to be far too caricatured an opinion of the relation between 'elites' and art, or corporate art buying and artworks. I discussed this in Chapter Two and return to it in Chapter Eight where I describe some motivations for buying artworks based on interviews I conducted with art collectors.

David Throsby (2001), in his *Economics and Culture* makes a similar point to both Oberholzer and Pelzer when he notes: 'While altruism or a sense of social or cultural obligation might provide the motivational force for the generosity of such people (donors, sponsors, patrons), it is their own utility which is increased as a result, and this has real value in economic terms' (36). Throsby does not extend his argument to include the effects this has on art objects, yet Pelzer feels strongly that it could only lead to a diminished experience and potential for art in society. Throsby's study tries to calculate, through general economic models, 'value' of art projects, sponsorships and buildings such as museums and heritage spaces, and sheds light on international trends in sponsorship that bear upon this study. He analyses the role of culture in policy-making and makes the point that economics has become almost synonymous with policy in modern states. Economics, therefore, play a much larger role than culture in government decision-making. For culture to be taken seriously in national policy creation, evidence of real and direct economic benefits, calculated to the 'bottom line' has to be produced. According to his understanding, there has been a major global shift from public sector to private-sector funding, due to, among other things, 'reductions in government budgets', and '... increasing recognition by the corporate world of commercial opportunities in the cultural sector' (146). This, he states, reflects both an economic and governmental shift 'towards deregulation, privatization, *destatisation* and market liberalism which have

²⁵⁹ Interview, 7 March 2008, Andries Oberholzer, Directorate Multimedia: Visual Arts, Department of Arts and Culture.

²⁶⁰ A wealthy South African family.

occurred across the board during the 1980's and 1990's in liberal democratic countries' (146). Former curator of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Clive Kellner²⁶¹, explained in our discussion that in South Africa '[w]e do not have a large historical tradition of culture and investment in arts. We do not have enough of educated philanthropy in South Africa. People will give to a cause when someone gets shot or kicked or disappears or there's a Red Nose day. It's a phenomenon that's of the moment, it's emotional. I can give my 20 or 50 bucks, but to invest in culture is philanthropy, that's something we have to develop'. It seems then that not only did the Art Fair follow a clearly defined global trend in the funding of arts by having approached a corporate sponsor rather than the government but that it would have had little luck had it first tried to find a generous local patron.

Against this trend, the voices, drawn largely from artists, gallerists, art buyers that make up the majority of the fieldwork for this project express a loud disdain for corporate art sponsorships, with some suggesting that government funding might have been preferable. Colin Richards²⁶² mused with a welcome dose of reflexivity that, generally, when the government is the main funding partner, 'sources (of funds) are more accountable', because, 'there is a public mandate and a sense of accountability that this is tax payers money to some degree, and somehow there is a sense of actually this is my money too'. He adds, however, '(y)ou at least delude yourself that it is democratic' – a delusion, I might add, that the South African press shatters on a daily basis as it reveals vast pools of corruption within government departments. In our interview, Richards, himself an academic, curator and artist, managed to imbue a generally negative attitude towards art and money with a remarkable amount of insight and subtlety. I will further discuss his argument after considering the government's involvement in the two Joburg Art Fairs.

Andries Oberholzer,²⁶³ quoted earlier, at the time of the research held the position of Directorate for Multimedia in Visual Arts for the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and was the government representative that agreed to discuss with me the funding of the arts by the department that employs him. His experience with

²⁶¹ Interview, 5 March 2008, Clive Kellner, Chief Curator at Johannesburg Art Gallery.

²⁶² Interview, 15 August 2008, Colin Richards, Practicing South African artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

²⁶³ Interview, Andries Oberholzer, 7 March 2008, Directorate Multimedia: Visual Arts, Department of Arts and Culture.

sponsorship within government and partnerships with corporates has enabled him to craft a succinct theory of what the practical difficulties might be with corporate sponsorships of the arts. Some of what he refers to in the extract below echoes experiences from the fieldwork for this study described in previous chapters:

My problem with corporate sponsorships and corporate collections is that in many instances it's very, very prescriptive ... Your sponsorship from FNB, I am sure that they sat around a table and discussed this very thoroughly as to what could FNB get out of this, and they don't only see this as a social responsibility issue. It's marketing. They use it as a marketing tool, they use it as a tool not only to market but also to market people for further investment in their institution.

Oberholzer is one of the individuals that make decisions about how the South African government's Department of Arts and Culture spends the money allocated to it in the national budget. Oberholzer has been in a government position since 1994. During this period, he states, the DAC, which is a national body, has become 'a lot more clear about what (they) get involved with. We know what to get involved with and what not to get involved with. We know when we are overstepping on provincial responsibilities'. According to Oberholzer, the DAC only 'gets involved with' national projects. Asked what a national project is, he explained that it would simply imply that the project involves all nine provinces of South Africa. What this would mean for the Art Fair specifically is that it would have to have galleries from every single province represented at the Fair. At the first and the second Fairs, only three provinces were 'represented' in this way. The national is, thus, defined geographically and not in terms of, for example, projects that exemplify national culture or national imperatives. Furthermore, much of the money allocated to the Department of Arts and Culture is stipulated as destined for 'poverty alleviation',²⁶⁴ which suggests that art, or far more often craft, is seen as an instrument for changing the economic circumstances of certain South African citizens, rather than, perhaps, giving them something to think about.

Artlogic approached the Department of Arts and Culture about their event in June 2007. A special presentation was made to then Director General, Thale Motsepe, and Andries Oberholzer. At this meeting Motsepe and Oberholzer made it clear that there were a number of reasons why the Department of Arts and Culture could not give financial

²⁶⁴ This was according to Steven Sack, Director of Culture and Heritage for the City of Johannesburg.

assistance, other than nominal amounts through application to the National Arts Council, to the Joburg Art Fair. These reasons were listed as: DAC is a national body and it is up to the provincial departments to give financial support; Johannesburg already receives a disproportionate amount of financial, cultural and other governmental support; and the fact that this is an exclusively commercial event, and so, is counter to one of their main foci which is development of previously disadvantaged centres, primarily those that are not-for-profit.

Some of the money that is allocated to the DAC is spent on acquisitions, or buying art. This available budget could have been of secondary benefit to the Fair through the increase of sales for the galleries, yet, Oberholzer explained that for the moment they spend the vast majority of their funds on repatriating art that had left the country during the apartheid years. Their mandate was, thus, to focus on mainly 'modernist' work, the effect of which is that amounts available for contemporary art are negligible. Oberholzer believed that the buying of contemporary work should be the responsibility of the corporate art collections. Corporate art buying is very often linked to corporate art sponsorships: the art produced for the sponsored event ends up in the corporate collection of the sponsor. In this manner the corporate sector has been very important to the South African art market. The South African arts sponsorship landscape as it stands might be said to revolve around a few key corporate sponsorship initiatives. I have identified these as: The MTN Artists Award, the Standard Bank Young Artist's Award, The Sasol Wax Art Competition, the Sasol New Signatures and the ABSA Atelier Awards. The Spier Contemporary Art Award, in 2008, has been added to that list, but unlike the other events, have had only one incarnation. Into this landscape the event of the Brett Kebble Arts Awards in 2005 injected massive energy, enthusiasm and press. The main reason for this was the prize money that was up for grabs – R200,000 for the winner. These events could build an artist's career, yet are incredibly transient. Olaf Bisschoff²⁶⁵, a young South African artist that we met in Chapter 1 as a painter of oil landscapes, have entered for awards several times and won prizes on more than one occasion before he was, accidentally, spotted by gallerist Gavin Rooke. Bisschoff explained to me how the winning of a prize could create much hype, but then you 'go home and next year you just win the same prize again'. Of these prizes only that by the Standard Bank is not attached to an art foundation, which denotes corporate social

²⁶⁵ Interview, 18 September 2008, Olaf Bisschoff, Practicing South African artist.

responsibility and 'patronage'. Standard Bank, according to Mandy van der Spuy²⁶⁶, who is in charge of this bank's art sponsorship, has in recent years started seeing their arts involvements increasingly as part of marketing, and her budget is allocated from that of the marketing department of the bank.

An interesting twist in the apparently clear-cut, hands-off, relationship between the government and 'commercial' projects appeared in the second year of the Fair through the involvement of the Gauteng Provincial Government, and their 'Creative Gauteng' division. The Art Fair's contact at this division was Annabell Lebethe,²⁶⁷ Director of Creative Industries, a woman in her early thirties, who had insightful views into the arts generally and the way her directorate viewed the arts in Gauteng. She explained that the directorate was formed in response to 'a new thinking around the arts and a new thinking around the creative economy', some of which departs from the government's strict mandate within the arts to support 'development focused projects', yet slots in with ideas outlined in Asgisa²⁶⁸ around the Creative Industries. According to Lebethe it is the government's responsibility to create places for citizens to 'go out' and 'have a lifestyle'. She agreed that development at lower levels is important, but of equal priority is the creation of viable living spaces and career opportunities. She phrased it thus: 'if government only focuses on the development ... Where do people go? You know, where do people aspire to be? Because at the end of the day, you *want* people to be employed; you *want* people to have disposable incomes, you *want* people to choose what work they do and what work they don't do and it is not driven by a social need'. Lebethe is of the opinion that the 'creative economy' could be positioned so as to answer to different kinds of needs that people have that has to do with having fuller, more exciting lives, and which ultimately would have real 'economic spin-offs in the value-chain'. The Art Fair, in the eyes of Lebethe fulfils the role of creating a platform that, for example, trainee curators from development projects could aspire to, thereby creating a 'continuous flow of intellectual property into the economy'. This, she insisted 'is what

²⁶⁶ Interview, 4 April 2008, Mandy Van Der Spuy, Standard Bank Art Sponsorship Manager.

²⁶⁷ Interview, 19 March 2009, Annabell Lebethe. Director: Creative Industries, Gauteng Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation.

²⁶⁸ Asgisa (Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa) replaced GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution) policy under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki as a strategy to stimulate economic growth. Duncan Innes positions this new strategy as: 'a significant departure from the government's previous GEAR strategy. Where GEAR emphasized the government's desire to curtail public expenditure, Asgisa seeks to expand government expenditure as part of a strategy to enable the South African economy to achieve and sustain the target growth rate of 6% per annum and to substantially reduce unemployment by 2014' (2007: 67).

will run the economy; social development does not run the economy'. These views echo some of what I explored under FNB's Homecoming Revolution project in the previous chapter.

Throughout our conversation, Lebethe quoted from the 'Cool Britannica' campaign in Britain that placed acute focus on the development of the creative industries and knowledge economies as the new growth points for contemporary economic development. Much of the rhetoric used above has been informed by these kinds of adjustments in the views that international governments have been taking on the arts and the creative industries. These strategies have been very effective in some respects globally, but have not come without their challenges (See McRobbie, 2002). The main challenge in South Africa to this kind of thinking is seeing it implemented for long enough by the government of the day to have an impact. Lebethe was clear that with shifts in government departments and changes brought by the April 2009 elections, it would be hard to predict what the future of this directorate might be and expressed at the same time, a kind of exasperation akin to that voiced incessantly by Ross Douglas around a constant need to 'lobby' for the arts. She became passionate as she explained to me:

Look, I must admit that it sometimes feels a bit draining, I am at the point where I am like enough already, can't people just get it? Enough already. Initially, when the cultural industries growth strategy was done in 1998 by Department of Arts and Culture, that kind of set in place what the sectors can do, take it seriously, don't underestimate the value of the creative sectors.

Then airing a point that often comes up when South Africans attempt to create arguments for better and more consistent funding for the arts, she continued:

look if you are battling housing and you are having to compete with health in a South African context, it does become a bit ... challenging for the creative sectors to be put on that priority platform, but I think over the years there has been a lot of understanding from a political level ... you know, we continuously have to be making those arguments to convince the policy makers, to convince treasury, to convince, you know the Premier, that this sector is really where you are going to get the most mileage. With the housing projects, people are going to be employed for the duration of the projects and that is it, where are they going to go afterwards?

I asked Lebethe, just prior to the second Joburg Art Fair, and, thus, prior to the South African national elections in April 2009, if she envisioned the directorate staying in place for the foreseeable future. Below is her hesitant reply:

It is difficult to say Cobi, I will be very honest, because we are not sure who the new incumbent will be, or if this MEC will stay, it will be good if she stays, because she already has this history, she is very familiar with the work that we are trying to do.

Just after the second Joburg Art Fair, the minister that Lebethe was referring to was transferred to 'education' and Lebethe herself was given the opportunity to become the CEO of the National Arts Council, leaving Artlogic in the hands of a new team at the Gauteng Provincial Government. The relations between government and the arts signal some of what I have termed historical legacies of the role and perception of arts in the social realm.

Colin Richards, I mentioned earlier, managed most succinctly to illustrate to me a progression within his own understanding of arts funding in the hour-long interview I conducted with him. He explained that a first reaction for someone like him, 'those of us who come from the '80s' would always be suspicion of corporates; a 'don't trust' policy. His views emerge from a self-claimed Marxism, informed by structuralism and dictate that questions be asked about where the money behind the art comes from, if not from government, and how that might compromise the art. Richards feels that often the corporate involvement comes with 'too marked a territory' which art should be vigilant about and engage with, rather than accept unquestioningly. Speaking about the Brett Kebble Art Competition he states:

I didn't feel there was a critical space that I could make that could service my sense of criticality; I might change that, because, in fact, if I look at Anton Rupert and I look at all the other things that I was peripherally involved with, they raise similar kinds of questions, like this guy is a crook. But I think that capitalism is crooked, so what? So he is just a bigger more conspicuous kind of crook. But Brett Kebble just seemed like a private enterprise, and also I really did not like his politics.

Artist Clive van den Berg,²⁶⁹ however, who worked on the Brett Kebble Arts Awards as chief curator, counters more cynically:

Yes I think the Kebble Award did a huge amount to make corporate South Africa think, well he is a nasty old swine especially retrospectively, there is a lot of retrospective judgment after his death, probably all warranted. He nevertheless provided an example of a relationship between corporate patronage and individual patronage from rich people or a rich person. Yes, there was a very real passion. Yes there might have been laundering as well, but what corporate doesn't? It is not as if we live in a country where there is a history of clean money.

Richards singles out Kebble as an art patron with objectionable politics. In this specific case that of 'laundering' his money, which he allegedly and according to his biographer, Barry Sergeant (2006), obtained through corruption and illicit trade, by sponsoring the arts. Sergeant explains how Kebble funded his entire business and lifestyle by creating fraudulent companies where the real capital was impossible to trace. He also became renowned for 'sponsoring' the lifestyles of members of the ANC Youth League in order that he may curry favour with the government. This was a strategy constructed so as to stay free from being investigated for tax evasion and in order that he might 'win' concessions from the government. Richards, relates this behaviour to that of Anton Rupert, who he says might be a 'crook', but a lesser 'crook' than Kebble. Rupert (whom we met in Chapter Five) was a very wealthy and successful businessman who did much to sponsor arts and culture. Rupert made his money selling cigarettes and alcohol on the international market, but went through great pains to make clear that he never got involved with the insidious politics of Afrikaner nationalism. So unless one has political objections about the enterprise of creating wealth out of harmful and addictive substances, Rupert was just a very wealthy man who conducted lucrative business under the radar of international sanctions against South Africa. Where Richards might be suspicious of large amounts of money generally and their influence on art in particular, Van den Berg is far more pragmatic. He seems to agree that corporates cannot be trusted, throwing a blanket over the entire sector as 'money launderers', yet this does not in the least deter him from taking employment from them if he feels the project could have positive effects in its own right.

²⁶⁹Interview, 11 August 2008, Clive van den Berg, Practicing South African artist, and director of 'Trace'.

Bringing the discussion back in line with the intention of this chapter, to look at tensions between art and money, Richards pointed at just what makes this relation and one's own actions towards it so complicated in the contemporary moment. Richards is someone who takes his role as cultural critic seriously and in our discussion, he probed at his own across-the-board misgivings and insisted 'a question that we all have to grapple with, "(is) do we interact with them or don't we?"' He described this standpoint in relation to his experience as curator at the first Johannesburg Biennale discussed earlier in this study: 'In fact, the first biennale changed my mind about that, in a big way. I was a curator, and that one made me think, and that was '95 and we were just coming out of the first election, I didn't know if that would work, if this was just a massive deception, you know, all of those things.' He expressed the dilemma of 'don't trust' at an individual, and perhaps generational, level in a way that speaks of a struggle for a certain kind of a society, as well as a certain pragmatism towards the society *as it is*:

And I had a decision to make and I remember thinking, well, you can't not engage because it seems to me you can still engage sceptically, but you should not refuse to engage and refuse to speak about these things. Because in a sense you ghettoise yourself. And you ghettoise the sceptical part. And ultimately the thing was, actually this is a time of not boycotting, but engaging and that is my view. And it even extends to things like the Art Fair, and events that I would normally have a very gut response to, and just feeling I don't want to be here.

The decision to involve oneself after doing some research on the backing funder, for Richards, is a deeply personal one that sometimes, as in the case of the Joburg Art Fair, goes against a 'gut' response, yet should be seen in light of what it contributes to public intellectual life at a particular moment, in a particular society.

The point here is that Richards positioned himself in our conversation as a Marxist and explained that his theoretical views had been shaped by growing up in apartheid South Africa, and living through the transformation period. Yet, he has come to understand that one can contribute positively to a project even when large corporate money is involved and that not getting involved, or proclaiming the whole thing to be 'compromised' might be a counterproductive position for an intellectual and cultural worker to occupy.

Some of Richards', and other's suspicion towards capital generally and with regards to the arts, has to do with the fact that, until recently, art's role in South Africa was to demonstrate solidarity with an urgent liberation movement. Art, within these circumstances, and informed by this point of view, plays a role of 'emancipation' much like that expressed by Pelzer earlier, yet one that is political in the first instance. Art is, thus, not there for personal enjoyment, but fulfils a political function. The use of art for marketing purposes, while not a new phenomenon, manifests a radical move towards a privatisation of culture and cultural expression, generally at odds with political messaging. Journalist and editor of the *Art South Africa* magazine, Sean O'Toole,²⁷⁰ wonderfully captured what is a violent transition for many, as 'art in the service of the struggle, not in the service of your lounge'. The tension generated between art with a political objective and art that is about furnishing plush offices and enhancing brand image might well be more severe in this local context, then, than what Pelzer describes as simply robbing 'art' of its 'emancipating potential'. This, I believe not only informs views on sponsorship of the arts, but in a similar manner, views on the very notion of a market for art galleries in general. I would argue that the second undercurrent of discontent towards the Art Fair's foregrounding of money, that of ownership, is firmly imbedded in a local art historical trajectory in which not much art has ever been for sale, nor did artists, until fairly recently, see themselves as producing consumable goods.

Art Galleries: Selling and Owning Art

Many of the older respondents to this study remembered a lively art market that flourished in the South Africa in the '60s and could name many galleries that have come and gone. I would, thus, not want to suggest that there has never been a market for art in this country. Rather, what I am inferring is that due to the political circumstance of the '80s, sanctions against the country, and due to global interests in South African art only picking up in the '90s, the actual market for contemporary art in this country through the gallery system has been tiny. Many of my respondents made the point that the art market, and the very notion of being able to actually sell something, is a very recent phenomenon in South Africa. Penny Siopis,²⁷¹ a mid-career artist, explained that when she started making work 'there was no sense of art as a profession, absolutely none. I mean

²⁷⁰ Sean O' Toole, 'Will Joburg Pull it Off?' March 2008, *Business Day Arts Supplement*.

²⁷¹ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African Artist and Professor at the Wits School of Arts.

you made work, ... you didn't sell lots of your work. There was the sense that artists had other jobs very much more so than now'. This, in her experience, brought about a non-competitive aspect to the landscape at odds with the classic definition of a 'market' that the Fair foregrounds. Apart from there simply not being much of a market, though, was also the fact of the work being of a particular nature. Certain spaces, she explained were 'politically positioned within struggle politics ... in a way that the period was a kind of solidarity kind of period ... artists' work was seen as critiquing apartheid'. What this suggests is the production of a very particular kind of art object, not to say that this kind of art object could not be bought or sold, which they were on occasion, but that the focus was placed elsewhere.

Sean O'Toole, I mentioned earlier is a freelance journalist, arts writer and editor of the *Art South Africa* magazine, and so a powerful voice within the South African arts sector. He is also an art buyer, albeit, in his own words, a modest one. In our interview, he explained to me that what struck him about the support or lack thereof for the Joburg Art Fair amongst the art community was an ambivalence towards what engaging in an art fair implies. He found that many of his 'community' saw the work of buying and selling of art objects as that of 'others' thereby further illustrating a non-engagement in the market from particular sectors of the art world. While this is fairly widespread and global in as far as many curators, writers and artists find the 'market' for art distasteful, it portrays a lack of understanding of what it really takes to make an event such as this sustainable. O' Toole described a particular encounter with some of his art world colleagues:

One thing that surprised me (at the Joburg Art Fair), on the last day, I bought two works, because I went with a hypothetical budget, you know for myself, I have a very modest collection, so tried to step out of the journalistic shoes and just enjoy the moment, and I bought two pieces, what I found quite surprising was (the following incident). (I ran into) the Director for Arts Culture and Heritage City of Johannesburg), and the (at the time) head curator of the one of the largest art museums in the country, and they said 'what have you bought', they, like, expressed amazement that I had bought art. So I said, well isn't that what the Fair is about? I only spent like R5000. I bought an Avant Car Guard print and a Zander Blom print and they were saying 'no, stuff here is too expensive'. I was like, I know what your salaries are because a few years ago I put their job posting up when they were advertised, so I knew, I was like you are being disingenuous we might all want to buy the Kentridge tapestry or

whatever, but surely you buy within your budget, maybe I am just being snippy, but I think there was an element of that.

It is conceivable that the two men O'Toole referred to, one heading up a public museum and the other in charge of spending government's money on cultural heritage and cultural events in the city of Johannesburg, conform, consciously or not, to a school of thought that sees art as in the service, and, hence, in the 'ownership', of the public. The notion of private 'ownership' of art is, of course, one of the fundamentals of an art fair. In this sense it pivots around one of the more controversial and unique qualities of the art object – that of the relationship between private ownership and 'public good'. The difficulty with this relationship was never brought so forcefully into the public imagination as when Japanese businessman, Ryoei Saito, declared that he wished to be cremated with his newly acquired portrait of Dr. Gachet by Vincent van Gogh. This is a strange story with many twists,²⁷² but the fact of the outcry by the public to this suggestion is of interest here. The public saw the Van Gogh painting as part of a cultural heritage of the human race, while Saito, having just paid US\$82.5 million for it, thought *he* owned it and could do with it what he wanted. It is possible that these two relationships to art are quite different and might even be mutually exclusive.

Much of the suspicion around the notion of art ownership is a product of what I earlier defined as a caricatured understanding of why people buy art, but also has to do with a notion that an artwork essentially belongs to all. The disdain for private ownership of art might further have much to do with the kind of sentiment Bourdieu (1998: 208) expresses in the following extract: 'The whole relation to the work of art is changed when the painting, the statue, the Chinese vase or the piece of antique furniture belongs to the world of objects available for appropriation, thus, taking its place in the series of

²⁷² Vincent van Gogh's Portrait of Dr. Gachet became famous on May 15, 1990, when Japanese businessman, Ryoei Saito, paid US\$82.5 million for it at auction in Christie's New York, making it the most expensive painting in the world up to that time. Saito, the honorary chairman of Daishowa Paper Manufacturing Co. and then 75 years old, caused a scandal when he said he would have the Van Gogh painting cremated with him after his death. He later said, 'What I really wanted to [express] was my wish to preserve the paintings forever.' Saito, his aides explained, was using a figure of speech, and his threatening to torch the masterpiece was just an expression of intense affection for it (http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Ryoei_Saito). The painting's disappearance during World War II leaves unsettled a fight over who owns it. The painting had been confiscated by the Nazis and allegedly sold by Nazi air force chief, Hermann Goering, to Franz Koenigs, an Amsterdam art collector, who was murdered in 1941. In the early 1940s, Koenigs had sent it to the United States for safekeeping by Siegfried Kramarsky, a banker. But the families have feuded about who had legal right to it even before Saito bought it in 1990 (Struck, D. 'The Mysterious Dr. Gachet.' 1 August, 1999, *Chicago Sun – Times*, Chicago).

the luxury goods, which one possesses and enjoys without needing to prove the delight they give and the taste they illustrate, and which, even when not personally possessed belong to the status attributes of one's group, decorating the offices one works in, or the salons one frequents' (278). His point of view on the matter is once again one that sees art as fundamentally bought to be a status symbol and outside of the habitus or conceptual framework of anyone who might not be sufficiently educated or in possession of sufficient cultural capital. Bourdieu is furthermore, speaking of a *right* to ownership of culture, but also suggests a point of transformation in how the art object comes to function when 'appropriated'. Francois Pienaar made a similar kind of point when he told me that people's relationship to their country changed when they 'bought a house' – suggesting they become invested in more ways than those that are purely financial. In the anecdote relayed by O'Toole, however a further dynamic is at work – the men he encountered were both from within the art community and can not be said to not possess 'the right' to own a piece of art, or to be intimidated by it.

In this regard, it is interesting to consider that the British Arts Council ran a campaign in 2005 to encourage art ownership by offering British citizens interest-free loans to buy contemporary art. Local journalist for *Daily Artbeat* magazine available at the Art Fair, makes reference to this campaign in her article *To have and to Hold, or How money makes culture*:

Why encourage art buying you may ask? Because ownership develops culture ... The USA tax laws have done a lot to generate the museum culture they have today. In the States there is a tax incentive for art and cultural development which has seen the rise in collecting by wealthy families and the subsequent donation of collections to public institutions. As Joao Ferreira reminded us in his talk at the BMW stand yesterday, the British Arts Council famously stated that ownership encourages understanding, a deeper appreciation for and critical understanding of art. May the bright lights and beautiful objects woo us into an idea of the cultural heritage we wish to be a part of and begin the journey of meaning a lot for Contemporary South African art.²⁷³

In a country where museums are not able to make big art purchases, many have suggested the task of 'preserving cultural heritage' lies in the hands of the private or corporate collector, which further complicates the notion of the 'private ownership' vs

²⁷³ Natasha Norman. 'To have and to Hold, or How money makes culture.' April 5, 2009, *Daily Artbeat*.

‘public good’. Sean O’ Toole is on the side of the art buyer, yet sympathises with those that object to the radical foregrounding of the market rather than the art: ‘I think they probably register the apogee of what is wrong with the art market’. Yet for O’Toole there lies a deeper pragmatism to the market of art that locks into other kinds of markets people rely on. He continued: ‘but for an artist friend who had bad teeth who got a good dealer and made a little bit of money, got a lot of self confidence bought himself new teeth, hey what is wrong with that?’ His artist friend’s fortuitous run-in with the art market is not directly related to the Joburg Art Fair, ‘but’, explained, O’Toole, ‘the Art Fair is just a mechanism that services those possibilities’. He concluded resolutely: ‘So if people are going to be that dogmatic that you are not allowed to buy new teeth, for example, then I would rather ... if it is a case of for or against, I would be for’.

O’Toole’s example of his art world colleagues not seeing the Art Fair as ‘for them’ demonstrates a fact that surfaced in the ethnography for this project as general, in which cultural workers in the field of the arts, as well as artists, perceive the market as happening at a remove from where they are focused. Sue Williamson²⁷⁴, a local artist from the same generation as Penny Siopis, when asked in our interview who she thought the market for her art was, answered that she did not have much to do with the ‘marketing side of art’. Her use of the word ‘marketing’ as opposed to ‘market’ conflates notions of selling with that of promotion, sponsorship and advertising in one accurate gesture. Siopis²⁷⁵ also admitted to not ‘really’ knowing who the buyers of her work were, nor being interested. She has exhibited at international art fairs but explains ‘most artists don’t go near international art fairs, I mean they will go, maybe the gallerists would give them some champagne, but generally speaking, it is not their place, they do not want to go there. And it is a place where money changes hands’. Many artists that I interviewed seemed to see the gallery or their gallerist as a buffer between them and the realities of having ‘a market’; many could not tell me who they thought their market was. For this reason, and probably some other more personal ones, artists do tend to avoid art fairs (Thornton, 2008).

²⁷⁴ Interview, 19 September 2008, Sue Williamson, Practicing South African artist, founder and Cape Town Editor of *Artthrob*.

²⁷⁵ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African Artist and Professor at the Wits School of Arts.

Younger South African artist, Wim Botha,²⁷⁶ described the market and its distillation at the Joburg Art Fair as ‘a necessary evil’. In his opinion, the Fair embodies a place where people don’t buy for ‘the right reasons’, ‘they buy without thinking about it’, which means that because he does not ‘repeat concepts over and over’ or use repetitive iconography in his own work, he is ‘screwed’ at an art fair ‘because it is an environment that does not allow for engagement, very few people can make a snap decision on a complex or intelligent work, that they have not seen before, in that environment’. In the extract below, Botha expresses some of the ‘distaste’ that many artists felt towards the Fair:

...there will always be this friction of the frenzy of a commercial environment and the production of works for their own sake, and so I am pragmatic enough to realise that if somebody needs to sell something you go to where the market is, so if the market convenes to create a fair, then it is a one-stop shop, so it makes sense. It is a bit distasteful, I can’t remember who said it, but somebody made the point that artists shouldn’t visit art fairs, it is no place for them, they shouldn’t even be there, and in a way it is true, although if you make your peace with it, I am not that much of an idealist that I despise it.

He conceded, however, that the Joburg Art Fair, ‘as a successful event’ was ‘miniscule compared to the huge other fairs’. His use of words were unambivalent when he described larger, international fairs as ‘truly soul-destroying places’. The Joburg event, he mused, ‘was not of a scale that you really get the full impact of it, I wasn’t there on opening night, but you didn’t have the hordes running through isles in a frenzy like a baby sale or something’. The latter situation, he thought, ‘might leave a bit of a bad taste in your mouth’. O’Toole, in one of the pieces he wrote on the event, also acknowledged this aspect of art fairs in his more humorous description of the fair model as ‘an industry showcase, a mad jamboree of people and products’. He continued: ‘Think Pietermaritzburg’s Royal Agricultural Show minus the smell of livestock’. Botha clearly perceives art to operate at a different, far more contemplative plane and made the point that the museum setting would be preferable for the viewing of his work, which hints at an understanding of art that is more about experience than ownership. Here he exemplifies a position explored in Chapter Two where those inside the art world portrays a tendency to view the general public as undiscerning and unable to ‘contemplate’ art

²⁷⁶ Interview, 16 September 2008, Wim Botha, Practicing South African artist.

within the supposed 'frenzy' that art fairs produce. Botha's stance towards art fairs were generally defensive and somewhat anachronistic and did not allow for much consideration of how this reading might change in different contexts or even regarding different people. Botha did, however, also concede that his relationship with his gallerist, Michael Stevenson, has enabled him to, for the first time in his life, work full-time as an artist and so support his family.

Paying to See Art

The third and last revenue stream that the Art Fair relied on for possible sustainability was ticket sales at the door. Here too, I found evidence of the ambivalent and charged relationship between art and money. I can recount many examples from conversations with various people airing opinions of how expensive tickets for the Art Fair lead to exclusivity, and that there simply *must* be ways in which one could either, do away with the ticket all together, to allow for greater access, or, at the very least, bring it down in price. The numbers above should have illustrated the difficulties that would have resulted from such a move and the direct effect it would have had on sustainability of this event.

Keith Diggle (1994) wrote a number of articles on how to market the arts and how arts practitioners should change the way they perceive themselves in order to be more economically viable – considerations of ticket prices and payments to view the arts are central to his thesis. His articles are extremely pragmatic and focus on such run of the mill business concepts as paying tax, and communicating positive messages to the press around art events. He raised controversy when he wrote an article in *The Independent* newspaper in 1988, which he came to term 'the 'art must be free' controversy' (233). His point was that museums and galleries should start to charge tickets for entry into their premises in a move to increase commitment and numbers from the public. His argument is that a ticket, having been personally purchased, *becomes* the value one attaches to an event. He states 'there is no evidence that making art free increases attendances' (233), and that this system does not preclude one from making concessions to 'the poor' or students. He explains 'At the heart of it was the idea that the ticket is more than just a piece of paper; at the time of purchase it *is* the product'. Diggle is simply saying that it is far too easy to say, 'I will go later' and then end up not going at all because one gets distracted, or forgets. The buying of a ticket is a contract of sorts that stipulates time and

date, but also the notion of 'limited supply' which people seem to attach value to (235). Of particular significance to the argument here is his theory that paying for a ticket gives art, in general, a more imbued sense of value that the viewer takes responsibility for, thereby debunking a notion of the 'public good' inherent in art.

The director for the Creative Gauteng directorate in the South African government, Annabel Lebethe,²⁷⁷ was once again insightful in this regard:

...the thing with tickets is that, to be honest tickets and governments are not good. What ends up happening is people end up relying more on getting free tickets, as opposed to saying I will actually go pay for a ticket. So it is also a culture that we are not trying to encourage. You want people to commit themselves, you want people to pay, that is where the sustainability lies.²⁷⁸

Capturing the crux of the power of the ticket, Lebethe explained that free tickets 'encourages a culture of freebees because it is the arts'. Her qualification 'because it is the arts' refers at once to notions of needing art to be a 'public good' and the unsustainability of such an approach in South Africa, and according to Throsby quoted earlier, in the world generally. Her constant lobbying, perhaps, has left her impatient of such views evident in her analogy between working on an arts project and being part of the manufacturing process of assembling a car: 'nobody expects a free car just because you happen to make the chair for that car, you know what I mean? You just supplied the leather, it doesn't mean you are entitled to a free car!' She continued 'And what is worse, it is people who you know can afford it, you know it'.

In the few days leading up to and during the Fair, Ross Douglas personally received hundreds of emails or text messages, or phone calls from people asking for free tickets (not to mention the many, more discreet, ones that the Artlogic office received). It seems logical to have to contact the director or whomever one knows in the organisation for a ticket to the opening night event since these famously cannot be bought; one has to be selected. Yet, when one asks to be placed 'on the guest list', as someone did, for the days of the Fair, implying that one doesn't want to pay for a ticket, something else is being

²⁷⁷ Interview, 19 March 2009, Annabell Lebethe. Director: Creative Industries, Gauteng Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation.

²⁷⁸ Interview, 19 March 2009, Annabell Lebethe, Director: Creative Industries, Gauteng Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation.

communicated. There was no daily guest list for the Fair and so, when someone arrived who regarded themselves as a VIP or not the type who queues for this kind of event, they would phone Douglas and he would escort them through the security guards.

I came to understand that the negotiations people insist on around paying or not paying for the ticket, captures a whole range of assumptions around art and money: The first is the most troubling as it exemplifies a passivity around art as 'public good', a way of seeing the arts as something that has to be enabled and that 'all' have a 'right' to, even as it has been clear that this has been slipping from the priorities of many international governments. The other concept is that of 'privileged treatment', needing to be, or demanding to be treated differently. These individuals perceived themselves as 'above' having to pay or queue – a 'free to those who can afford it' concept. Lastly what such an attitude communicates, and what much of this part of the study has been concerned to unpack, is a misunderstanding, consciously or not, of what it takes to make art events sustainable: It was not uncommon until the day I left the field for this project, for someone to, in the same breath, praise the Fair for what it brings to the local art landscape and ask for a free ticket to view it. Nor was it uncommon for someone to condemn the Art Fair as 'evil' place for the marketing and exploitation of art, and say how wonderful it has been for the art community to meet each other at this event; nor was the contradiction apparent to the person who complained about the 'vulgar' branding of the event by beer brands and car manufacturers, yet praised the Fair for being able to attract such a diverse audience to art. Not forgetting the artist that hates 'the market', yet lives off the sales of his art work by his gallerist. These tensions and contradictions, I have come to understand are deep-seated, often political, and will probably remain with this project for as long as it manages to exist, that is, to stay in business, or until the director moves on to a new, possibly more lucrative, business opportunity.

This part of the study has been about art and money, business relationships, and the emotional language of numbers. I have aimed to excavate some information behind how numbers are used within the business of Artlogic as tools for client relationships; how the bank constructs its relation to amounts of money deemed appropriate for arts sponsorship; and now, in this latter chapter, how assumptions are made of how money ought to exist in relation to art. In this chapter what has surfaced is a, sometimes,

deliberate ignorance of 'numbers' so as to enable an ideological stance. I intend with this remark to allude to the contradictions mentioned above and to suggest that when 'arts insiders' express views on the money-art relationship, they choose to ignore the realities of what it takes, financially, to produce art events. This was demonstrated by Richards' own catharsis of realising that while it might be true that sponsorship of art comes with a compromised terrain, it might still be the only way in which art events can come to exist - and that, furthermore, much that is positive might still be gained from their existence. Yet, I have also shown that this ideology has a historical trajectory that is still, in no small way, in the process of being reinterpreted. The Art Fair, I have argued is a major component in this process of 'reinterpretation' regarding the role of art in this contemporary society.

As a way of making sense of research material, this section of the thesis reflects a journey within the field: first I was exposed to Artlogic and their expedience, but also to their struggles within the economic sphere of 'art business'. I then gained a deeper understanding of the bank's internal structure and the way they have come to, perhaps even been forced to, regard the money they spend on art. It is worth mentioning that by the end of my fourteen months I would often sympathise with the bank's position when I thought back on the way in which the Art Fair came to exist and how it manifested. It is perhaps this long journey that have lead this last chapter to sometimes betray an impatience with those that still insist on a certain way art 'ought to' exist in the public realm without taking on board the realities of 'sustainability', of government relations to art, and financial obligations generally. In this way, my own regard for the 'numbers' has become an emotional one.

In essence, what this part of the study has attempted to both demonstrate and come to grips with was the overwhelming focus on and influence yielded by economics within the structure of the event in a way that far out-shadowed other aspects, such as the 'publics' or the art itself.

PART 3

Art Objects and Reading the 'Now'

Introduction

Arriving now at the last of this three-part study, it is necessary to cast a reflexive glance at the structural decisions made within the document as a whole and to provide motivations for what have been both conceptual and practical choices. Some of the central questions that require answers, even if only provisional ones, are the following: What does it mean to distil the art object discussion out from that on the 'public' and that on 'cultural economics'? How does one come back to the artwork, within an interdisciplinarity, as the object of analysis, without returning to what is known, to boundaries that are already accepted and received? How does one recontextualise art objects through a politics and associated practice of reading? What, more specifically, does it say about the manner in which art exists in, speaks to, and tells us about, a specific social context – in this case, the contemporary moment in South Africa?

Art objects have figured throughout this study. In the discussion centred around publics, art objects were referenced. Similarly, when cultures of 'sponsorship' and the organisational culture of First National Bank were discussed, art objects featured, both in the context of what works had been purchased by the Chief Executive of the bank, Paul Harris, and the descriptions of artworks by the event organiser of the bank. It was, furthermore impossible to write the structural tour of Joburg Art fair, offered in Chapter One, without recurrently mentioning works of art as anchors to spaces and moments within the Joburg Art Fair organisation. Yet, these all remained references 'in passing' and in service of the specific focus at the time.

One argument in favour of a distillation of the Joburg Art Fair's art objects in a dedicated section is to acknowledge and explore the different modes of reading and meaning-making enabled by and required by art objects. The rubric of aesthetics, coupled with an interpretation of artworks as highly codified and individuated instances of 'texts', which can be 'read', allows for a hermeneutics of the artworks to enter into the discussion with its already clearly marked economic and social contours. It is, thus,

through the works of arts that we learn more about the time and place under investigation here.

Accordingly, the following three chapters comprise explorations into the many new and interesting ways in which art objects are being read by scholars in the fields of visual cultural studies, material studies, 'object' studies and art criticism. I would like to argue for a way of reading art objects that under-grounds and re-reads that which has come before in this study as specific markers of a time. In a certain sense, in this section, I make an attempt to demonstrate something of what Jacques Rancière (2004) meant in *The Politics of Aesthetics*: 'Artistic practices are "ways of doing and making" that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility' (2004: 13). Parts One and Two of this study were considerations of 'ways of doing and making' within the civil realms of publics and money, both of which referenced, in one way or another, social collectives. The discussion of the art object, therefore, inserts itself into this discussion as a break from that mode of interpretation and meaning-making. Through its focus on the singular, this is a discussion that takes place on an altogether different plane.

The Politics of Visual Art: Space and Time

Annie Coombes (2004) writes that '... artists operate within a highly privileged realm that provides a certain license (which is not to say that they do not take real risks), and this sometimes enables them to work through taboos and contradictions in a relatively "safe" space in ways that other arenas do not permit' (2). Coombes' project is concerned with the public performance of identity and understandings of the 'now' through art, where art, for the reason quoted, might be good to think with in reconsidering 'visual culture and public memory' in South Africa. Mieke Bal (2006) uses the example of Borges' fictional rewriting of *Don Quixote* to emphasise that works of art are made and displayed in 'a time filled with the present'. This is highly evocative for the argument I have been crafting thus far, not only because a reading of art objects constitutes the immediate concern of this part of the study, but also because this study reads the Joburg Art Fair as a phenomenon, ultimately as a hermeneutics of the contemporary (see also Heywood and Sandywell, 1999). I believe Lyotard (1997) is making a similar point about the ability of art to, at once, 'exist on another plane' and, at the same time, rupture the

everyday when he writes: 'The exaltations of colours makes an appeal against blindness' (1997: 244).

The notion of 'reading' a work of art that I have been deploying is one that borrows heavily from the art historical writings of Mieke Bal. She first explored this kind of approach in her book *Reading Rembrandt* (1991) but thereafter returned to this 'relationship' with art objects on numerous other occasions. Reading for Bal allows for the political to enter into an explanation and a decoding as it takes into consideration cultural assumptions and cultural contexts at play in the viewing of art works. Reading works of art is an act that uses signs to construct syntax within frames, where 'syntax refers to the structural relationship between elements' and 'framing is a constant semiotic activity, without which no cultural life can function' (Bal, 2006: 300, See also Hall, 1993). It is within the act of reading that a politics of context is animated (2006: 291), not merely the context of the work when viewed, but the circumstances that brought it about as well as what it is that a reader might be bringing to the analysis. 'Politics' here refers specifically to power, including the reasons that explain why some works make it into the public realm in the first place. It also refers to political works of art, or works that speak to a political situation.

In her essay, *Reading Art?* (2006), Bal explains that 'reading' is a different act from what traditional art history requires, as it 'engages in a discussion of how the business of 'art', the routines, habits, traditions of talking about, and dealing with art, can be made more complex and relevant' thereby going beyond descriptions of works and notions of how it relates to past movements in art (292). Disagreeing with many other theorists, Bal does not ascribe to the visual traits of the 'sublime' or the 'unspeakable' which, according to her, is an un-writing of the visual. Bal argues that reading is a language of all the senses, thus, synaesthetic. Referring to the writings of Norman Bryson, she explains that 'vision should be aligned with interpretation rather than perception', meaning that looking is active. Interestingly, however, she argues that the 'seen' is considered to be an external fact, or a truth. In other words, an object's 'look' is considered to be an objective property of the object. Sensual coding works differently in the case of the other senses – those of touch, taste, and hearing – in that those are all considered to be subjective to the feeler, taster, or hearer. For Bal, this aspect of the visual, introduces another dimension of the political as it is possible to display objects as versions of truth in a manner that is

far more difficult to achieve in the realms of sound, taste and tactility. This brings to the discussion the specific power of making visible or of keeping invisible. Such politics is also under scrutiny by Jacques Rancière (2004) defined as '(a) delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience'.

Following Bal's line of analysis, it is clear that the context of viewing is crucial to the method of reading art objects. In her view this is so, primarily, because it is in this relationship that politics and power relations reside and hide. Bal elaborates on the necessity to investigate the notion of 'the seen in relation to the unseen' as one component of the politics of display – which, at least in part, is what the preceding two parts of this study aimed to lay bare. In 'reading' the art objects of the Art Fair, one, therefore, has to take on board the limitations of this context, that of a Fair generally and the Joburg Art Fair in particular, but also explore what kinds of readings the specific context enables and make possible. What does the context of display allow for, given its unique attributes, but what, simultaneously does it exclude from its realm of possibilities? What, moreover, are its concessions and restrictions for display, viewing and representation?

The Objects of the Art/Market

The Fair, in the first instance, is a market. This social fact might be interpreted as providing an all-encompassing lens on the art objects at the Fair. Yet, 'the market' – what it is, how one responds to it, how one 'makes it work for you' – is not one thing, but indeed is interpreted and understood differently by different individuals and collectives. This much is evident from the very different approaches that galleries took in ordering their spaces and in choosing which artworks to exhibit. It is also clear from the different ways in which buyers responded to the idea of 'the market'. The decisions galleries make about what to show at the Fair, might be connected to a greater or lesser degree to their interpretation of 'the market' and their positioning in that market. Nonetheless, it is probably safe to assume that the market is an informing agent to their choices. Yet, for many analysts, this aspect of the Fair presents an almost insurmountable constraint in terms of 'reading' specific art objects on display at an art fair as well as making sense of the totality of the artworks on display at a particular fair. By this I mean that they see the

work at the Fair as strictly compromised and as only readable, in this instance, through the fact that it is for sale. Simon Njami, as I explained in Chapter Three had a contrary and refreshing view on this matter. He explained, both to me in our interview and in his catalogue essay, that he sees the context of the art fair as creating a valuable link between the two extremes of the spectrum that encompasses the life of a work of art: the artist's studio on the one extreme and the eventual buyer on the other. In his essay produced for the 2008 catalogue of the Joburg Art Fair, he speaks of the 'breadcrumbs trail' of the art work's journey from studio to various dealers. Echoing many of Appadurai's (1986) ideas, which have been discussed previously in this study, on the necessity of analysing the social in an object – objects in motion – Njami says 'the work of art, when leaving the studio, is devoid of any social value' (2008: 79). For Njami, the art fair context highlights a crucial plane off which one can read some of the meanings contained in and made possible by an art object – a commercial, and, hence, social plane where the product meets directly with the consumer. Reading it thus, the market cannot be removed from the object; it is one of its constituent parts.

This does not change the obvious fact that the emphasis on the consumability of works of art places restrictions on the possible forms of art on display, generally excluding forms such as ephemeral practices of performance, installation and time-based pieces. This is a constraint within the Fair format that ought to be taken seriously and has rightly been linked to cultivating conservative and tame 'readings' of the world of art for visitors to the Fair, especially so for a new public. Some fairs,²⁷⁹ mostly those with more financial resources, manage to overcome this aspect through large curated exhibitions, performance spaces, and through the incorporation of art prizes within the fair itself. The second Joburg Art Fair incorporated the 'Special Projects' of two not-for-profit art initiatives, that of Blank Projects and the Joubert Park Projects's Urban Scenographies. Both of these projects were performance-based, thereby attempting to fulfil the need for other forms of art practice and expression. Yet it is debatable whether the impact of these two very small booths really did serve to introduce an alternative form of art making, expression and display – especially given the positioning of these spaces outside of the gallery circuit and so easily missed or read as 'something else'.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Frieze Art Fair incorporates the Cartier Art Prize and Basel Art Fair has space for installation and performance.

²⁸⁰ Rory Bester in reviewing the Fair for the Winter 2009 edition of the *Art South Africa* magazine welcomed this attempt as 'both projects offered performances rich in visitor participation'. Bester's

Beyond the limitations the art fair format places on art forms, this is not the only determining factor in the selection of artworks on display. Any work of art cannot simply be displayed at the Joburg Art Fair. The first barrier to entry for an artist or art work to the Fair would be that the artist or work has to be represented by a gallery. This implies it has to fit into the system of valuation in currency as expressed through and represented by the system of galleries; thereafter the specific gallery has to choose to apply to be incorporated into the art fair; then the gallery has to be chosen by the organisers as 'appropriate' to their constraints; and finally the gallery has to choose to exhibit the work of art within its selection for its booth. In the case of the Joburg Art Fair, the requirements for gallery selection are vague, simply stating that galleries should be contemporary and African. Yet, it is clear, as demonstrated in previous chapters, that these rules are inconsistently applied according to circumstances and individuals involved. This might well be true of many other art fairs the world over, having to do with the relation between art and subjectivity – inherent to the world of art. In some, if not all cases, this has clear political undertones that pivot upon power structures of networks and access. Galleries routinely apply to participate in the Fair, thereby indicating their willingness to pay for the space rented, but are informed, that they do not fit the criteria. Reasons given for the rejection are always more or less crafted as it was my impression that the decisions are to some extent subjective and not based on clearly definable, objective criteria.

What is undeniable, and of more importance to the discussion at hand is the fact that once a gallery has been accepted and, in the case of the Joburg Art Fair, finds itself as one amongst about twenty-five others, the range and number of works that it can display is incomparable to any other display 'context'. This in itself might be seen as a constraint inherent to the art fair context, as the sheer number of art objects might present a challenge to the senses. Many artists have argued that this is not an ideal context for the viewing of their work. Wim Botha, for example, suggested in the previous chapter that

descriptions are succinct and useful as coming from a position of remove: 'In *Bad Form* (the Blank Project's title), curating itself became an innovative time-based performance of revolving exhibitions that changed at different times during the day. Smith, Nerf and Burger's performance-based programme extended to Andrew Lamprecht's suitable coy art appreciation tours and Barend de Wet's naked performance, *The Difference Between Life and Art*. In a stand bristling with chaotic energy, *Urban Scenographers* conducted two auction sales as part of a series entitled *The Work You Requested*. The patent lack of materiality of the objects for sale – to either have or hold – was an insult hurled at the consumerism that is our new identity politics' (Bester, R. '2009 Joburg Art Fair', *Art South Africa*, volume07, issue 04, Winter 2008: 81).

the art fair format does not allow for much contemplation. Koulla Xinisteris²⁸¹, a buyer for a corporate collection, explained to me that one does not get a sense of ‘overview’ or career trajectory of a single artist, as works become disembodied fragments of larger explorations. These concerns are heightened in South Africa, where there are few other opportunities to see such a range of works – museums are poorly attended and under-funded and attempts at biennales seem to falter in one way or another.

But more than the market form of the art fair and its highly restricting exhibition-format comprising a three-day, temporary trade fair, it is the *objective* of the Fair that distinguishes it fundamentally from other art display contexts such as the museum or the biennale. Yet, I would like to argue that in some ways the art fair format allows for greater multiplicity and heterogeneity than does a museum or biennale. Here many would disagree with me, yet it seems, as outlined elsewhere, Simon Njami holds a similar point of view. This is worth discussing briefly, simply in order to better understand what I have been referring to as the context within which readings of particular art works are made and embedded in the chapters that follow.

The manner of display characteristic of the art fair format where a jumble of objects are to be found side by side harks back to its antecedent, the World Fairs of the nineteenth century, as places of marvel and wonder. But, perhaps ironically, so does the origins of the museum. In considering the history of world trade fairs and their impact on the lives of objects, Breckenridge (1989) reminds us that whilst museums have their origins in the fair format, it was not long before the emphasis in museums came to rest not on the objects themselves, but on carefully constructed systems of classification that were introduced and in which these objects were embedded, thus, removing the element of the ‘random’ associated with the fair. Breckenridge explains that the World Fair in England introduced a new way of looking based on the establishment of distinct cultural relations to objects and cultures themselves: ‘the 18th and first half of the 19th century was a period in England when the arts were ordered and their histories written, the second half of the 19th century was a period when they were institutionalized and linked to the politics of colonial practices’. Museums as formats influenced by these fairs were, thus, in the first instance about ‘other’ places and secondly, examples of high levels of classifications and ordering which functioned as a ‘metonymic gesture’ where ‘the

²⁸¹ Interview, 15 September 2008, Koulla Xinisteris, Director of the Bag Factory and corporate art buyer for the South African Broadcast Corporation.

collecting stands for the whole' (209). In many ways, this practice within museums extends well into the present in the forms of narrativisation of objects and display, alongside the channeling of objects into themes and classifications. Kendell Geers, however, has made the point that museums globally have become just one place amongst many to see art, thereby shedding much of a former identity 'as metaphor for society' (Geers, 2005: 147).

In South Africa, museums, as both Coombes (2004) and Dubin (2009) demonstrate, have been some of the most active cultural sites where issues of change in the country have been negotiated and taken seriously. However, these institutions remain constrained along the lines of what Dubin refers to as 'conflict and negotiation' which habitually occur 'over museums and what they do', where '(r)ival claims are validated or rejected ...; contradictory narratives are confirmed or nullified; different publics are inspired or humiliated or overlooked' (Dubin, 2009: 2).²⁸² While it is true that museums are often publicly funded, this does not imply that they might not be highly gendered and racialised spaces or that positions of power are not exploited. This could be said to be true too of biennales as vessels for display, given that one curator often oversees the entire representational framework, even of an event as large and cumbersome as the Venice Biennale. Thus, while museums and biennales are credited with being more inclusive spaces for display, often only by virtue of the absence of the market, they are highly contested and in many ways much less transparent than a fair might be (Bennett, 2006: 51). It is useful to keep in mind though a caution from Robert Storr, made in his presentation at the *Indian Art Summit*, that the focus on the 'business of business in the aggregate' found at fairs remains a blinding and constricting hindrance to reading art objects and that while it is exciting to speak of 'the market', the 'real action' might lie elsewhere.²⁸³ I suggest in Chapter 8 that some of what 'the real action' might mean, if Storr is referring to the work that art can do for a viewer, takes place in people's homes once the work has been bought.

²⁸² In terms of a relation to the market, at the 2007 Venice Biennale, many of the works were for sale, marking a departure from the standard sanctified space of the biennale as 'free' in that sense. Museums, of course, also buy works of art, even though in South Africa with very limited budgets, which while this is not the case of all the exhibitions they are able to show, once again brings the dynamic of the market into direct relation to viewership. In my interview with Clive van der Berg, local artist and curator, he lamented the fact that South African museums hardly ever buy installations and are as 'product-oriented', to use his own words, as he found the Art Fair to be.

²⁸³ Storr was the chosen curator for the 2007 Venice Biennale.

I might be faulted for being overtly generous in my interpretation of the art fair context when I suggest that it can be viewed as an example of the ‘cutting edge’ of the present and, thus, allows for the kinds of readings that Bhabha (1994) suggests is the work of cultural theorists: ‘(t)he borderline work of culture demands an encounter with newness’ (1994: 7). Yet this point of view is one particularly tied to the South African context where there simply are few other alternatives for exhibition and viewing on this scale. A further consideration would be that few of the works at either of the two art fairs within gallery booths were curated or specifically ordered via recognisable themes in the manner routinely practiced at museums and biennales. These combined characteristics of the fair, as elements that constitute ‘context’ then has the effect of offering up first vast quantities of work that showcase diversity, and second of art objects at face value, free to be interpreted or read in whatever way the viewer may attempt. It, therefore, enables new connections to be made between things and ideas and for a defamiliarisation from accepted canons. Interestingly, and surprisingly evocative in the art fair context, Bal suggests (following Bhabha, 1994) that visual cultural studies might, in order to bring a new angle to the analysis of objects, focus on ‘seriating’, that is, the meanings of objects in series or collections, rather than the individuality of each in order to create new and relevant readings (2003: 19). The art fair is the kind of context that creates random and unexpected ‘series’ of art objects as gallerists work around the various constraints involved in fair exhibiting, such as booth size, amount of time to display works, what they imagine the market might be, and gallery ‘ideology’.

Art Currents and The Place of the Political

Returning to Bal’s insistence on reading art objects within a *context*, a second context within which works displayed at the Fair is located, beyond that of the Fair, is local art history as well as local and international trends. I consider aspects of this context here as it emerged from the fieldwork, as well as the way in which it is presented in local art critical and art historical writing. Since the majority of works displayed at the Joburg Art Fair can be described, in one way at least, as ‘South African’, the discussion centres mainly on traits of the local.

Not surprisingly, a recurrent theme in my interviews was the fact that South African art has moved from being overtly politically focused and engaged, to another place – one

that is not necessarily devoid from or uninterested in politics, but uses a more varied language in its expression thereof. Clive van den Berg²⁸⁴ referred to South African artists' engagement with the politics of the country as having become 'our psychic default position' which might have to do with the demand from abroad for a certain kind of political art from South Africa. Roome (2002) has suggested through her own ethnographic work at an exhibition of South African work in New York that making 'political' work became a kind of passport for South Africans to be included into international exhibitions. This is a tradition in Van den Berg's words that has to do with 'celebrating the achievements of the democracy and of commenting on the nastiness of our colonial and apartheid past', which is a direct result of the manner in which artists saw themselves 'under apartheid': 'I mean I used to think that art was part of a discursive practice, in a very heavy sense, when we were artists under apartheid, it was the kind of language that declared our solidarity and our 'cred'. Artist Lizza Littlewort²⁸⁵ explained this in somewhat more visual terms: 'In the olden days, I think everything was very dour, you had these kinds of sculptures by Gavin Younge of a wheelbarrow with a spade to show how people suffered with BARBWIRE AROUND IT!! I mean, ewe, sending the message home, guys'.

Michael Stevenson believes that many South Africans are still working within that register, one that has manifested as an 'incredible inward-lookingness, parochial provincial, that self-referential, ingrown toenail aesthetic'. This, for him, has the combined consequence of the local audience being uninterested in works from elsewhere, and the artists working in this manner struggling to find an audience for their work outside of South Africa. Yet, he maintains, it is valuable for a South African artist to have the 'ability to distil an essence from here'. But South Africans, outside the field of visual art as much as within, are far too 'obsessed' with 'narrative', the telling of personal histories and stories, 'because everybody has so many stories – where you come from; where you are; what you are: I'm a gay, white male and I live here and this and that, and my grandmother is this and my mother is this'.

Pointing to a similar tendency, Alex Dodd²⁸⁶ has found that 'South African literature and art [sometimes] is overly representational, in the sense that it is very hooked into social

²⁸⁴ Interview, 11 August 2008, Clive van den Berg, Practicing South Africa artist, and director of 'Trace'.

²⁸⁵ Interview, 19 November 2008, Lizza Littlewort, practicing South African artist and art cartoonist.

²⁸⁶ Interview, 14 November 2008, Alex Dodd, Free-lance journalist.

realism'. For her, this is a limitation: 'South Africans tend to look at our real politic with such a clear lens'. This she labels 'a kind of monumentalised history'. Agreeing with Stevenson, Dodd believes this South African condition of production has had very particular consequences for forms of expression: 'That is why we have this incredible body of memoir in this country. That is our main genre; memoir is the absolute central genre in South Africa. Because it is all about the self, it is all about society and the self'. Both Stevenson and Dodd concede that while this 'tendency' is still very prevalent, there have been some real changes within the vocabulary of representation and expression deployed by South African artists. Dodd mentions that 'this was particularly in the past, I mean this is what I think has excitedly changed'.

Long-time gallerist, Linda Givon²⁸⁷, cautioned, however, that one should not lose sight of the importance of the work done by South African artists in commenting on the political circumstances in the country, nor should one forget or belittle the modes of expression that had been painfully fought over. She is of the opinion that those modes are still very much in evidence in some younger artists as the effects of apartheid itself are still undeniably and blatantly inscribed in both the landscape and the everyday of South Africa.²⁸⁸

But beyond the relation between art and the past, and the 'work' of art in the context of the nation or the democracy, there are also other trajectories, traditions and thematics that contemporary visual art is seen to represent or speak to.

Departing from the point of view that the art of the now is seen as embedded in, and a continuation of, South Africa's particular past, Colin Richards (2008) has recently used the rubric of violence to frame a very comprehensive set of work by South African artists. Richards' analysis spans almost two decades of art making, and uses the theoretical terrain of 'humanness' and 'human being', to understand some of the themes that tie work from South Africa together. This is a fresh lens on work that is under-theorised or seen within a very limited scope. Much writing on South African art has its

²⁸⁷ Interview, 25 November 2008, Linda Givon, Former owner and director of Goodman Gallery.

²⁸⁸ While many academics are still calling for a re-writing of South Africa's history of art (See answer to an article by Theminkosi Goniwe in *Art South Africa* Vol 7, Issue 4, Winter 2009 p23, Gerard Schoeman, 'Forget Theminkosi Goniwe'), many have made brave and insightful attempts at this terrain from many different angles, many incorporated in the catalogues for exhibitions. See, for example, the catalogue for the exhibition 'Revisions', 2006 by Hayden Proud; the catalogue for 'Trade Routes: History and Geography', 1997, Okwui Enwezor; Williamson, 2004.

roots in writing on resistance art during the late 1980 and 1990s in South Africa where the preoccupation was overwhelmingly that of the political elements of inclusion, race and art as site of political struggle (see Minty, 2006; Williamson, 2004). As Van den Berg mentioned earlier, being active in the politics of resistance was *part* of being a South African artist, and the influence of this time has been carried over into the period of transformation. It is little wonder then that the rhetoric of struggle and resistance can often still be found in writing on South African art. Many of the exhibitions staged to celebrate South Africa's ten years of democracy in 2004 referenced strongly this tradition, and as Rory Bester (2004) puts it in *A Decade of Democracy*: 'South African visual art continues to play a pivotal role in interrogating a nation in transition' (25). In a similar vein the recent, 2006 publication of the catalogue for the Bruce Campbell Smith collection, called *Revisions: Expanding the narrative of South African Art*, takes as its point of departure the manner in which art gives voice to and reflects South Africa's history of racial segregation. This lens has spurred much writing on issues of 'representation' within work, especially racial representation, of which the collection of essays under the title, *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* edited by Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz in 1999 is exemplary. This collection is specifically engaged in unpacking and theorising the implications of representing race, or of 'speaking for' a racial group. The essays are directly concerned with the real-politic of South Africa and consider, perhaps for the first time, the implications of the 'difference' between white and black voices within the arts.

A different and influential way of reading South African art has been crafted with reference to the politics of space informed by South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid through such registers as 'landscape', 'site' and 'place'. This tradition has included much Marxist writing in the manner of British work on landscape art and land ownership (See Bunn, 1994; Delmont and Dubow, 1995; Dunlop, 2000). Historically, many of these writers were profoundly influenced by the 1970s cultural turn in understandings of geography and social space, lead by, for example, David Harvey. In its less-Marxist incarnation, such as *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trama and Contemporary Art* by Jill Bennett (2005), the landscape becomes metaphor for spaces of healing and trauma used by artists to speak of this country's history. William Kentridge's work often bears traces of the South African highveld landscape and has been theorised in this register. David Bunn's (2000) group research *Landscape and Memory Project*, in my view, presents a body of

research that captures aspects of the present, 'the now', through surprising investigations of place and space. The language of 'place' and 'landscape' has been woven here through a project that concerns itself with the South African condition in a way that weds theoretical tools with the empirical. It is noteworthy, however, that these works distinctly are not concerned with theories of the urban, with city-ness and metropolitan living.

Other recent bodies of work have turned to the global interest in cities and city-scape to understand art making, as many artists similarly have become interested in the city as space for expression and inspiration. Amongst this work, David Bunn's (2008) essay, 'Art Johannesburg and its Objects' is certainly the best example. Bunn characterises 'art making in the city' as following a theoretical 'problem of imagining mediation between above and below-surface levels of being' (139). These 'separate levels', according to him, have been grappled with by local artists in two different ways: the first speaks of a surface that has hardened and is unyielding yet evocative of 'an irreducible body of truth' beneath. In demonstration of this tendency, he discusses the work of Penny Siopis and Clive van den Berg, both South African artists with interests in skin and the body. (Recent work by Penny Siopis forms part of the analysis of art works presented in the next chapter). In the second instance, Bunn names the work of a younger generation of artists who 'explore the devaluation of embodied urban meaning, which they find replaced instead by zoned and segmented neighbourhoods without connection'.²⁸⁹ Dorothee Kreutzfeldt's (2004) research for her Master of Arts in Fine Art brought together in the thesis, *Painting in Public: Interventions into the City of Johannesburg*, provides a useful overview of the ways South African artists have started working in the city as well as some theoretical insights into reasons for doing so.

Closely related to this strand of writing, and belonging to a similar historical moment in South Africa's transformation period, are bodies of work on memory, the body and identity politics. Emma Bedford (2004) suggests that concerns over the body, sexuality and identity have directly superseded the traditions of resistance art mentioned earlier: 'Democratic change has brought about a new sense of freedom, allowing artists to explore issues around the body, identity, self-representation and sexuality, explorations that have largely been covert, constrained or entirely avoided until now' (720). What

²⁸⁹ As mentioned in a different context, earlier in this study, Rory Bester's (2008) work on photography as presented in texts such as 'Cities, Photography and Research' also does the work of looking at the city within art as way of broadening the scope of art.

Enwezor (2006) calls the 'anxiety of difference' (34) often includes marginal figures of the female, the black person and/or the homosexual body. Many South African artists have expressed themselves through this register, most notable perhaps, Berni Searle and Tracy Rose and more recently in complex ways, Zanele Muholi. (I discuss some of Muholi's work in Chapter Seven). This particular register remains closely related to the politics of the country, a powerful example of this at work would be the catalogue for the exhibition held in New York in 2004, *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art* (2005). This exhibition, one of the largest recent South African shows, specifically frames the present through the lens of the past and makes a claim for work on the body, identity and memory as a new cutting edge and the most valid form of political enquiry for artists within the transitional moment.²⁹⁰

During much of the past decade art acted in ways that allowed South Africans to rewrite the archive of the country, its history and the lives of its citizens. As such, one can look back on these debates as being intimate, personal testimonies to the stuff of living in South Africa. These, predominantly, representational and political debates, seem to have been an overriding preoccupation for local art historical writers, and has left little room for the study of social, institutional and economic structures that underpin and inform the production of art works, and by extension the works themselves.

The Joburg Art Fair's Art Objects

At the Joburg Art Fair one could certainly find many art objects that fell into the modes and subjects of art-making described by Van den Berg, Littlewort, Stevenson and Dodd. Yet there are clear departures from this fixation. One such instance, I would argue, is best articulated in a little vignette from the second Joburg Art Fair.

Young artist, Athi-Patra Ruga,²⁹¹ responded to a question posed by a journalist about the location of his work within the Art Fair context in a most insightful manner. Ruga is represented by the Whatiftheworld gallery. Included amongst his art works on display

²⁹⁰ Alongside these examples of writing on South African art, the only local art journal *Art South Africa* has through its seven years of operation become a valuable archive and resource for reviews on art works and art exhibition.

²⁹¹ Rose Kotze, 'Is that a political question?' April 5, 2009, *Daily Artheat*.

was a tapestry work, entitled *Rooi Kombers (After Irma Stern 1946)*.²⁹² The work is two-dimensional, framed, and depicts a black woman with a comic-style bone through her nose, wrapped in a red cloth. As the title suggests, the image references work by South African modernist Irma Stern for whom 'Africans', particularly from Zanzibar, provided life-long subject matter. Stern is now one of South Africa's highest-selling, dead artists. Ruga is clearly invested in the discourses of representation that are naturally political in the South African context. Yet, when asked by journalist for the *Daily Artheat* about the Fair as context for display that might be overtly safe and conservative for someone as 'edgy' as himself, he simply replied: 'Sorry, is that a political question? If so please refer me, Balenciaga'. 'Balenciaga', I can only assume, is a reference to the international fashion house, by which Ruga evokes a completely different reading of 'political' questions of context, representation and viewing.

Before 'joining' the art world, Ruga ran his own fashion range. When reviewers labeled his clothing *JustNje-amp* 'un-African', the artist replied to his reviewer, Carl Collison: 'Of course my clothes are African. They are made by African hands, for African bodies, right here in Africa ... In fact, the whole question of what is African is outdated. My forefathers died for me to enjoy these freedoms, not to constantly question myself. I try to steer clear of what I call the unholy trinity: Race, Gender and Sexuality'.²⁹³ Ruga himself is fashioned and styled within a hip clothing vernacular much like that sported by the subjects represented in the photographs of another young, black artist Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko. Veleko, in one of her bodies of work, took photographs of highly styled and contemporary black youngsters that she encountered around the streets of Johannesburg, wearing brightly coloured t-shirts, jeans, outrageous sneakers, sunglasses, hats and a multitude of accessories drawing from the subcultures of punk, skate-boarding and high fashion brands. Rory Bester writes that Veleko's 'fashion' photographs depict people who dress like her in order to surround herself with a clan of similar people against the grade of the 'aggregated look'; 'an archive of fellow expressives'.²⁹⁴

This vignette, the reading enabled by Ruga as person and his practice, and the photographs by Veleko articulate for me instances of what Gilroy (2004) terms a 'vernacular dissidence' (8), which, while not existing here in popular culture, which is

²⁹² 'Red Blanket'

²⁹³ Carl Collison, 'Boum Bada Boum.' *Art South Africa* Vol, 4, Issue 4, Winter 2008: 46–7.

²⁹⁴ Rory Bester, 'Archive against Loneliness.' *Art South Africa*, Vol 4, Issue 4, Winter 2008: 45.

Gilroy's interest, manages to claim and express a 'newness' that is far removed from the language described by the interviewees above.

The Object of Art

Returning now to the theoretical framework that informs this part of the study and by way of introducing the next three chapters, it is necessary at this point to reflect upon the use I have been making of the word 'object' when referring to works of art. It is a theoretical move intended to place the discussion on art within the realm of visual cultural studies in a way that draws simultaneously from history of art, art criticism and cultural studies.

Bal (2003) in her essay, 'Visual Essentialism', arrives at the concept of 'visuality' as central to reading objects within visual cultural studies. Visuality, she explains, is the moment of interaction between art object, the gaze, the institutional context, the public sphere and the 'researcher': 'it is the practices of looking invested in any object that constitute the object domain: its historicity, its social anchoring and its openness to the analysis of its synaesthetics' (11). Bal arrives at a definition of visuality through problematising 'visual cultural studies' as a 'field' or 'discipline' that has a shared genealogy with art history and cultural studies (25). The former, she argues, through its connection with 'history', is primarily dogmatic and exclusive, and the latter has focused for the most part on 'low art' (25). Danto (1999) too has formulated, albeit with a different set of suggested outcomes, a theory that denounces the value of art history for a reading of contemporary art, not because of its fixation on the 'past' but because it attempts to formulate theories that cannot be true for a 'future' of art. He suggests that art be considered through the lens of philosophy so as 'not to be held hostage to the future' (11). By this he aims to suggest something about the nature of contemporary art as being a 'style' without recognisable features (as in Classical, or Modernist, or Baroque), but also as something that could reference any historical time and could be morphing endlessly. For him the discipline of philosophy as a lens is conducive to understanding and considering the moment at which an art work becomes 'art' (8). This moment is of importance here as it points, once again, in the direction of the context of viewing as one of the constituent parts of the work itself (8).

Bal's understanding and critique of visual cultural studies pertain directly to my study in both its reflections on method and as investigation of visual culture itself as organising 'field'. In fact, she embarks on her critique by posing just that question: what is the 'object' of visual studies? By pointing out that the 'object' is both 'thing' and *objective* or aim, she highlights the intimate relation between seeing as a 'practice' and structures that allow objects to be seen or come into the realm of the visible (6). Putting 'visuality' forward as the object of visual culture forces one to ask, 'what happens when people look?' She points out that the word 'happens' indicates an 'event' which becomes one half of the subjective experience of looking, the other half, according to Bal, is the experience that 'emerges'. In this act a new 'object' has been formed out of 'visuality'.

Visual cultural studies, Bal reminds us, crucially is a departure from art history, which implies both that there are shared traits and objectives and that the world of art itself might be under investigation within cultural studies as much as in history of art. Nonetheless, she cautions against cultural studies: 'But one mistake must be avoided at all costs: to think, as cultural studies has done before us, that neglecting 'high art' can make the social distinction that generated the category disappear'. Her version of visual cultural studies is, thus, closely aligned with Appadurai and Breckenridge's formulation of 'public culture'.

The volume, *South African Visual Culture* (2005), is an intriguing local case of writing within this scholarship that does not take on board Bal's insistence that visual studies incorporate art and art objects. This volume contains essays which have for the most part been written by academics trained in art history. Despite their background, very little attention is paid by the authors to contemporary art as public culture, while all are concerned with popular culture such as advertising, television, film, magazines.²⁹⁵ What is noteworthy here is that when scholars consider contemporary culture through the register of visual cultural studies, very seldom does contemporary art feature. This

²⁹⁵ It seems significant that the editors spent the majority of their introduction on a genealogy of 'culture studies' via the linguistic, cultural and visual 'turns' with heavy emphasis on the history of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, at the time in its fortieth year. This gesture is dated and leaves a reader wondering whether the editors felt it necessary to include this history as validation or because they might think the South African reading public might be unfamiliar with it. It further warrants pointing out that the book itself presents questionable visual literacy through the cover design of an attractive young female in chiaroscuro with what seems like a modernist, formalist block of design over her one eye – this image is the chapter heading to every article forcing its way insidiously into the reading experience.

testifies to the still more or less strict definitions and boundaries that exist between disciplines in this country.

Given the 'tendencies' within art described by Stevenson and Dodd, together with the powerful reign of disciplinary boundaries within art writing in South Africa, it is necessary to cast around for defamiliarising lenses. For that reason I find the notion of the 'object' and visual cultural studies as understood by Bal as useful. The 'reading' of 'art objects' using the vocabulary of visual cultural studies then comprises a move that attempts at once to incorporate and remain aware of the Fair context and what the reader brings to the act of 'viewing', at the same time as it motions to defamiliarise art works by aligning their analysis more closely with a manner of 'reading' that Sarah Nuttall formulates in her edited volume, *Beautiful Ugly* (2006). This volume, which focuses on African aesthetics, in her own words, 'is not a work of art history; nor does it belong to the realms of aesthetic theory or anthropology. It is a series of essays drawn from *contemporary Africa*' (2006: 8). For Nuttall the focus on 'beauty' and 'ugliness' is a move to sever African aesthetics from 'the purchase of anthropology on the one hand, and art history on the other' (12), thereby enabling a reader to ask fundamental questions about what one likes, and whether one knows why one likes or dislikes these things.

The choice to consider works of art *objects*, I believe, performs a similar defamiliarising function within the analyses that follow in the next three chapters. Objects are about materiality and a relationship with that materiality, as Candlin and Guins (2009) remind us. Reading art works as objects, in my view enables the most to be extracted from them within the constraints of the fair environment, precisely because this is what the fair, perhaps more than other forms or contexts of display, honours in works of art. In their discussion of objects and object methodology, Candlin and Guins point out that art writing often neglects objects and materiality: 'many of the more theoretically informed discussions of images and art objects skirt around issues of material and technique. We have as it were "objecthood" without the material object'. For them, objects have agency, as can be seen in Actor Network Theory where humans and non-humans are integrated into 'social networks, wherein the animate and the non-animate both have an acute role in the formulation, mediation and stabilization of social, cultural and political relations'.

Bill Brown takes the discussion a step further to consider the limits of the 'object' as, for him, it is within 'things' that the emphasis falls on the subject-object relation, which echoes much of what Bal aims to achieve in reading through visibility. Objects, for him are too over-described, and it is in thingness that one can move outside the 'order of objects' (2009: 6). He writes that 'we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us, when the drill breaks, when the car fails...' (2009: 140). For him, we read through objects our own desires, structures and aims, yet things confront the limits of endless naming and structuring. He uses the example of Claus Oldenberg's inflated sculptures that now, years later, are starting to deflate and look sad. He explains: '... this is an art that instead shows how weary that world (the world of objects) has become of our projections. If these objects are tired, they are tired of our perpetual reconstitution of them as objects of our desire and of our affection. They are tired of our language. They are tired of us' (2009: 146). Herein lies a caution to allow the objects themselves to speak, through their materiality, and their form, while allowing for a true reflection of the personal, subject relation one brings to the reading of the object. Accordingly, the discussions of art objects that follow are imbedded in what the works look like and how they have been made, together with the 'world' of the artist-maker.

Taking seriously Brown's caution about the role of projections when reading objects, Susan Sontag's essay (1994), 'Against Interpretation', comes to mind. Sontag's theory connects directly with that of Brown through the phenomenon of transparency. This she describes as 'experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are' (14). Sontag roots her critique firmly in the time she was writing, around 1966, which she believed saw an invasion of content over form and an obsession with interpreting works of art, rather than experiencing them. During this process, 'form is separated off from something we have learnt to call "content"', and this has led to form becoming 'accessory' and content 'essential' (4). Interpretation for her means 'plucking a set of elements ... from the whole work' and obsessively ascribing meaning to them (she referenced Marx but specifically Freud and his 'interpretation of dreams and the everyday' – a reduction to the level of cognition of all that is accidental and magical) (7). This view anticipates many of the more Marxist readings of art from the 1970s such as the seminal work by John Berger (1973), *Ways of Seeing*. Finally she claims that 'in most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous ... Interpretation makes art

manageable, comfortable' (8). Sontag calls for an 'erotics' of art (14), which she positions as against a hermeneutics. In this sense, while her sentiments resonate with much that this part of the study tries to do, to see works of art for what they are as objects, it is doubtful that she would place as strong an emphasis on context and modes of production as Bal indicates as necessary and which this study practices.

Mitchell (2005) is also interested in shedding some of the 'baggage' that people routinely project onto objects when he states 'when questions of desire are raised (in relation to images in art history) it is usually located in the producers or consumers of images, with the picture treated as an expression of the artist's desire or as a mechanism for eliciting the desire of the beholder'. He argues for a shift in the 'location of desire to images themselves', not to do away with the work of art history, but to 'help us to grasp the fundamental shift in art history and other disciplines that is sometimes called visual culture or visual studies' (28). Mitchell wants us to ask 'what do images want' from us, by which he bestows the image, and objects of art, with a radical agency. In order to incorporate this element of 'pure' enjoyment of works of art into this study a section has been devoted to private collectors and their relationships with works of art that they have bought and live with.

Reading Art

This third part of the study, then, is not a historical overview of the South African art landscape or market, but draws on the above considered theoretical bodies of work to understand the production of culture through South African contemporary art in the context of the Joburg Art Fair. Within the 'event' of the Art Fair, then, the art object is its own event and creates 'events' for visitors as they are confronted by them. To this end the following three chapters consider art objects as texts and 'read' them through three different lenses: The first, in Chapter Seven, is a discourse analysis that views seven chosen works as in dialogue with already existing bodies of scholarship and the 'politics' of living in South Africa. Here I return to the structural approach of the tour, yet this time it is one in which art objects themselves, as well as how they were positioned in the Fair, form the coordinates of the itinerary. Chapter Eight asks for a reading of works of art not dictated by my own tastes; works that have not been written about; and works that were not necessarily topical at any given time (as many in Chapter Seven were).

Rather, the focus is on buyers of art and their collections and asks of these individuals, respondents to this study, to give their readings of works of art. The final chapter isolates one art work through a close reading of the 'Featured Artist' (an Art Fair 'Special Project'), Jane Alexander, whose work, *Security*, could be seen at the 2009 Joburg Art Fair. The close reading of this work, positioned specifically in relation to what has been discussed in earlier chapters, as well as the Fair context in contemporary South Africa, serves simultaneously as conclusion to this study. The conclusion, thus, follows directly from what *Security* communicates as art object in itself and about the Joburg Art Fair at this time. In the final analysis, in both senses of the term, this part of the study again deploys the logic of the tour, followed by readings of art objects to demonstrate some of the motivations for studying an art fair in the first place – what is it about art objects that enliven a reading of the social realm, or that makes the connections with money and finance so apparently scandalous?

PART 3

Chapter 7. The Art of the Fair: a Close Reading

Upon entering the gallery section of the Art Fair one was faced with and surrounded by a plethora of art objects. This might well have been an overwhelming experience, even for the most seasoned of gallery goers or art enthusiasts. Advice on how to approach such an experience or suggestions about strategies of viewing, or categorisation, were not on offer. As many pointed out, the catalogue, did provide information about the art works on display at the fair in image form, but gave very little information on ‘viewing’ once confronted by the objects. Certain viewers, such as those I discuss as collectors in the next chapter, had come to the fair with their own knowledge of what they are looking for, and accordingly searched for works that resonated with personal collection criteria. Yet many fair-goers, as we have seen from the first part of this study, come to the fair relatively unarmed with such pre-formed knowledge.

What, if we could imagine this for a moment, might suggested strategies for viewing the art works at the fair have been, had the organisers felt sufficiently brave to enter into the quagmire of such a discourse? The first and most obvious might be art historical, and would dictate a reading that looks at works in relation to a local art history, embedded in an international one. Accordingly, such a strategy would, as its main reference, point to the development of movements and styles, of influences and borrowings within the works on display. Another strategy might be to present artists’ statements about each of the artworks one would encounter at the Fair, so as to focus not on connections between works but on the singularity of each. Logistically, this strategy would require a vast period of reading beforehand by the public. The Fair then might have been characterised by individuals engrossed in reading as they pass through the aisles and booths. Of course, precisely such a strategy has been adopted by many museums in the form of the audio guide, which, by all accounts, is regarded as highly informative and enhancing to the viewing experience.²⁹⁶ A third strategy might be to impart a certain amount of biographical information about each artist, thereby allowing the viewer to understand something of ‘purpose’, or ‘thesis’, or ‘development’ through which an art object might be decoded – in the manner meant by Stuart Hall (1993: 95). Lastly, as with many

²⁹⁶ Many of my interview respondents highlight this as an essential prop in their experiences of international art museums.

curated exhibitions, a thematic might be introduced, not in the vague and undefined manner of the 'African contemporary', but in a more descriptive sense, such as 'South Africa Now'; or 'Here and Elsewhere'; or 'Politics of the Everyday'. I am allowing a fair amount of playfulness here, to suggest the openness of the field. In some senses, each gallery booth communicated a version of a thematic of the 'now', yet filtered through speculations of what a market might respond to. For some, such as the Michael Stevenson Gallery, presenting the face of the contemporary was of primary importance, while for others, as we have learnt from the discussion around the SMAC Gallery, it was a historical trajectory that informed one of the present. In the absence of any at-hand information along the lines of the above 'strategies', it was the work itself, its materiality and one's personal frame of reference, that animated the dynamic of 'reading and viewing'.

Accordingly, this chapter is structured, once again, around the 'act' of the tour, thereby situating the analysis in close proximity to the art fair context. Again, this comprises some kind of mapping exercise. Yet, even at the starting point one refers here to what is at once a more intuitive and discursive map, but also an intellectual map. It is a loosely woven tour that is brought into shape by readings of art objects that rely on all of the 'strategies' suggested above, in doing so harnessing from these strategies what is relevant and informative. In some instances, the point of access is an art historical one, in other cases, works are read symptomatically, as signs of the contemporary. In some others still, works are identified as interesting for the way in which they can be seen as a response to art criticism and 'trend'. Finally, some artworks that are discussed reflect a personal interest of the writer. It, therefore, is an experiment in 'reading' that aims to be reflexive of its act while remaining free to indulge in the process. The discussion moves through seven art objects, selected from either the first or the second Joburg Art Fair, thereby superimposing two maps onto each other. In a manner reminiscent of the walk through presented in Chapter One, the discussion here meanders from one work to the next without crafting an overarching argument or moving in any particular direction. In this way, it is once again an ode to what Certeau termed the difference between the 'itinerary' and the 'map', which, according to him, 'is the difference between two symbolic and anthropological languages', that denote the difference between 'ordinary' (the tour) and 'scientific' (the map) discourse (119). This chapter negotiates both these terrains.

While it might be tempting to enter into a reading that tries to identify overarching themes or trends at work within and across the two fairs, I have come to the conclusion that this would not be a useful strategy, simply because the Fair offered both a diversity of works and a large quantity of works. The time at which this analysis takes place, just one year after the two events, renders only a very short lens, which may not give the overview the adequate distance from which one might begin identifying such trends as yet. There might well be identifiable strands present that exemplify some of the ways of reading South African art that has been prevalent, as pointed out in the introduction to this section, yet I have chosen rather to focus on art objects that resonated with me personally, or were pointed out in the press, or that speak in particularly clear ways to certain aspects of the 'now' that this study has been concerned with.

The single case where I have chosen to highlight a contemporary trend is that of photography. I devote a section within this chapter entirely to bodies of photographic work, trying to understand specifically what it is that the medium offers theoretically, and as praxis. Many authors and critics have commented on the wealth of outstanding photographic work that has been produced by South Africans within the past decade. Some, like the gallerist Michael Stevenson²⁹⁷, pins this development to the general excitement around the fast-moving technical innovations in this field. It is also of significance that the only other large-scale art event on the continent, besides the Dak'Art Biennale, is a photographic biennale in Bamako devoted primarily to photographic work from Africa.

Finally, it is of importance to note that at both the 2008 and 2009 Joburg Art Fairs, certain art objects took on a public life within the context of the art fair, as a result of discussion and debate it stimulated before, during or after the event. In other words, these works, for very different reasons, became 'spoken about'. This phenomenon could perhaps be attributed to the very short period over which the Fair took place, so that the viewers physically and cognitively had to engage in high levels of selection and editing due to the multitude on display, and for that reason were moved to singling out certain works as the basis for continual discussion. It may also have something to do with the repetitive nature of the Fair, its form and grid, which causes much of the offering to be taken up into a rhythm of viewing, coming up the one after the other, so that when a

²⁹⁷ Interview, 31 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, Director and owner of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

piece does attract press attention or other kinds of recognition, it stands out sharply from the rest. Many of the objects to be discussed below attained this manner of ‘public’ status and it is part of the work to be done within this study to understand why these works might have attracted this kind of attention.

The Irreverent Young Ones

The first art object I discuss makes reference to the context of the local art world, and so is a useful place to start. In the very far back corner of the 2009 Joburg Art Fair, having made your way past the books and design space, diametrically opposite the entrance to the Fair, the Whatiftheworld Gallery displayed two large paintings next to each other on the back wall, so as to be the first thing one would see upon entering or passing their stand. The one was a portrait of American R&B musician, Jay-Z, and the other, a portrait of South African star artist, William Kentridge. Both the portraits followed the classical style of portraiture in which the subject is depicted from just below the shoulders; the face turned towards the viewer; the eyes staring out of the frame; the head of the sitter filling the substance of the picture plane and where the subject is situated in front of either a neutral interior or a landscape background. Jay Z’s face was curiously green, as if covered in grass, and it was this element, the most eye-catching in these two identically sized portraits, that set the tone for ‘reading’ these works. This discussion will focus on the portrait that hung on the right, that of William Kentridge.

It was the painted portrait of a South African artist of note, his recognition derived from his political credentials, his international artistic acclaim and sheer fame. For many crucial years in his career, Kentridge’s work was directly informed by South Africa’s apartheid politics – its landscape, and its debris of buildings, people, animals and infrastructure. In his essay entitled *Procession of the Dispossessed*, Dan Cameron (1999) opines that ‘there is no question that his (Kentridge’s) entire career has coincided with and been marked by continuous efforts to articulate the reality of a cultural resistance during the seemingly untenable struggle to transform South African society’ (49). His best-known early work took the form of labouriously drawn animations, which explored guilt and complicity within apartheid through the subject of his own self-portrait, and some characters that viewers got to know across a nine film spectrum. Kentridge’s drawn animations famously are not done in the traditional method for producing cell animation, where every new

frame is executed on a clean sheet of paper. Rather, the drawings evolve on top of each other, through erasure and re-drawing, and so retain and declare the changing forms, evoking through the palimpsest connotations of a history inscribed, of memory and of fantasy. The works are at once highly individual and movingly intimate, yet speak to the larger social landscape. Few would disagree that most of his work is also beautiful in the iconic sense of using Renaissance techniques to achieve perspective, space and realism while remaining loose and expressive. His career has been remarkably prolific and in the very far, right-hand corner of the Fair, at the Goodman Gallery booth, one would find at least three of his works: a large-scale charcoal drawing – charcoal is his preferred medium; a very large tapestry from his latest body of work; as well as a collaboration with fellow mid-career artists, Deborah Bell and Robert Hodgins. Furthermore, many of his prints, works on paper, and secondary market work could be found in other booths, such as that of David Krut Projects. How does this information impact on the reading of the portrait? At this moment in history, William Kentridge is synonymous with South African art; after a career spanning three decades, the man is respected as both an engaged artist and intellectual; finally, and not least of all in terms of the investment potential of his work, William Kentridge might well be the most coveted South African contemporary artist²⁹⁸.

Avant Car Guard, the three-man artist collective and authors of the work under discussion, on the other hand, are all youngsters, in their late twenties and only beginning to be 'known' in the small local art world. My first encounter with their work was in the form of an e-mail invitation to submit art works for a fictitious art prize, which I found a delightfully nasty comment on South African artists' obsession with winning art competitions as one of the few ways of 'making it' locally. Subsequently, Avant Car Guard have made many works that draw inspiration from what they call the 'small swampy pool'²⁹⁹ that is the South African art world. Avant Car Guard is acutely interested in the issue of 'a public', yet conceived in a confined and prescribed sense – as what I have described before as the 'core' art public. Chapter Two of this study was an attempt at looking between the cracks of the ideas people have about art publics, to expose a larger, more heterogeneous version of such a public. Yet, if one were to look at Avant Car Guard's subject matter, one would have to assume that for these three artists,

²⁹⁸ Earlier I made reference to the fact that Artlogic originated out of a project with William Kentridge where the 9 *Films* were digitized and performed.

²⁹⁹ As they described in their BMW Art Talks slot at the 2009 Joburg Art Fair.

the public is no larger than local art critics, their friends, the gallerists and South African iconic artists. The referencing and mockery of older artists by younger ones has international art historical currency, as does the strategic portraiture painting of important people by lesser known ones. The William Kentridge portrait follows this trajectory.

Their rendition of the familiar face of the artist – familiar through his own endless self-portraiture in his work and through the press – is done in charcoal (as is most of Kentridge's own work), combined with crudely applied acrylic paint. The word 'Hollywood' is faintly visible on the artist's forehead so as to suggest a similar technique of erasure and covering that Kentridge himself uses in his animations, as well as bearing the connotations of 'fame and fortune'. His eyes are red, his shirt is blue – both colours that Kentridge deploys sparingly to create accent within his charcoal animation, and in subsequent drawings such as those for *Black Box* (2006) and *The Magic Flute* (2007). And then he has a bone stuck through his neck. Behind the large head, recalling the backdrop to the Mona Lisa, is a small, far-away landscape of trees and snaking rivers. The execution is curiously ugly (as thick acrylic paint often is) yet is 'realistic' and painstaking. Avant Car Guard, in their 'talk' as part of the BMW Art Talks programme during the Fair, answered a question from the audience about how three people paint one work together, with the answer: 'Like paint-by-numbers: one does the background, the other the sky, et cetera', which explains the lack of expression or individuation in the execution.

It is William Kentridge as Frankenstein. A newspaper article quoted the gallery curator, Ashlee Maclean, as saying '[i]t is a comment on Kentridge. As an artist he churns out work in his accepted, well-known style, but the works are soulless. So he becomes kind of a monster...'.³⁰⁰ The article continues: "The painting under discussion is called "Poor man's Picasso" and, as Maclean explains, it hints at the danger of art becoming mere commodity.'³⁰¹ That it is called *Poor Man's Picasso* suggests buying a William Kentridge work, for South Africans, might be like buying a Picasso, only a lot cheaper. Alternatively, buying this portrait of the artist is like buying a 'piece' of him, but much cheaper. This makes a point similar to that by Mieke Bal (1991), in her work on

³⁰⁰ Eamon Allan, 'Art of cruel laughter.' 9 April, 2009, *Mail and Guardian*.

³⁰¹ Eamon Allan, 'Art of cruel laughter.' 9 April, 2009, *Mail and Guardian*.

Rembrandt, in which she argued that the artist and his images have become a simulacrum of himself, a trope with little substance. Avant Car Guard seems to be suggesting that Kentridge has become devoid of the meaning my synopsis above ascribed to him and his work.

The piece, furthermore is political in as far as it questions Kentridge's own politics – the endlessly winding landscape behind the sitter could be interpreted as the wealthy artist's own sprawling Houghton lawns in the old and prestigious Johannesburg suburb where he grew up and still lives. Yet a further political commentary resides in questioning the politics of art making itself, or art making within politics – Kentridge has managed to portray and comment upon apartheid in a relatively 'packaged' and easily referenced way, which, in turn, has made him rich and famous. Lastly, it is a 'new kids on the block' politics, where three white heterosexual males can claim legitimacy and thereby claim a present moment that has little time for social commentary outside their tiny world of art, theory and discourse; where art is far removed from political commentary and closer to a self-referentiality. Unlike apartheid era artists such as Sue Williamson, who depicted the lives of disenfranchised individuals, or people who for economic and historical reasons are less fortunate than the artists, Avant Car Guard's work suggests an interest in the self and the familiar. One has to wonder, however, if the 'message' substantiates the method; why not just do a sketch? Perhaps this points to the authors' own notion of 'what art is', or 'what a finished work of art looks like' thereby referencing something of the value of time spent, or the visibility of craftsmanship within a work of art that gives it 'value', of which Kentridge's own work is a towering example.

There are, furthermore, two main reasons why this work drew press attention: the first was the blunt irreverence that turns the darling of the local art world into a figure of ridicule. It is almost certain that at least the majority of the Art Fair public would know who William Kentridge was; would know what he looked like from the vast amount of press he receives; and might want to own one of his works – if not because they like it, then surely for its 'investment' value and recognisability. The other reason for standing out was that, incredibly, this was one of two portraits of the artist on view at the 2009 Art Fair. The other was by older South African artist, Paul Emsley, for which he won the very prestigious BP Portraiture Award at the National Portrait Gallery in London. Also a graphite drawing, yet here it is doubtful that it actually makes reference to Kentridge's

own work in this medium, as Emsley himself prefers to work thus, evidenced by the other 'drawn' works in identical style that hung on either side of the Kentridge portrait. Neither does the piece by Emsley allow for irony, or ridicule – it seems a genuine ode to the revered artist. It is no less than remarkable that two portraits should be exhibited of the same subject, not of a political figure, but of an artist, both possibly seeking 'recognition' through the famed figure, with one of the works 'buying into' the fame, and the other attempting to work against the idolisation of this person while still hoping for a certain amount of 'cultural capital'. The newspaper article quoted above by Eamon references his discussion with gallery curator Ashlee Maclean and points out: 'their (Avant Car Guard's) Frankenstein is less scary than another portrait of Kentridge hanging in the iArt Gallery stall. I have to agree. "Portrait of Kentridge" by Paul Emsley is a terrifying, enormous photorealistic portrait that only a stalker could love'.³⁰²

While keeping in mind that the Avant Car Guard's two portraits (that of Kentridge and Jay-Z) were produced as part of a portraiture series by the collective, depicting various other South African art world persons, it is worth contemplating the fact that at the Fair, Kentridge was hanging next to Jay-Z with the two styles of execution being so similar that they might well be read as a diptych. This, one can only assume, references the acute levels of consumability inherent in the genre of R&B and Hip-Hop, together with the affluent lifestyles led by these musical icons. The gallerist might have made the decision to hang these objects side by side. Why he may have done so becomes much clearer when considering the number of times and the different ways in which Justin Rhodes³⁰³, one of owners and director of Whatiftheworld Gallery in my interview with him, 'used' 'Kentridge' as trope or convenient shorthand for an easy consumability. In describing his overall view of the public at the Fair, he opined: 'I think you will always have a buying crowd or a public that just walks in and buys a Kentridge print or whatever it is, just buys a name or that fine arts sort of thing...'; Then, to demonstrate that his gallery has integrity in their commitment to the work of younger artists which place him under severe financial pressure, he said: 'We don't swing Kentridge prints on the side. I use him as an example because you walk around and see a lot of it'. Later in the interview, he made a point of demonstrating that he caters to a new and exciting audience: 'Most of our younger clients are not so interested in buying a Kentridge print'. In order to further

³⁰² Eamon Allan, 'Art of cruel laughter.' 9 April 2009, *Mail and Guardian*.

³⁰³ Interview, 5 April 2009, Justin Rhodes, Whatiftheworld Gallery, Cape Town, co-owner and director.

emphasise the difference he brings to the art landscape, he stated: 'I find people don't always relate to what we are showing; it is very easy to go to David Krut's booth, for example, people can understand that, (all those Kentridges), and they are selling like hot cakes'. And, finally, to explain the value he offers art buyers:

'I walk around (the Fair) and I see booths with red stickers and they have sold like ... I don't know 14 Kentridge prints this big (he demonstrated a 30cm frame) at R45,000 a pop and I come into our booth and I think if you had R45,000 to spend you could buy some amazing work and I just want to cry a little bit. But it is ok, it is ok. I just think, and I am ok with that, we will stand there all day until we are blue in the face'.³⁰⁴

Speaking to Rhodes, I was left with an urgent sense of the need to move on, of a new generation, of new subjects to explore, and of new and different buyers for contemporary South African art. For Rhodes, Avant Car Guard represents such a present. Beyond the element of the sensational, therefore, and drawing on the sense of an urgent present described by Rhodes, I would argue that Avant Car Guard, albeit banal and silly in many respects, deserves the analytical time devoted to them here. What gives their work 'value' and makes it worth 'reading' resides in the relationship between the name of their collective and the depiction of the artist. It is by paying closer attention to their name, 'Avant Car Guard', that I believe one is able to unlock some of what I referred to elsewhere in this study as a 'precariousness' of living in contemporary South Africa; a precariousness which these artists at once embrace and are able to be lighthearted about. The name of the trio is alluring and suggestive, and manages both to incorporate their fixation on the severely localised ingredients of their industry, and the movements of a larger art world and discourse. The 'car guard' is a figure of frustration in South Africa and an embodiment of what Achille Mbembe has referred to as 'superfluous citizens'³⁰⁵ created by post apartheid. South Africans parking their cars by the side of a road would be asked, upon returning to it, to pay any amount that they see fit for having their car looked after while they were away. It is an insurmountable and undeniable reminder of the impossibilities inherent in living here – the failure of politics, and, perhaps most urgently, of the randomness of power relations between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in South Africa. Yet, the absolute recurrence and frequency of encounters with car guards also demonstrates the immediacy of the 'here'. Some of what

³⁰⁴ Interview, 5 April 2009, Justin Rhodes, Whatiftheworld/Gallery, Cape Town, co owner and director.

³⁰⁵ Public lecture at the Johannesburg Workshop for Theory and Criticism, 2009.

this suggests is that this immediacy might be much more real and relevant than an international art historical discourse could ever be. It is within this reading that one might understand and give more credit to Avant Car Guard's signification of the local, as if to suggest 'let's look at what is going on here', for here, rather than exploring other and distant subject possibilities.³⁰⁶ Their irreverent language, further, points to a form of public expression in which irony and satire have taken precedence over more serious and politically correct forms of discourse. The latter forms of expression were powerfully present in much work from the apartheid era (I mentioned the work of Sue Williamson earlier) with few examples of humour or satire.³⁰⁷ Avant Car Guard's is, thus, part of a contemporary vernacular that is firmly grounded in local subject matter, within a local politics and a celebrated self-referentialism.

Dressing Up

In a related, but somewhat different way, the next object I turn to also engaged signs of the local and the contemporary. Yet, here these signs are deployed in relation to what I discussed in Chapter Two as 'demographic mobility' and the 'rise of the new black middle class'. This object exists at the margins of this social phenomenon, while digging deep into its possibilities, fantasies and constraints. We have moved away from the Whatiftheworld gallery space, traversing the outside edge of the map towards the booth of Gallery Momo. This gallery, as we have seen in preceding chapters, has been burdened with all the responsibility that attaches to being the 'only black-owned gallery'³⁰⁸ at the

³⁰⁶ It is also useful to briefly consider South Africa's relation to the international movement of the 'avant garde', which as Candice Breitz (2007) has pointed out, is profoundly political. Kathryn Smith (2007) devoted an entire volume to the question of South Africa and the avant garde in the form of an exhibition catalogue, of which only that by Colin Richards really manages to speak coherently and in a theoretically informed way about both 'South Africa' and the 'avant garde' in the same text. Richards (2007), in considering the kind of modernism that can be found in South African art history, theorises the modernist moment of the avant-garde, so infamous for its obsession with newness and the cutting edge, and speculates on the 'almost total absence of that dimension of avant-garde practice which focused on institutional critique in the dominant South African art world in the early years' (43). He also remarks that there was no trace of the 'anti-colonialism' and 'anti-institutionalism' of the Dada and Surrealist movements in these works. This, he attributes to the fact that 'the principle ethos' of the time was so structured to be in support of the state and reigning institutions. Little wonder, he concludes, that a more *formalist/expressionist* version of the avant-garde was the order of the day in South Africa (43). These versions of modernism, although being said to have a critical relation to global politics in its regions of origin, are also exportable as a style, and arrive in profoundly more 'benign' forms in other areas of the world (43) – and it is this 'far more benign' form of the avant garde that can be found in South African art history.

³⁰⁷ The most well-known examples of artists that did adopt the language of satire would be Brett Murray, Anton Kannemeyer and Conrad Botes.

³⁰⁸ When the gallery just opened, Thembinkosi Goniwe in *Painted Black* regarded what he called a 'tagging' as 'Imply(ing) that the intervention of black art professionals seems *unusual*, if not unsettling, to the affluent

Joburg Art Fair and was described in a blog as '(clearly) its interest is in the post-colonial in a more historical sense'.³⁰⁹

At the 2009 Joburg Art Fair, in Gallery Momo's booth, two figures had been positioned in the middle of the floor space. With arms outstretched, their larger-than-life forms occupied a substantial, three-dimensional space, as did the blue, Victorian outfits in which they were dressed. Stretching away from their bodies, their arms were slender and elegant – perhaps searching or dancing or reaching? – rendering the two figures deeply intriguing, yet quiet. Adding to the sense of a demanding presence was the fact that they had been raised on a short, 15-cm-high plinth, and thereby stood at least 2 m tall. They were so large, in fact, that the viewing necessarily incorporated a sense of one's own presence and a consciousness of the space between object and viewer. Entitled *Sophie* (2009), these two highly realistic fiberglass representations of female figures was by young, South African artist, Mary Sibande. They wore big billowy dresses in Victorian style adapted with the South African domestic servant trimmings of the apron and kop-doek.³¹⁰ Both women were black and while their bodies were turned to face each other (albeit somewhat askance), their eyes did not meet, but seemed cast down, or closed. The faces had been carefully crafted in fine detail; the features, it seemed, resembled those of the artist, an observation confirmed by the text available on the work which stated that she had cast her own face and upper body as well as her arms and hands to achieve an acute realism. This visual information, only visible on close inspection, worked in contradistinction to the effect of abstraction achieved by the uniform blackness of the skin, and the large, almost flat-seeming areas of blue, together with the linearity of the white trimmings to the dresses. These elements created for me a viewing experience that was, in the first instance, about blue-ness which brought to the art historical mind, Yves Klein's patented colour blue – as well as his naked women covered in blue paint; Gerhard Richter's blue paintings for BMW and Anish Kapoor's organic blue shapes; my mind also conjured up the many works from what has been termed Picasso's *Blue Period* between 1900 and 1904.

white fraternity which has historically colonized and continues to dominate the cultural field' (*Art South Africa* Vol 2, Issue 1, Spring 2003: 43). It is arguable whether 'white' professionals were unsettled by this occurrence as much as it is noteworthy that six years later the gallery is still 'tagged' in this way.

³⁰⁹ Brendan Grey, 'To be fair – Mixed Feelings.' 17 March, 2008, *Art South Africa online*.

³¹⁰ Head scarf

It has been suggested that the blue fabric of *Sophie's* dress should be recognisable to South Africans as the cheap local fabric out of which domestic servant uniforms are made.³¹¹ But I was also reminded of the fact that my school uniform was the same colour blue - it was then called 'royal blue' – and was crafted from a similar fabric. These two characteristics brought the previously mentioned abstraction sharply into the realm of the socio-political, since both the colour and the fabric, locally, have institutional connotations. Considering the coding of the figure of the servant, Mary Corrigan, whom I have quoted before as a South African journalist and art writer, states in direct reference to Sibande's work: 'Overexploited and positioned within the heart of white South Africa, domestic workers have been the ultimate victims of a skewed social and political system, thus, their occupation embodies the vexed racial dynamics in this country'. Sibande's figures were hardly menacing in the manner of the Medusa discussed by Bal (2006) as a woman 'who cannot kill' (289); yet they were not without a menacing discomfort. As their outstretched arms intruded upon the physical space of the viewer, the figure of the domestic worker forced itself into the recesses of the South African mind, pointing to and reminding us of the scores of white South Africans brought up by live-in domestic workers. Here I was reminded of Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness* – the image of the growing, white farmer's son from the Free State being carried around on the back of the young Maria. I was also reminded of the powerful scene in *Sarafina*,³¹² in which Leleti Khumalo visits her mother in the 'white suburb' where she works as a live-in domestic servant. Sarafina causes havoc in the house, throwing pillows around in an attempt to master the environment and free her mother of her slavery; yet the viewer knows that she is only making more work for her mother, the servant.

Sibande's too, she reminds in her artists statement on the gallery website, is a narrative about mothers and daughters. For her, the figure of the domestic worker is her own mother and her own grandmother, and so her artist's impression is an act of defiance and liberation, where she can *choose* to don the dress with all its socio-political burdens. Sibande is a young artist, having very recently graduated from 'art school' and forming part of a small group of emerging black artists. For her it is a celebration and an assertion of not having to wear the dress herself unless she chooses to do so. In this way, the

³¹¹ <http://corrigan.blogspot.com/2009/08/mary-sibande-domestic-fantasy.html>; Percy Mabandu, July 31, 2009, *Ambition made Flesh*. <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-07-31-ambition-made-flesh>

³¹² South African musical by Mbongeni Ngema from 1988, which was later, turned into a film by Darrel Roodt in 1992.

women could further be read as mannequins parading an outfit: a hybrid between a dress of luxury and glamour, Cinderella-style, and that of the kneeling, bending, scrubbing and ironing domestic help. Reflecting now on the costume donned by these figures, Mary Corrigan writes on her blog: 'With a bustle, pleating, organza sleeves, layers of petticoats and rouching, the domestic worker uniform is transformed from a functional everyday item into a pseudo-Victorian dress suited only to a sedentary life. In such a get-up all menial tasks would be impossible. So while her outfit fixes her in a position of servitude it can, with adaptations, precipitate her liberation'.³¹³ As Corrigan suggests, the patterning of the dresses were opulent and luxurious, and so encode connotations with the Enlightenment, colonialism and slavery in the sign of the Victorian. In viewing these figures, then, we were transported between historical times: that of the Victorian era, and that of our own. But Sibande tells us in her artist's statement that these objects are not only about moving between times, but about a linear temporal trajectory that speaks of progress; a moving forward. Percy Mabandu reviewed Sibande's solo show after the Joburg Art Fair in July 2009. After quoting Sibande as saying 'Sophie is me', he unpacks this move forward as follows: 'She is enacting a long-standing family dream to be more than domestic workers. She captures the history of this dream by echoing her great-grandmother in the piece, *Sophie-Elsie*, based on the first domestic worker in the family line. *Sophie-Merica* is inspired by her grandmother, the second maid in the family line, and is dressed in a blue gown with a white apron to symbolise her social station as a maid. The third-generation domestic worker in her family was Velucia, Sibande's mother. Sophie-Velucia broke the domestic worker cycle in the family line by becoming a hair stylist'³¹⁴.

We are also told in the artist's press statement, although this was not at all apparent to me in the representation itself, that a fantasy was being played out; a fantasy that has to do with donning a costume or a suit, (like a 'superman's suit'), and being free to enter into a persona that transports the wearer/artist to another place: 'When Sophie puts on her maid's uniform, the simple pattern becomes this imaginative Victorian dress that turns into a superhero's outfit which allows her the freedom to express her imagination. Through her aspirations, Sophie has gained the desire to imagine and travel to non-real spaces and times ... a form of escape from the real world'.³¹⁵ The 'dreaming' of the now-

³¹³ <http://corrigan.blogspot.com/2009/08/mary-sibande-domestic-fantasy.html>

³¹⁴ <http://corrigan.blogspot.com/2009/08/mary-sibande-domestic-fantasy.html>

³¹⁵ Artist statement on gallery website.

woman Sophie-that-is-Sibande is located within the girl fantasy of the Victorian ball gown – still preferred by many prospective beauty queens in beauty pageants. I am, however, perplexed by the connotations of fantasy pinned to the Victorian dress with all its colonial baggage. For me, the Victorian costume does the work of signalling and evoking the historical trajectory of slavery, rigid class structures and oppression (including the general oppression of women) in a manner similar to the South African maid's uniform, yet at the same time hyperbolised. This aspect furthermore seems to reference the well-known work of British artist, Yinka Shonibare, in ways that might be too derivative should the connotations of the 'Victorian' be taken as primary. Shonibare, for at least a decade now, has been creating works in African cloth – sometimes these have been wall-mounted pieces, but sometimes also life-size figures in suspended animation similar to these figures of Sibande. In the work of Shonibare, the Victorian referencing is foremost and highly integrated into the coding system of the work and across his oeuvre. Yet, it seems, in these works by Sibande this reference sits somehow on the surface as a taken for granted trope. My reading of the work, informed by some of Sibande's other works, such as *In her Closet – White Dress* (2007) and *In her Closet – Red Shoes* (2007), suggests, rather, that the dresses should be seen in the first instance as the dresses of fairies, princesses and beauty queens, and only secondly as Victorian. It is this connotation, to my mind, that unlocks the art work's powerful framing of 'demographic mobility'. The artwork thus, speaks, in the way discussed above, at once, of a generational move from the servant to educated middle-classness of the art student, thereby illustrating a very direct social mobility, yet, at the same time, also signals personal aspirations of beauty, glamour and the suburban leisure activities of shopping malls and matric farewells.

This work exists as part of a growing 'series' of art objects at the Fair that depicted new and unexplored subject positions of the black body and black subjectivities in South Africa. Such works include Themba Shibase's portraits of black leaders, such as *Whose Heritage* (2008), Jodi Bieber's photograph *Babalwa* (2008) and Lawrence Lemaoana, *The One* (2006).

Painting with Plastic

Keeping the connotations of 'blackness' and 'class' in mind in relation to new post-apartheid subject identities, we move now to the Seippel Gallery, where a radically different black subjecthood was being portrayed. The director of the gallery, Ralph Seippel³¹⁶, as mentioned in the first walk through, took the decision to display in a 100-sq.m space ten two-dimensional, rectangular works by one artist, Mbongheni Buthelezi, only. The effect of this curatorial move was to alter the visual faculty once inside the space, because the works, all executed in the same style, created their own visual world. The space was filled with multi-coloured dots, like an exaggerated pointillism. One could discern the faces of people, a house, musical instruments, but their forms had been exploded into millions of tiny pieces of colour. Beyond the mere fact of seeing so many of these works at once, it was also the scale and repetition of technique that facilitated this theatricality. Curiosity compelled one to go closer, to move into the space of the object and to inspect the surface, driven by a technical attraction (how did he do it?), and drawn in magpie fashion to the smartie-like opulence of it. It was at close range that one could start to identify the surface texture as that of layers of molten plastic. Standing up close like that, there was no image, just surface, meaning that the technique was indeed that of pointillism where the eye rather than the artist's hand (the brush) mixes primary colours into secondary ones and secondary into tertiary.

Standing back again, allowing the 'picture' to take shape, the impression was one of the image being held together for a mere moment by the fragments from which it had been constituted, as if the chaos of movement suggested by the tiny collaged bits of plastic could morph into other spectral shapes to tell other stories of other people and other places. However, this magic stopped once you had retreated sufficiently for the image to stabilise, and force itself onto the retina and the consciousness. The movement of particles was still there as the eye roved the surface, but the image itself was stubbornly one dimensional, both in execution and in content, leaving little room for the wealth of complexity suggested by the molten surface. It was a picture of a girl, reading 'with a candle' as the title explained – an image, a picture, devoid of the multiple levels of discursivity and referentiality that viewers of contemporary art had come to demand.

³¹⁶ Interview, 23 March 2009, Ralf Seippel, Director: Seippel Gallery. Johannesburg, Cologne.

What does this mean? Firstly, it suggests that the mind that is familiar with art history expects 'more' of works of art than what this image of the girl reading by candle light offers for de-coding. It suggests that the world of contemporary art requires another dimension beyond the merely pictorial, which this work did not offer. Secondly, it denotes an expectation of works of art to present a world to the viewer that had been analysed in a way that is sufficiently complex, and that here, the girl reading by candle light offers too trite a message. It seems to be a 'message' about social upliftment and the youth managing 'against all odds' to better their circumstances. Perhaps that explains why the *Daily Art Heat* newspaper named this as one of the worst works at the Fair. Or perhaps it had to do with the German gallerist insisting that it is a work 'about' 'education', which, in turn, forces the work into socio-political commentary on the South African context. The notion of holding up the image of a child, so devoted to reading that it is done by candle light, as exemplary of positive changes in South Africa, strikes me as under-theorised and naive.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned in Chapter One, this was the work most often named and remembered by the 2009 set of survey respondents as that which they 'most liked about the Art Fair'. More than one survey respondent referred to the works as 'plastic on plastic', and others mentioned the name of the artist as their 'favourite' (the mentioning of actual titles of art works or artists names were, on the whole, very rare in the survey questionnaires). What this suggests is a discordance between my own first impression and that of the majority of the survey respondents, which I would argue, resides in two distinct facts around local art appreciation and history of art: the first has to do with a fascination with craft, craftsmanship and technique, and second, that it represents one of the few instances, at the Art Fair, of an aesthetic trajectory that has a specific local history and reflects a local circumstance.

My fieldwork registered that craftsmanship, by which I mean the demonstration of technique and time spent, is a highly valued attribute in the appreciation of South African contemporary art, not just by buyers of art, but also by artists themselves. Examples of this kind of work would be that by Willem Boshoff, Wim Botha, William Kentridge and Colin Richards. In Chapter One, I quoted gallerist Warren Siebrits³¹⁷ as saying that, in fact, the 'traces' of hand-work in art is one of his selection criteria for working with an

³¹⁷ Interview, 25 March 2009, Warren Siebrits, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary, Johannesburg, co-owner and director.

artist. Colin Richards³¹⁸ suggested in our interview that ‘when you look at my work, you will see the efforts of the hand, the efforts of labour, the efforts of the labouring body, but my view is that that is linked to my efforts in the intellectual process’ (See Roberts, 2007, for a discussion of this as international phenomenon). Richards went on to admit: ‘I think people buy my work unfortunately for quite reactionary reasons, because of the labour; they think this person is skilled, they still use their hands’. This gestures towards, but shouldn’t be conflated with, debates around the relationship between art and craft, which are highly topical in South Africa. It is a debate that aims to see a continuity between craft work, in South Africa often made for the tourist market and used in government rhetoric as an avenue for social and economic upliftment, and contemporary art. Within the larger context of South African ‘creativity’ the art-craft debate rages strongly in government corridors to the exasperation of many contemporary artists who would rather not be associated with what they often see as a ‘patronising’ creativity.

The second reason for the popularity of Buthelezi’s work with the Art Fair audience regards subject matter. Much has been said thus far about change and newness within both the South African society and its art production; yet there is much that hasn’t changed and many that do not agree that it is time to ‘move on’ to new subject matter and new forms of expression. Casting the lens wider to include the broader society, it is clear that post-apartheid is characterised as much by change as by the lack thereof. During the apartheid years and those of the ‘struggle’, black artists were for the most part ‘workshop trained’ as they did not have access to tertiary art education. Often called the ‘architect of apartheid’, Hendrik Verwoerd famously stated that it would be to no avail to educate the African in things the aims of which were European. These strictures on education led to ‘The State of Art in South Africa’ conference in Cape Town, 1979, where mostly white artists, among them Sue Williamson and Penny Siopis, pledged not to exhibit their work abroad in representation of South Africa until ‘all state-funded art institutions were open to black as well as white students’ (Williamson, 2004: 15). An influential and far-reaching art workshop and community-art tradition spontaneously developed to compensate for the lack of art education to black citizens. It might be argued that the workshop tradition produced both a unique aesthetic and a unique audience. This audience spanned a wide spectrum from such revered art collectors and

³¹⁸ Interview, 15 August 2008, Colin Richards, Practicing South African artist and professor at the Wits School of Arts.

patrons of the Bagfactory, Robert Loder³¹⁹ to what one of my respondents in our interview referred to as work produced primarily for a 'white', guilt-ridden market (Verstraete, 1989: 167–9). The respondent was, however, speaking specifically about what was called 'township art'³²⁰, some of which overlaps with the 'workshop tradition'. The buying of this kind of art by tourists and wealthy white citizens is a phenomenon often mentioned in my fieldwork as politically problematic and a hindrance to the creation of an 'educated' buying public as well as a strong contemporary art movement locally.

Furthermore, while the restrictions on access to tertiary institutions have certainly been done away with, there is still a mere trickle of black students into fine arts schools compared to other disciplines, which might be attributable to social pressures or prejudices against choosing art as a career.³²¹ This fact, as many have pointed out, has effects on content, point of view and voice within the larger art world, which, in turn, might have had the effect that 'township art' has for the most part, existed outside of an excepted contemporary canon, regardless of having a wide commercial following.³²² In the volume, *Images of Man Contemporary South African Black art and Artists*, the author, De Jager (1992) presents a vast array of different works that went under such a heading and so manages to show that 'township art' was a varied practice that took very different forms. He opines that it was the quality of a life lived in extreme proximity to one's neighbours prescribed by the township that makes what is broadly termed 'township art' a style that is on the whole 'expressive': 'By expressing what is happening in the townships they capture, objectify and reflect values, attitudes and collective perceptions' (4), thus, showing what life is like for those South Africans forced to live in those conditions. De Jager goes on to make generalising statements about the manner in which these works express an 'African world-view and philosophy, such as being anthropocentric and ontologically oriented' as well as bearing a 'deep humanism' (4). These latter remarks, in turn, demonstrate the dangers and pitfalls of looking at this kind

³¹⁹ Loder was one of the founders, alongside Sam Nhlengethwa, of the Bag Factory as well as the Triangle Workshops. His private collection has been shown internationally, a local example was *Transitions* (2005) curated by Barbary Murray, at the Africa Centre.

³²⁰ This term might seem politically problematic to those familiar with its surrounding debates, yet were without fail in my interviews, used to describe a particular way of making art.

³²¹ Annabel Lebethe in our interview made it clear that societal pressure against crafting a career in the creative industries hinders the general transformation of the sector.

³²² This was most provocatively explored in the documentary by Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee (2003) titled, *The Luggage is Still Labeled: Blackness in South African Art*. See, however, for a critique Mario Pisarro's *Decolonise the Mind in Art South Africa* Vol 2, Issue 2, Summer 2003: 37.

of art as 'whole' and as representational of a collective, and the ease with which a patronising tone enters into the analytical language. Gavin Young (1988) also endeavoured to bring together and theorise 'township art' in his *Art of the South African Townships*. Of this particular volume, Charles Pike (1989) is of the opinion that that the book and the works of art cannot be understood outside of the politics and cultural expressions of the particular apartheid South African circumstance. It is perhaps with this background in mind that one should enter into a reading, an interpretation, of this third object, the work of Buthelezi. It is also the work of critics who write about art objects in post-apartheid to probe what might be read as a patronising voice and work through some of the discomforts that result from it. What this object 'does' is to bring to mind and reference the socio-political through its style, manner and subject matter in ways very recognisable within the South African context, but it does not seem to 'comment' on it in the way the gallerist and the catalogue caption suggests³²³.

Perhaps it is best, then, to ignore the German gallerist's insights into the works, which depicts the artwork as as dealing with 'education', or, in the case of a work depicting a man drinking water, 'about' 'water as life force to South Africa', which he elaborated on in our interview, and I overheard him saying to interested visitors. Furthermore, whilst the gallerist calls it a 'new way of painting', the only feature resembling painting would be the format: rectangular and two dimensional. It might be more accurate to describe the technique as a bricolaged drawing in colour. Yes, it resembles a Jackson Pollock drip painting, but Pollock's works arrests a tension between mad abandon where paint is hurled at the canvas and tight control of surface through a maze of abstract layering – they are fundamentally abstract; fundamental to both form and concept. Buthelezi's works are concerned with image and depiction, and so thrust narrative at the viewer in a way that undoes much of the chaos and movement achieved by the surface. Furthermore, it is striking that all the works are done in exactly the same way (a technique Buthelezi broke down into several identical stages in his BMW Art Talk lecture) and so there seems almost no dialogue between 'technique', material and subject matter or 'image'.³²⁴

³²³ For a more recent research on art produced during the time here referenced as 'the workshop tradition' see Carman, J., 2010.

³²⁴ Reference was also made by the gallerist to the act of crafting art from recycled material, or 'trash'. Here Buthelezi belongs to an idiosyncratic form or genre very prominent in *Africa Remix* and often commented upon in relation to that exhibition, as well as the works of El Anatsui that was hanging in the October Gallery. Anatsui also uses what is sometimes called 'trash', other times 'recycled material', in the form of

The celebration of ‘having discovered’ a new technique, as elaborated by the gallerist and intimated in the Art Fair catalogue, coupled with the one-dimensionality of the socio-political ‘concept’, I would argue, is stultifying to the combination of surface and expression of what might better be read as an ‘everyday’. This artist works in the mode of expressing an everyday which would surround one in the township in much the same way that the previously mentioned writers on ‘township art’ remarked other works within the genre do. When considered alongside the other works in the Seippel booth, all by Buthelezi, it becomes clear that he depicts the faces of his friends, the houses in the place he grew up, and street scenes from this environment. I personally enjoy the moment of ambiguity achieved when the eye and the mind are caught midway between the disorder of disparate bits of plastic and a picture – a state best achieved by this specific work, *Child reading with a Candle* (2007). I am, thus, suggesting a ‘reading’ that is suspended in the physical distance between the moments when the dots take shape and when the narrative advances, in order to allow the image of a girl reading by candlelight to have a life beyond what might seem like a very blunt version of the socio-political. However, I am not convinced that this is the ongoing intention with these works. It would seem that the surface and the subject matter exist on different planes, and the reading I take from it might not be the one primarily intended by the artist. Seen this way, it could be argued that, for the artist, *Child Reading with a Candle*, as much as all the other works in that booth, were perhaps pictures in the first instance and socio-political commentary (as suggested by the gallerist), or ‘optical playfulness’ (as suggested by me) only in the second instance.

Photographing the Contemporary African and African Contemporary Photography

Moving now to a more engaged and complex relationship between art and the socio-political, the next three objects will be discussed in relation to and in dialogue with each other. The discussion is centred on two key conceptual themes. It focuses both on the medium of photography and the representation of ‘the other’, more usefully considered

pressed tin from the tops of bottles to construct large and elaborate ‘cloths’. Readings of Anatsui’s work invariably makes reference to this unique material that he uses as well as the way in which the material references the notion of the recycled object as ‘African’ material.

as the site of 'difference'. Here the lens deployed for the analysis differs from the treatment of the three art objects discussed so far, where familiarity with the subject matter was key to the analysis. In this case, each of the three objects consists of a body of photographic work rather than a single artwork.

The first body of objects considered here is Pieter Hugo's collection entitled *Nollywood* (2008). These were large-scale, square-format images of bizarrely theatrical figures, positioned in defamiliarising settings. In one of the photographs, a big, very dark man has been fitted with two sets of 'devil' horns. It is a black man painted to be even darker with a strange texture applied to his skin; his hands are resting on his knees to display long nails; he is also wearing red contact lenses; yet casually shares a bench with a traditionally dressed Nigerian woman, both seeking the viewer beyond the lens by staring straight out of the picture plane (*Chris Nkulo and Patience Umeh. Enugu, Nigeria, 2008*). The title of the series explains that these are actors for Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry.

The second body of work described below is Zander Blom's *Travels of Bad* (2009), consisting of a large number (17 in total) of medium-scale photographic prints. These were intensely colourful depictions of idiosyncratic scenes containing musical instruments, tubular-shaped objects, large areas of painted colour fields and paraphernalia of music- and art making. It is a series of individuated photographs, each carefully constructed within the same 'real' three-dimensional space: a corner of a room.

In the third instance I bring to the conversation Zanele Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* series (2007). Also in square format, each work (a total of five) depicted the same black trans-gendered figure. In each photograph the character is dressed up for different occasions; sometimes in an urban, sometimes a rural-looking setting, with the figure remaining the main focal point.

Linking and connecting these three bodies of objects is photography itself – a medium that renders people and places into subjects. Yet, crucial to making sense of this connection, is the fact that this is photography set within and *of* Africa, with African subjects. Within this register, all these works engage subject-subject-object relations between artist, scene or figure photographed, and the picture plane itself. By 'subject-subject-object', I mean the subject in the frame, the subjectivity of the artist, the subject

viewing them and the object of photography. These are all highly constructed images, which, true to the 'art' photograph emphasise the 'creating' of a picture, over the 'taking' of it (Garlick, 2002; 300). The subject positions explored by these three artists, I argue, point to different ways of engaging 'each other', 'the stranger', and 'ourselves'. In this context, the discussion refers back to some points raised in Chapter Three under examinations of 'Africa' at the Art Fair, here considered to manifest in some of the most dynamic, immediate and relevant ways.

When considering photography in general, key concepts to bear in mind would be the special form of agency – explored, amongst others, by W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) – that resides in the photographed image. In *What do Pictures Want*, Mitchell refers to Roland Barthes in order to explain the power invested in the photograph. He traces Barthes' own realisation of this power from initially believing that 'semiotics ... would conquer the image's resistance to meaning' until he was later confronted by a photograph of his own mother, which made him 'waver in his belief that critique would overcome the magic of the image' (9). The example of Barthes' personal 'realisation' says something of the distance or closeness between the viewing subject, the object of the image, and the many things that happen in the space between, depending as much on what the viewer brings to the event as it does on the photographic drama itself. The three works under discussion here arrest a similar attention, sometimes through the uncannily familiar and other times through the exotically different. Further key concepts relating to the 'reading' of photographs include: the photograph's ties to the language of 'documenting' and substantiation of 'the veracity' of experiences (Firstenberg, 2001: 175); the manner in which the act of photography has historically been considered a 'product of unmediated and objective processes' (Firstenberg, 2001; Sontag, 1977: 68); Susan Sontag's (1977) famous theory of the violence in 'capturing' of things and people by photographs (7), as well as the long drawn-out opposition to 'high art'. Within this structure, photography of Africa, specifically, occupies a complicated and well-theorised area.

Snap Judgements, an exhibition held in 2001, curated by Okwui Enwezor, is arguably the most tightly theorised, visual exploration of Africa's relation to photography, and the vision of Africa portrayed in photographs. Enwezor is principally concerned with exposing and dislodging the place of 'Africa' within a Western paradigm. This, for him, includes troubling the notion of the 'incredibly grim view of the world Africans occupy'

constructed by news, media and art imagery (Enwezor, 2006: 11). He positions his analyses against prevailing 'afropessimism' that in one of its registers refuses to see 'anything good' ever coming out of Africa, as it is a place of misery and despair. This, for him, creates a temporal, if not merely physical chasm between how the Western world perceives their relationality to Africa – in a move that denies any form of coevalence. Enwezor goes on to explain that 'no other landscape has had a more problematic association with the photographic medium: its apparatuses, various industries, orders of knowledge, and hierarchies of power' (13). He uses the example of the difference in 'framing' of 'the African' in images used in African news and media and those published and displayed in the West to explain how colonial forms of depicting the African (still very prevalent today and described as 'corrosive' to the African body) could be countered by a postcolonial, and, hence, alternative form of looking and showing.

In contrast to a 'Western' representation, he argues, contemporary African art photography 'extend and reroute more traditional forms to document people's conceptions of themselves and their place in society' (28). The argument pursued by Enwezor is one which crafts a very clear distinction between modes of representing and imaging used in Africa and those practiced in the West, as well as between modes of viewing. While I agree with the broad strokes of such an argument and understand the urgency inherent in making it, I believe the three bodies of work under discussion here bring a nuance to such a binary. Presenting a similar, if perhaps more fractured, lens on the subject of photography of what he calls 'the other', Pinney (2003) points out that often Africans themselves are interested in nostalgic and violent representations of themselves favoured by and created by the West (3). As I mentioned before, the Art Fair throws up questions of the 'exotic' and the 'essential' in the 'African' through its thematic, and so simultaneously indulges in and 'exposes' such tropes, yet remains unclear and ambivalent as to its own stand on the debates.

Pieter Hugo's photographs of Nigerians insert themselves forcefully into debates around representations of Africa in photography. At the 2009 Joburg Art Fair, the two works displayed by the Michael Stevenson Gallery from this series, were referred to as instances of 'exotic Africa', 'scary black Nollywood Beezlebub looking guys'³²⁵ by a journalist for the *Daily Art Heat*. Each photograph had been crafted around a character in full costume

³²⁵ Rose Kotze, 'Is that a political question?', 5 April, 2009, *Daily Art Heat*.

for the playing of their role as demon, lover, businessman, guard, and others I wouldn't know how to name, in a Nollywood film. The characters had been positioned in streets, or what seemed like the backstreets, or empty spaces of the city. Looking at the figures, one got the impression of a cast resting between performances, rather than posing for the camera. However, each character/subject looks straight at the photographer/viewer in a manner characteristic of Hugo's entire oeuvre, thereby giving the photograph a staged-ness. The dissonance between 'resting actor' and 'street scene', becomes highly charged, and is imbued with further tension, predominantly as a result of the hyperbolic, extreme nature of the costumes and make up, rendering the characters truly unfamiliar and 'other-worldly'.

Part of what is at stake here undeniably relates to what Enwezor describes as '(t)he manner in which photography frames the African body (and) makes the body appear peculiarly defamiliarised, if not altogether monstrous' (2001: 12). Many of the figures in Hugo's works are 'made up' to possess 'animality', or to look 'beastial'. Richards (2008) uses the writing of Achille Mbembe to explore the connections that link 'violence', art and the post-apartheid: 'Mbembe's argument (is) that there is a level of discourse on Africa that is "almost always deployed in the framework (or in the fringe) of a meta-text about the animal ... about the beast"' (266). Writing of the artist Brett Bailey who has created many performance, theatre and image pieces exploring a nascent 'animality' in 'Africa' in a way that is acutely tuned into the politics of his representations, Ashraf Jamal (2003) explains that many 'readers' of his work have seen it as 'a kind of anthropological tourism; reckless, baseless, gross and gratuitous' especially so 'by those who assume a moral high ground' (50).³²⁶ Jamal questions this form of judgment by evoking the political inherent in the body of work that Bailey has produced – he emphasises what is to be gained by working squarely in the midst of these troubling representational frameworks with a consciousness of what is being done, thereby directly confronting the trope of the animal in Africa. In short, Jamal gives Bailey a certain 'benefit of the doubt' regardless of the fact that the notion of the 'anthropological' or perhaps ethnographic 'tourism' creates a form of surface varnish that sometimes resists the more forgiving readings of the work that he engages in. A similar process is at work in the *Nollywood* images.

³²⁶ Asraf Jamal, *Art South Africa*, Vol 2, Issue 1, Spring 2003.

In many ways Hugo's work, in its outrageousness, laughs in the face of sensitivities described by Enwezor and Richards. Yet, it would seem that it is the characters in the photographs that hold the power over their reading. They are defiantly strange within what Jyoti Mistry (2009) termed a 'vocabulary of the visceral' (50). Mistry asks, 'How do we write of an African practice, particularly an art practice, that is neither essentialist of an entire continent, nor drawing only from the obvious historical places of a colonial past, and that is, finally, more reflective of the confluences of socio-political and cultural factors informed by access to global trends?' (2009: 50) Hugo's images of Nollywood actors and actresses exist for me at the meeting point described by Mistry. This is achieved through a thoroughly indigenised subject matter, which bears clear traces of 'global trends', and is depicted without being too squeamish to probe at the edges of the theories of representation. It speaks of 'Nigerianness' in a way so confident and expressive through these figures of myth and fantasy, that it renders the viewer, in the words of the press statement for these work, 'wondering whether our perceptions of the real world are indeed real' as 'the boundaries between documentary and fiction become very fluid'.³²⁷ The press statement continues succinctly to argue that 'the tableaux of the series confront us with a verisimilar world: the situations are clearly surreal, although they could be real on a set; furthermore, they are rooted in the local symbolic imaginary'. We are, thus, positioned at the limits of the 'documentary' mode where what is being 'documented' is the unreal and the imaginary, a fiction that exists within the world 'documented' which in many ways remain opaque to both the artist and the viewer.

Furthermore, it is important to consider what Nollywood itself 'stands for' in discourses of African creative practice. The press statement on the gallery website frames this world as follows:

In the Nollywood series, Hugo explores the multilayered reality of the Nigerian film industry. Nollywood is the third largest film industry in the world, releasing between 500 and 1000 movies each year. It produces movies on its own terms, telling stories that appeal to and reflect the lives of its public: it is a rare instance of self-representation on such a scale in Africa. The continent has a rich tradition of story-telling that has been expressed abundantly through oral and written fiction, but has never been conveyed through the popular media before. Stars are local actors; plots confront the public with familiar situations of romance, comedy, witchcraft, bribery, prostitution. The narrative is overdramatic, deprived of

³²⁷ http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/hugo/nollywood_index.htm

happy endings, tragic. The aesthetic is loud, violent, excessive; nothing is said, everything is shouted.

While the connotations of 'loudness' and hyperbole described in the press statement are evocative of re-readings of creative practice in Africa, it also expresses the limits of the work. There is a vibrant industry of science fiction, horror and the 'other-worldly' (I am thinking here specifically of the films of Tim Burton) in other parts of the world, and it is worth asking whether Hugo's images of what really is a very similar 'world' is not more intriguing for being African. It might well not display what Shaka (2004), in his consideration of African film practice, calls 'creative grafting' and 'the hybridity that underlies modern African identity'(8), offering rather a mere version of a filmic genre staged so as to express 'hybridity' by Hugo. It is useful to keep in mind that Nollywood uses the props of the 'other-worldly' as much as it does those of high drama and the soap opera.

Considering now the subjectivity of the artist, some key features should be observed to understand better something of himself in relation to his subject matter. In explanation of these images, the gallery website presented some accompanying text to the images. This text was produced in the register of the anecdotal. First, it explained the *process* whereby the artist first encountered these subjects, then it plotted a meeting, and then the staging of the works as was seen. It is a register that highlights the un-known terrain in which Hugo works, evocative of travel photography. Furthermore, this 'tactic' imbues the 'reading' with a sympathy towards the photographer:

In his travels through West Africa, Hugo became increasingly intrigued by this hyperactive industry, in constant production. He compiled a list of the iconic images and scenes that had attracted his attention, and imagined photographing in these settings. Initial attempts to photograph on actual film sets however failed, in Hugo's mind, to capture the intensity of the situations. He decided to take his interpretation of these staged realities into another realm by assembling a team of actors and assistants. He asked them to recreate the stereotypical myths and symbols that characterise Nollywood productions, reproducing the dynamic of movie sets.³²⁸

This body of work is, thus, crucially, not studio photography, but characters photographed against, and inside of, 'Nigeria': its streets, benches, taxi ranks, et cetera, which, as a device, both highlights the bizarre otherness of the world that is Nigeria (yet,

³²⁸ http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/hugo/nollywood_index.htm

it is difficult to accept that the whole of Nigeria is as dilapidated as Hugo chooses to portray it) while creating a dissonance between the 'costume' and the 'real', the everyday. The incorporation of the world outside of the 'set', highlights the element of travel, of having to go to another place far away, and so the impulse of 'travelling to the exotic' so exemplary of certain aspects of the Enlightenment and modernity is inscribed in this series (Garlick, 2002: 289). Hugo himself seems to hold on to this feature of documentary and colonial photography by not photographing 'on set' as described in the press statement (Garlick, 2002: 294). This is revealing of the artist's subject position as 'traveller' in search of the strange and the unfamiliar.

Hugo's and other, notably male, photographers such as Guy Tillim's works are frequently exhibited abroad and have become renowned for their 'brave' depictions of Africa (see Tillim's Congo series tracking the election ceremony, *Congo Democratic*, 2006). Both are often described as outrageous for their subject matter, and credited with existing at the cusp of documentary photography and contemporary art photography. Amongst this I would include Hugo's work on South Africa in *Messina/Musina*, his *Hyena-Men* series and Roger Ballen's photographs of poverty-stricken white South Africans. All these works explore and depict a reality that is clearly far removed from that of the artist and so focuses acute attention on a form of 'content display', thereby existing in close proximity to an expositiveness that has come under heavy criticism in the realm of documentary film making.

Reading vertically across my interview data, a certain mood of resentment and fatigue with this mode of documentary representation surfaces, not as central, but as if from a nearby margin. It is in the form of side remarks such as: 'I am so tired of this imagery, I mean the one relationship we do have to the continent, is endless images of abject Africans from Pieter Hugo and Guy Hugo, and I am sure there are a few other Tillims';³²⁹ 'I am so tired of inbred boere looking at you with ears down here and dribbling things with holding this old dog and looking very sad because they are South Africans, I am so tired of it, I am becoming tired of Negroid people with hyenas rapidly'.³³⁰ Others allow for a more interpretive scope, as David Brodie demonstrates: 'Depending whether you are arguing for or against (Hugo's) work: either Pieter is making

³²⁹ Interview, 11 August 2008, Clive van den Berg, Practicing South African artist.

³³⁰ Interview, 14 August 2008, Mark Read, Owner and director of Everard Read galleries Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Africa monstrous, or Pieter is making a superbly brilliant comment about how photography has made Africa monstrous. But these are still issues that are about the photographic medium and about the relation between the photographer and the subject. It is the documentary mode of photography which is the overarching, valid photographic mode of South Africa'.³³¹ This latter point about 'validity' and 'the real' is one that had been touched on in the introduction to this Part in relation to Alex Dodd's comments about the viewing of the 'real politic ... through a very clear lens' prevalent in South Africa. However, with the images under discussion here, I would argue, against the expressions of fatigue quoted above, that Hugo's lens is far more oblique and obscure, and manages to create a world that is multifaceted and engaging in a way that evokes the surreal.

Zander Blom's work enters into dialogue with that of Hugo's at the level of the 'fatigue' expressed by some of my interviewees around expressing African and South African subjects as grotesque or exotic. The most notable connection between the body of work just discussed and that by Blom, is the concept of 'travel' which Blom prominently inserts in the title, *Travels of Bad* (2009). Christopher Pinney (2003) has elaborated a theory in which he is concerned to understand the different processes at work between what he refers to as 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' photographic practices. Pinney assumes that the relation between 'early photography and European travel' is not an 'accident' in which 'what might be termed "colonial" schemata positioned people and objects deep within chronotopic certainties as they sought stable identities in places from which they could not escape' (203). Furthermore, he explains: 'earlier practice privileges the time/space of photographic exposure and links these creational moments to the photographer's and the photographic subject's movements through time and space' (204). He is, thus, engaging two processes he believes to be at work to construct a theory around seeing and, to use Sontag's inflection on the word, capturing, within colonial picture taking. The first has to do with placing subjects within stable categories as they were presented in photographs, a concern over classification and ordering at work within the Enlightenment of which Breckenridge has also written (1989). The other process is that of movement through time and space, where the photographer moves from his country to that of another in order to 'be there' where he takes the photograph. He then moves back to his country, but the 'subject' of the photograph stays within those

³³¹ Interview, 24 April 2008, David Brodie, Director of Brodie/Stevenson Gallery.

‘captured’ time/space coordinates (here making a similar point to Enwezor around coavelence).

What Pinney is describing has bearing on the process practiced by Hugo and discussed above, but stands in much more interesting relation to Blom’s artistic production. He goes on to explore the use of the ‘backdrop’ within some West African, but predominantly Indian, photographic work (204). For him the backdrop speaks the language of the ‘surface’, which encapsulates, within the ‘myth-making’ process that is photography, a reminder of its own constructedness. It is, for Pinney, the antithesis to the indexical and perspectival which has been crucial to the dynamics at work in ‘real’ settings in colonial photography: “The ideology of the indexicality authorized an autoptic practice of “being there”” (204). This is highly suggestive for both the subject matter of interest to Blom and the manner in which the works come into being.

Travels of Bad is a 17-piece series documenting the ‘tour’ of a rock band, called ‘Bad’. Their journey takes them into Africa where adventures, filled with animals, insects, disease and women befall them. These adventures are hinted at in idiosyncratically crafted titles for each scene, such as: *Scene 4 First Glimpse of Paradise: Magical Alternate Universe, Tasty Jungle Beast World; Scene 8 Settle Down in Paradise: The Shy Bride, Laundry Maid, Exotic Beauty, Frightened Teenager, Lap Dancer, Check-out Girl; Scene 14 Mosquitoes of Deathness: Terribly Noble, Manipulative, Blood Addict, Monsters on a Rampage; Scene 16 Death by Syphilis x Mosquito Bytes x Tuberculosis x Broken, Mutilated Infected Leg x Savage Booze x Stupidity*. Blom explained that he has been influenced by the phenomenon of Modernist artists, such as Gauguin’s and Picasso’s travels to exotic places for ‘inspiration’ and decided to build a humorous narrative (over a two-year period) that would tell a story ‘from the periphery’ of artists from ‘the centre’ no longer finding any inspiration in their own environments. He decided to extend the humorous within the concept by focalising around a touring rock band, a ploy to make the work more ‘absurd’, ‘funny’ and ‘devoid of irony’.³³² His artist’s statement explains the work to be ‘essentially a satire that looks critically at the influence that exotic cultures and their artefacts have had on the avant-garde system of European visual art from the end of the 19th century onwards’. His own work, then, is positioned as ‘critique’ of the kinds of practices he is evoking, which clearly also includes

³³² These are words used by Blom in his BMW Art Talks slot at the 2009 Joburg Art Fair in which *The Travels of Bad* was his topic of choice.

that by Hugo. Journalist Johan Myburg picks up on the inherent critique levelled at such photographers as Hugo with an observation following a quote from Blom. Blom is quoted as saying: ‘A lot of people ask me stupid spying questions about what I say in pictures, if I say I wanna feed green lizards, am I actually gonna do it?’. Myburg responds to this as follows: ‘Met hierdie aanhaling uit die teks by Scene 9 gee Blom weliswaar aanduiding van die seining dat ‘die Ander’ oenskynlik interessanter moet wees. En derhalwe nagejaag moet word. Leer hiermee saam Blom se krities op hedendaagse fotografie wat daarop ingestel is om met in situ foto’s die allure van die eksotiese vas te vang.’³³³(‘With this quote from the text to Scene 9, Blom is suggesting that “the Other” should apparently be more interesting. And so should be sought after. It is clear that Blom is criticizing contemporary photography that focuses, through the documentary mode, on capturing the exotic’.)

Blom created the entire journey in one corner of his house. This was not accidental to his concept, and the pressed ceilings and fireplace over which the drama took shape feature in each scene as a constant reminder that neither viewer nor artist ever leaves this space – so exemplifying the anti-travel. The world of the visual created within the photographs was truly individuated and thoroughly engrossing, and, in this sense, was reminiscent of the ogling of photographs brought back from somewhere exotic and unknown. Garlick (2002) writes in his consideration of tourism and photography about the function of the photograph as later having to ‘stand by ready for the (re)presentation to viewers as evidence, both of the holiday, and of the fact that the holiday experience had been adequately catalogued’ (292). Yet here, it was the stuff of the visual, pieces of paper, use of colour, composition, line and most of all the strange play between abstraction and ‘narrative’ that arrested one’s attention. While it is true that the fireplace and ceiling resides in each image, it is painted over or covered in different ways in each scene so as not to be the first thing the eye takes note of. In fact, in many of the scenes the colours and forms were devised so as to completely flatten the space into either a two-dimensional one, or a pure abstraction. Beyond the references to art-making and the practices of others, Blom is also working in an innovative relation to photography itself that highlights surface – a practice Pinney would see as central to postcolonial photographic practice. Blom explains: ‘The difference between a photograph of an

³³³ Johan Myburg, ‘Baldadige ‘Bad’ van ‘Bad’ Blom’, March 23, 2008, *Beeld*.

artwork and the artwork itself is something that I have been interested in for some time now. My visual experience of most of the artworks I have come to know and admire, has been a mediated one. Like most South Africans, my early education in art was primarily based in books' (Blom, 2004: 6). Here Blom is further referencing the physical divide between European ways of interacting with art and the way many in 'colonial' places do, as being at a distance, documented rather than 'in the flesh'.

Blom's is a world with no human subjects, where no one ever enters into the picture plane. This absence, I would argue, heightens the tension that abstraction brings to the viewing, but also expresses an alienation. Where are the people in Blom's world, and where is he? I am not suggesting that photography needs to portray humans; rather it is within Blom's own narrative that people are evoked; it is after all, the story of people going on a trip. The abstraction speaks the language of the international contemporary in a way rarely referenced by South Africans – there are very few examples of pure abstraction, or abstract expressionism within the South African canon. Read with this in mind, they are marvelously crafted, complex picture planes. Yet, I am unable to shake the notion of the artists' own alienation being expressed in these 'empty' scenes of what is essentially a fantasy that plays out within the four corners of a suburban house. On a certain level it speaks, however mockingly and jeeringly the overall tone might be, of the lack of an adequate subject with which to express an individual identity. It might well be what Nuttall (2009) identifies as the plight of the 'old white man' so vividly depicted by Ivan Vladislavic, which she uses as example in her text, *Literary City*. It is a character alienated by the rapidly changing post-apartheid context where his favourite bars and places from his childhood have been reappropriated by new groups of citizens with whom he feels very little commonality.

What does an artist that never leaves his house say about subjecthood within a city? Unlike Hugo's and Muholi's work, Blom's is not in any way unnerving, and it is only through the visual and the play with the photographic medium that one is captivated. Blom simulates a 'journey' as enabled by, and inscribed within, the photographic medium even though what he captures are the forms of painting, sculpture or installation – it is, thus, the traces of his own journey, of his invisible body through a space, interacting with and altering objects, that the camera captures. In his own words, he recognises some of this: 'Essentially I am documenting my life and my activities within the confined space

of my home as an ongoing, invented narrative. I'm capturing a story which I'm writing, living in, and playing out, with the intention of directing the outcome within a contemporary art context' (Blom: 2007: 6). In this sense, he, the artist, is a secondary subject of this narrative.

His is a world that references and explores a temporally and physically distant Modernism, that of Futurism and De Stijl, through books in his room, as he confesses. He too, then, is fascinated by faraway places in a way similar to Hugo (which he mocks), yet in his case, his interest lies in Europe, not Africa.³³⁴ It is a subject position haunted by the spectres of 'what came before', principally that which came from Europe, a (mocking) referentiality of modes of viewing and imaging, yet the only suitable response he finds to this situation is a fictional fantasy within a one-roomed stage. His references are those of the art history taught to white South African art school graduates like himself, into which current art historians such as Themibinkosi Goniwe have repeatedly tried to insert local and African points of reference. While Blom might be critical of the ways Modernist artists related to Africa, he reveres them and makes art that mimics their 'styles'. The combined stylistic features of the Modern, and the conceptual references to other people's fictional journeys, suggest a closing in on the self, rather than an exploration of an outside, changing, South Africa, so prevalent in many recent works that take the city, especially the city of Johannesburg as multiple metaphor (See Bunn, 2008).

I believe within the discussion that I have attempted to animate here, an answer to the question posed in relation to Blom's subject position is offered within the works of Zanele Muholi. The discussion thus far has centred on depictions of 'Africa', its places, its myths and its people, within the medium of photography. Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* brings the discussion into radical proximity with the self, introducing intimacy and identity in a way unexplored by the two male photographers. Muholi's work is firmly anchored within a world that is known, and over which she has control; it is her own world that she routinely depicts as she reminds one: 'These are not just subjects, these are my people' (Smith, 2008: 75).³³⁵

³³⁴ Blom explains that these remain predominant references for him both theoretically and practically in his self-authored, *Drain of Progress* (2007) which in itself mimics a catalogue 'raisonne' done by such modernist artists.

³³⁵ Kathryn Smith, 'Zanele Muholi.' *Art South Africa* Vol 4, Issue 4, Winter 2008: 75.

Both Muholi and Blom challenge the premise of Hugo's subject matter as having to be retrieved from far away through the traversing of physical terrain and geography. Yet Blom's is a stubbornly gendered narrative, which he argues, merely depicts the 'world' of the male modernist artist, endlessly creating images of nudes and mistresses, as well as the stereotypically male world of rock stars. Yet, his own language remains that of a 'boy's' adventure with very little consciousness of other possible subject positions. In his 'BMW Art Talk' at the Joburg Art Fair he explained that in the first 'scene' from *The Travels of Bad* the pink tubular shape represents a 'gross, old nude, pale European woman' and later explains how his rock band comes into contact with 'native girls'. Muholi's very subject is that of gender in her role as 'activist' and 'self-identified black lesbian' (Richards, 2008: 271) and it is unthinkable that she would ever use the terms preferred by Blom in relation to women. Through this subject position she depicts an 'otherness' that is her own world, which at once challenges the signs under which 'the other' in Africa has been positioned (discussed earlier) and the stereotypes held of gender roles more broadly, which has the effect of 'othering' people. The series I am interested in looking at here takes this overarching premise into the realm of the performative in a way that very few of her other (either portraiture, or more documentary) works do, so as to dialogue better with the works of Hugo and Blom. The first and most immediate response Muholi's work brings to the current discussion has been well defined by Richards (2008), who describes it as follows: 'There is a disturbing and unforgiving intimacy in many of her works, one that compels reflection on how the difficult processes of love and objectification are being enacted' (271). Hers is a discourse where the 'other' is the self.

The series consisted of five works. In three of them the scene was harshly urban; on the stairs that lead to the rooftop of a high-rise building; in front of chicken-wire fencing with the Johannesburg radio tower visible in the far top corner; in another, she was sitting in front of a clumsily hung, semi-transparent black 'back drop' through which laundry hanging on a washing line is visible. The surface is concrete which hints at the way many Joburgers live in small rooftop, sentry-like, servants' quarters, often adorned with multi-coloured laundry. In each of these, Miss D'Vine sports a different outfit and poses for the camera. Her body takes up a large portion of the frame, giving the impression that, while she is clearly in a distinctly chosen environment, it is she and what she is wearing that is the subject of the series. These outfits do not have the look of a 'costume', but rather seem like things from her wardrobe.

Two images in this series are of particular interest for this group discussion: in the first, Miss D'Vine is in a veld clearing, possibly in a semi-urban or transitional area of the city; she is wearing a small Ndebele beaded 'skirt', naked from the waist so as to expose her male torso; in the grass behind her, bits of colourful garbage has been lodged and forgotten; she wears her red stilettos, tucked in underneath her neatly folded knees (*Miss D' Vine I*); in another she is standing in a short, black dress with the trimmings of a 1980s cocktail outfit, in the same space, against the same background, also sporting the red stilettos (*Miss D'Vine II*). These works by Muholi were exhibited at the 2008 Art Fair and were used prominently on that year's Fair website.

The first image described above, *Miss D'Vine I*, at first glance mimics 'tourist' images of rural African people, in South Africa, specifically the Zulu. While she is sitting in what seems like a 'clearing', directly behind her are medium-length yellow grasses, suggestive of a game farm setting. Her hair has not been 'done' but seems natural and combed to stand up; her black body is emphasised by being uncovered – the only pieces of clothing are a beaded neck-piece, a Ndebele beaded skirt and red stilettos. The overwhelming first impression is of a (picture postcard) rural African sitting in the veld for tourists – this, of course, only lasts as long as it takes the viewer to recognise the shoes and the gender ambivalence. Seen in conjunction with *Miss D'Vine II* in which she, now standing, occupies the same space in a short black dress, the reading event is one that moves in a fast-paced manner between the signs of the 'tourist' gaze, the sign of the African as either strong male or docile female, the yellow African veld, as well as 70's drag photography and photographs from the *Black Panther* series. Yet each of these signs is troubled, and has been re-inscribed with the acute idiosyncrasy of the subject-identity of Miss D'Vine. The viewing experience is, thus, powerfully what Enwezor terms, 'a clash of lenses' (2006: 13). Of the work, Muholi has the following to say: 'In this and other similar series of photographs, I give young black queens and drag artists a visual voice in the cultural landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. Born in Kae Mogogole in Pretoria, Miss D'vine adores Ru Paul, and wishes to perform abroad one day. She hangs around with her mentor, La Rochelle, and like-minded friends, in her Hillbrow flat'. Muholi explains that outside of dreams of international stardom, Miss D'Vine sees herself as a

political figure, '(s)he is part of a drag queens' and artists' movement that aims to bend the political attitudes of a "less than" democratic society'.³³⁶

In our interview, Muholi's gallerist Michael Stevenson³³⁷ explained that Muholi is, on the whole, uninterested in the history of art photography within which there is a well-trodden trajectory of 'queer' photography, as well as the famous 'black is beautiful' work of the 1970s. Rather, Muholi's interest lies in the imaging of her own world:

But you see, Zanele gives herself entirely to her community and gives herself entirely to her subject, so she is at one with them. They are not the 'other'; so, they give themselves entirely to her and only she can take photographs like that. Anybody else that takes photographs like that, they just start becoming objects, people, 'other', they become spectacles, they become something else, but because of her extraordinary compassion and humanism, she can get things that other people could not get, she could get something from those subjects that if somebody else took a photograph of a big black nude woman it would look deeply, deeply exploitative. She does it and somehow...

Muholi is, thus, crucially creating an imaging that subverts the lens of 'othering' so prominent in Enwezor's critique of images of Africa in the 'West'. However, her work is similarly subversive within Africa and takes Samuel Fosso's experimentations with gender in his self-portrait studio photographs to an often awkward extreme (See Enwezor, 2006). Of the three photographers, she is the most actively involved in crafting her own and alternative subject positions within the South African contemporary.

If one was to take seriously the register of 'fantasy' inherent in photography's capturing device, each one of these bodies of objects is brought into sharp relief in ways that are profound for the reading of the 'African' sign in photography: Hugo's subject is the very stuff of the fantastical, the fantastical resides within the frame. He is photographing what is intended only for entertainment in the most hyperbolic of ways. Furthermore, the characters of Nollywood films often have lives only in the digital format that is extensively circulated, but in many cases have a very short lifespan before being replaced by other figures and narratives, thereby, working against the iconic. Blom simultaneously indulges in fantasy while critiquing its premises. Why do we fantasise about far-away

³³⁶ Zanele Muholi, 'Miss D'vine I, from the series, Miss D'vine (2007)' <http://genderfork.com/?p=2943>

³³⁷ Interview, 1 May 2008, Michael Stevenson, Director Michael Stevenson Gallery.

places that have little or nothing to do with our polity? How much of travel through time and space is really the stuff of fantastical projection onto people and places? While for Muholi, the intimacy of the 'here' is sufficiently rich in personal connections to make possible the fantastical in self-styling. Miss D'Vine strikes poses signaling the 'big screen' in the way that Hugo's characters deny; the Nollywood figures are, so to speak, fresh off the set, their world is that of performance, yet Miss D'Vine creates that 'in her own backyard'. In this sense her 'scenes' do make some reference to Cindy Sherman's staged, self-portraiture work, yet, evokes very different possibilities of character. Where Sherman inserts herself into the 'body' and *mise-en-scene* of some imagined character, Miss D'Vine gives the impression of really embodying all the characters that she explores across the five-image series.

It is within this register of fantasy that one is able to approach what Appadurai and Breckenridge (2008), quoted earlier, term 'Africa's everyday', or Africa being allowed to have an everyday. All three artists are securely empowered and uniquely idiosyncratic so as to refuse easy reproducibility by what Enwezor calls the 'vampire machine' (2006: 15) that is the West creating images of Africa. All three unlock the fantastical in the space between subject and lens, and, in turn, between viewer and photographic object. Blom is most adept at pushing to its limits the possibility of fantasy within the object through acts of abstraction, colour, form and line that sometimes takes precedence over 'subject', yet for both Hugo and Muholi, fantasy is at the essence of their subject composition, hence, inside the lives of the very people they photograph in a way that is not constructed by the artist. However, each of the three bodies of objects I have considered here, I would argue, stands in a troubling relation to what Enwezor and many others have referred to as the work of 'decolonisation', especially in relation to the decolonisation 'of the mind' (as it is often phrased so as to evoke the work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o). It is often assumed that the act of decolonisation might be an earnest representation of an African 'normality', in opposition to the 'exotic' or the 'bestial', yet these artists deny such 'normality', opting rather for difference. The three sets of objects all probe at the soft spots of what such an act might entail for subject, artist and viewer.

Painting the Present

The last object with which I had a visceral encounter at the Fair fell noticeably outside that of the 'spoken about' in relation to the local context. In fact, this work was easy to miss and I never heard any mention of it in conversation or the press. In order to find it, you had to brave the Anton Kannemeyer cartoon-style painting, *Black Gynecologist* in the Michael Stevenson booth, of which one of the gallery assistants said they hung it at the entrance to marvel at people's reactions to it. In Kannemeyer's work, a white woman lies in a doctor's rooms in the typical position for the performance of a 'pap-smeer', with a black doctor performing the test and inspecting her vagina. Few works manage so succinctly and instantly to evoke the troubled state of 'race' in South Africa and the tremendous amount of mental work that a new dispensation has required, and continues to require, in the contemporary moment. If one had made it past this piece, which, according to the gallery assistant, many others couldn't, you had to move to the very far side of the Michael Stevenson booth, behind the gallerist's table where one might again have become preoccupied by the many publications on display. Had one looked up at that point, though, one would have seen this square work hanging above the table in the corner. It was a medium-sized work by Penny Siopis, no bigger than 100 x 100 cm, from her new series of paintings. I believe this particular object is one of the few that transcended a local context to explore such notions as form, 'figure ground', and myth, in step with international trends in practice and theory. Here, for the first time in this chapter, the socio-political recedes, albeit only for an initial moment, and one is most favourably positioned to experience what Sontag termed 'an erotics of art'. The work forms part of a larger solo exhibition held at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in their premises in Woodstock, Cape Town, in May 2009, yet at the time, it was the first glimpse we had of her new direction.

Thinking back on my encounter with this object at the Fair, I confess, the work merges with my subsequent viewing of the full body in the series at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town. I remember only being shocked and thrilled at seeing a grassy green amongst Siopis' signature red pallet. My field notes, too, say no more than 'Exciting. Siopis is using green and painting again, watery green and red' – nothing about the subject or title. This, therefore, is a reading from the memory of a moment informed by a longer period of contemplation at a later stage. Important for this study though, is the question 'what was it that had caused excitement at that initial viewing at the Fair?' I can still evoke that response from memory, and know that it had to do with two

concepts simultaneously. The one is simply the unadulterated ‘painterliness’ of the work – a move away from the more conceptual works the artists had been producing recently. The other was the thrill of seeing what seemed at the time like a tremendously fresh, new direction for this mid-career, well-known, and very prolific, South African artist. ‘The task of painting’ writes Deleuze (2003) ‘is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible’ (56). With this reading, I am in the strange position of remembering only forces; I cannot recall how exactly they were made visible, yet remember vividly effects produced by the ‘forces’ and the resulting thought processes.

Siopis’ has been an oeuvre that many have linked to an iconography within a vocabulary of the traumatic.³³⁸ This driving concern, as it activates the intensely personal, but also the more general societal, has lead her in and out of practices of painting to explore the mediums of video, installation and sculpture. The work in question is one predominantly crafted from the movement patterns and residues of glue and ink, and so might not be ‘painting’ in the strict sense of the word. These materials proclaim their identity as ‘glue’ and ‘ink’ in the way it behaves on the surface, thereby being objects in themselves, yet at the same time, holds the memory, the trace, and the ‘capturing’ (like the camera) of the movement and action of the artist’s hand – it is in this character of mark-making that the ‘painterly’ reside. The most striking effect of the painterly was the ‘production’ of a surface on the picture plane. Bunn (2008) has written insightfully of the unlocking of formulations of ‘surface and underneath’ within Siopis’ work. He considered the *Pinky Pinky* (2002) series as some of the ‘most powerful, Johannesburg-based meditations on subjectivity, surfaces, and transition’, where the skin is a hard, opaque, unyielding thing that serves to protect, but also allows one to see a being residing just under, its surface. He notes that here ‘skin has become detached from what lies beneath’ through the thick, impasto application of the paint onto the canvas. In contradistinction to Bunn’s interpretation of the earlier series – or perhaps better understood as a marker of the progression in Siopis’ work – in the art work I saw at that Joburg Art Fair, as I recall it from memory, ‘skin’ and ‘surface’ were rendered as lightness, as the liquid and the transparent. In this work, the surface was that of water, sometimes clear, sometimes murky, but certainly not hard and opaque. The concern with surface and ‘underneath’ was still active, but with a remarkable move towards a lightness, the see-through surface

³³⁸ Sarah Nuttall (2009) makes references to this fact and moves away from it to consider the ways in which Siopis’ then recent work *Pinky Pinky* allow for readings of living in the post-apartheid present.

of a liquid. Siopis' material seemed to 'congeale' (to use her own word) for a mere instant before it would flow off the canvas and submit to gravity. This implied an extreme lightness, which seemed to be the vocabulary of mark-making employed within the work.

To say more about the 'effect' of the surface is to honour an inquisitiveness, yet one that far transcends what I had described a moment ago with reference to the work of Mbongeni Buthelesi, where one 'gets it': 'he created an effect' where the process was like a puzzle that could be solved. In Siopis' work the surface effect and the affective state produced are intertwined. The viewing affected one's sense of movement in space, creating a sensation of sliding downstream, floating amongst leaves and branches in a forest river, without the anxiety that this description suggests. It is a feeling of wetness, floating and being tugged. As I have mentioned, the effect of colour and line on picture plane is painterly in that the substance of the colours and marks are loose and unmasked by the efforts of representation as primary priority. This brings to this reading ways in which painting itself, as a way of working and as philosophical entity, has been said to be re-emerging and informing new debates within contemporary art.

In the introduction to this part of the thesis, I considered what doing a visual cultural study within an event such as the Art Fair might entail. One of the key features that emerged from that discussion was the need to take on board and bring to the analysis an understanding of the context of viewing and making, as well as concentrating attention on what is made visible at a given moment. Furthermore, the analysis suggested that the consideration of the work of art as an 'object' should encompass in its 'reading' of the object something about the fatigue that the object itself might experience towards 'us' and 'our incessant interpretations, projections and desires of it'. What this suggests in terms of the objects that are viewed, is that they must be allowed to inform 'their' ontology. This is a challenge for the 'reader' of *art* objects, one that I have attempted to grapple with throughout these discussions. Yet here, faced with this work of Siopis, it seems that the action of listening to the work itself is part of a natural response. This reaction is imbedded in, and I believe allowed for, by the making process, which according to the artist is a precarious mixing of '(p)rocess, chance and materiality (literally paint, ink, canvas, paper, glue acting on a surface)³³⁹. These ingredients are what 'excites' the artist, 'especially when unpredictable. I value this unpredictability. It creates a vital

³³⁹ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African Artist and Professor at the Wits School of Arts.

tension or energy between form and formlessness'. 'Form and formlessness' here allows for the object itself to have a voice beyond 'intention' and before 'interpretation'. It is precisely this play between form and formlessness that unlocks the 'desire' within the image, which Mitchell speaks of (when he asks 'what do images want?') and facilitates, what Sontag calls an 'erotics' of art, which the artist herself holds in her mind when creating some of her work. It is the motioning between form and formlessness that evokes sexuality, in a literal sense residing in a swaying motion, a dragging down, a slippage. Says Siopis: 'I am informed by the philosophical relationship between form and formlessness, but form and formlessness within the kind of manifestation of sexuality and it is becoming increasingly so that the form almost slips away, if you like, from the representation'.

Siopis explained in our interview that this struggle waged for prominence between form and formlessness, has further political implications. Deleuze's book-long reading of Francis Bacon's work lead him to the conclusion that, '[i]t is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface... The painter has many things in his head, or around him, or in his studio. Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work' (2003: 86). The stuff around Siopis, in her world, her studio and in her head, is that of South Africa and living here now.

I began this reading with the statement that the socio-political will recede to allow for another discourse to advance; yet, it now returns as Siopis, herself, has shown a constant interest and engagement with the ingredients of South African life. While, in this particular work it is located much further from the surface than was the case in many of her previous works, the artist explains that she is constantly informed by living here. In these works, she explained, the very medium of 'flux' suggests a manner of living in the now; 'a time which can congeal into sheer horror or open up to sheer ecstasy'.³⁴⁰ It further suggests the working of the imagination and the psyche, what she describes as 'can you go there?' meaning what is the capacity for imagination and empathy within such a corporeal environment as South Africa. She continued in our discussion: 'and what is in the space of your head? Is it just mess? Is it anxiety? Is it all stuff that is turgid

³⁴⁰ In conversation with Sarah Nuttall published in the catalogue and online <http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/siopis/conversation.htm>

and tangled up? What is the figure ground in your head?' This personal situation, of the head and the psyche, is reflected within the society, where there is an unresolvable tension between 'figure' (subject, person, situation) and ground (context, narrative, interaction). This happens in the paintings too, where, as she explains: 'the figure-ground literally in the painting looking like it is in some kind of a crisis as a kind of marker of context in which we live as in being in some kind of crisis'.

Bunn (2008) makes a compelling case for reading the *Pinky Pinky* series as anticipating the change afoot in South African society at the time, not restrictively conceived of 'since 1994', but as a long and on-going tension. In some of the works, he sees a figuration of a determined 'coming into being' or a 'being born' through a stubborn and unyielding surface. These works bear the traces of palette knife actions rendering the paint thick and severely opaque. He reads in this an expression of 'metonymies between paint and skin' (150) where '(n)ormal renderings of depth are avoided entirely' (149). Given the artist's concern with the processes of change in the world around her as praxis, her mark-making reflects her state of thinking about that change. In the works I have been looking at here, the skin/paint metonymy described by Bunn has been replaced by a water/paint metonymy. These are still, as in many of her earlier work, bodily fluids, but also suggest the water of the sea. An ontological shift is presupposed by this new transparent 'skin' that is made of water. In the interview with Sarah Nuttall in the exhibition catalogue, Nuttall asks to what extent these works are the result of ('have developed from') Siopis' recent stay in Greece. Siopis replies that she had indeed been influenced by the water of the ocean. In the subtext here resides the biographical facts of having 'gone away' for a while from her own life in Johannesburg, the creation of distance between her life and her present, and the growth of new points of view within new ways of working. This change, I would argue, is in step with changes which have occurred in South Africa itself since the *Pinky-Pinky* series was made, where the thick impasto of the times of 'transformation', the post-apartheid decade is giving way to a clearer picture, not one less troubling but one in motion, where things are better visible. However, the surface of congealed glue and ink reminds us that it remains a place where things are in radical 'flux' between the poles of excitement and violence.

Siopis has the rare ability to speak with clarity and eloquence on her own work. In a move to conclude a chapter that has been devoted to objects – works of art, I position

now some of her own thoughts, expressed in our interview, on the contemporary moment in South Africa and how this transpires (to use a very solid term) in her thinking and working. It indicates an epistemology that seems rich in possibilities for visual culture to affect and introduce hermeneutics to a reading of the present.

Living here, I am completely amazed and shocked and sometimes absolutely intrigued and even sometimes stimulated by the kind of extraordinary levels of violence that one has and the manifestations of violence and then what you do with it ... I think it is a space for art actually and that is obviously what I am doing; concretising or manifesting that sense of uncertainty.

There are things, sort of visions of you like, that happen here that don't happen anywhere else. Like this is the narrative, I was driving down to Standard Bank with a skeleton, a real body skeleton, meaning a real person, but skeleton of, in the back of my car and was going to put it (on exhibition), so I am driving down, and this is like a little allegory, driving down to Standard Bank and there is a big protest, some kind of protest down town, and these people are just walking past and the car is immobilised, you can't move, there is a traffic jam, all these people, the masses of people are walking past, shouting and being energised by whatever they were protesting about, I can't remember what it was. Somebody saw the skeleton at the back of the car because it is just a sort of hatchback car and started shouting hey, hey! You know, and going on and at that moment while they were shouting staring at the skeleton, I suddenly saw, and this was like a vision, a man pulling a trolley with a huge animal head kind of just cut at the neck just bleeding freely. I thought 'this is a violent place', there is something so primal about it, that is very, very challenging to the mind, to think what do you do with this stuff, and I wouldn't experience this in England for instance, or, you know, in NY even. It is fantastically interesting. So that kind of corporeal volatility, for want of a better phrase, does stimulate me and the uncertainty of it.³⁴¹

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This chapter was concerned with bringing art objects from the Joburg Art Fairs into relation with the post-apartheid South African moment, which is the focus of this study. The study argues that the Joburg Art Fair represents a life-style oriented, mall-like experience which has little to do with political engagement, while also, predominantly through art objects like the ones analysed, holds a mirror up to South African society and so reflects an archive of the moment. Some of the objects discussed, furthermore, trouble easy notions around the 'African' that still has currency in writings on the

³⁴¹ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African artist and Professor at Wits School of Arts.

continent, while others were positioned so as to show the complexity of emerging subject positions within the post-apartheid. The aim was not to craft one over-arching argument, but rather to give the reader glimpses into a creative practice of the now, an analysis enabled by the structure of the Joburg Art Fair.

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PART 3

Chapter 8. Art Logics: Buying and Owning Artworks

This chapter is again concerned with reading art objects, but does so in a way that picks up two threads from previous sections. The first is the economic dimension, that gets expressed in acts of buying and selling. The second is the notion of publics of art. The chapter is structured to give voice to the opinions of at least some members of this ‘public’ to present a different way of reading art objects. It is a reading that does not rely on what artworks might convey about the contemporary moment, which resonates with this study, or the art historical trajectory in general, but that focuses rather on what art objects mean to some people.

As stated, the Fair, as a context for viewing works of art, must be seen as compromised in certain specific ways. Yet, at the same time, it manages to bring into the public realm and to publics the possibility of viewing a large selection of work that, in a way, is less about thematic curation than is traditionally the case with many museum and biennale offerings. For this reason, members of this public (or publics) are able to choose how they read works and what they like – in accordance with the point made by Simon Njami in his evaluation of the Joburg Art Fair that was discussed in the introduction to this part.

I argue that the merit of the Fair should be understood in terms of the sheer scale and diversity of contemporary works it showcases, thereby creating an archive. Moreover, and specifically in the local context, the Fair is, at this time in South Africa, the only large-scale art platform that takes place annually. The Joburg Art Fair therefore carries more weight and significance, both as event and in terms of the art that is presented, than might be the case in larger art economies. The main characteristic of the Fair – that it functions as market – is a point that I have returned to throughout the study. I do so again in this chapter, as a way of spanning and linking the social and public realms with the economic dimension of buying and selling, and so to arrive again at the art objects themselves – but this time as they are experienced and ‘owned’ by the public.

This chapter focuses on the accounts of four art buyers whom I met during my time in the field. From these accounts, we get to understand something about the way people live with art and the various ways in which art objects' 'breadcrumbs trail' – Simon Njami's metaphor for the journey of an art work from artist's studio to eventual buyer, house, office, or storage warehouse – manifest (Njami 2008: 8b). By focusing on the buyers of art, a flight line is created with Chapter Two in which the public for art was discussed and analysed. In my selection, I have concentrated on individuals that have art collections or who have bought art, and have not included anyone who has never bought art, or who buy different kinds of art to that displayed at the Joburg Art Fair. This selection criterion is biased to a version of the art public that is more narrowly conceived of than what I described as an un-formed art public in Chapter Two. It is worth noting, though, that not all the buyers of art discussed here could be included in what Douglas referred to as the 'core' exhibition-opening going public, nor are they necessarily part of a public 'who have grown up with art'. Discussions took place inside the homes or offices of these individuals in an attempt at exploring Michael Warner's (2005) notion that a lot can be learnt about the 'public' by spending time studying the 'private' (5), thereby understanding the boundaries between these two realms as elastic and fluid (8). The chapter also attempts to explore Douglas and Isherwood's (1996) notion of 'marking services' in practice – that is, it reads works of art as speaking back to the owners of the work, and I therefore pivoted upon an understanding of the work as coded with meaning that resonates specifically with the owner. Furthermore, the findings are in continual dialogue with the work of Bourdieu (1998) in *Distinction*, which I have been referencing throughout as one study that tried to understand art buying and its relation to the social and economical.

Getting people to buy art is central to what the Fair tries to achieve; yet understanding how much of this actually happens or who might be doing the buying, for the greater part is based on either mere estimates or off-the-record information. Much speculation circulates as to who the buyers of art are and why they might be buying art. Reasons for this curiosity include the fact that galleries do not disclose the names of their clients. (Linda Givon³⁴² stated this as a first rule of being a gallerist). In addition, large amounts of money are at stake. In other countries there is, for this reason, the risk of exposure to art theft should one be too public about one's art collection. Yet at the moment in South

³⁴² Interview, 25 November 2008, Linda Givon, Former owner and director of Goodman Gallery.

Africa, this is only a minor risk, according to Gordon Massie³⁴³, the director of the only local art insurance company 'Art Insure'. How people buy art, why they do so, and how they live with these art objects are thus almost entirely unexplored terrain, aside from highly theoretical work on collecting, some of which I consider below, as well as the coverage one sees in lifestyle magazines of people's homes. Based on my material, I argue here against an analysis of art-buying that sees it first as connoted to status and the display of social standing – although both these elements are at work to varying degrees. Rather, I argue, that art buying of the kind seen at the Art Fair, is much like other consumption processes: often of the moment, reflecting highly personalised life-worlds, and something that becomes a habit. I argue furthermore, following considerations on the 'context' of viewing, as discussed previously, that once incorporated into 'collections', or mounted on walls in the homes of buyers, the meaning of the art object has scope to take on other meanings.

By being shown around their collections by art buyers themselves, this part of the research made visible how infinitely variegated motivations and strategies of collecting are. In Chapter Two, I quoted Ruark Peffers³⁴⁴, formerly of the local auction house affiliated with Sotheby's, who remarked that 'Black Diamond' or 'BEE' individuals like Tokyo Sexwale should be interested in the work of, for example, Gerard Sekoto. Peffers made the point that given that Sexwale is a black person and 'connected' to the political struggle in South Africa, and since Sekoto was a black artist who fled into political exile and lived in Paris, Sexwale should see this work as his 'heritage' and feel an affinity with it. Similarly, gallerist Baylon Sandri expressed a degree of surprise at some of his black clients who were buying works by Afrikaans artists such as Hanneke Benadie or what he thought was 'obscure' works from the 1960's rather than following perhaps a more race-conscious or politically-informed approach when buying art – as if to suggest that the buying of art could be understood as instrumental and rational acts that can be articulated and defended on a cognitive level. Such opinions around the connection between race, culture, background and art, might well be true in some cases, but the buyers I came into contact with told a very different story. These accounts of private collections point to another terrain that a study of the Art Fair opens up and which is occupied by social agents in a way at once contained (a closed circuit between art buyers, art work and art gallerist) and intricately connected to the worlds of art; the social; and

³⁴³ Massie made this point in a presentation at the Hollard campus (his underwriters) in 2009.

³⁴⁴ Interview, 7 October 2008, Ruark Peffers, Ex-director of Sotheby's Paintings Department.

the art industry that I have been describing in other parts of this study. It is another flash point from the Joburg Art Fair - an everyday practice -brought to light by the event, but functioning for the most part within the very private spheres of people's homes.

It is important to note that the buyers discussed here are not representative of 'types' in the sociological sense of the term – I have merely chosen a selection that I have found most interesting. A different methodology could possibly produce 'types' of buyers and characteristics befitting of different categories. What the methodology here, of simply meeting in private or work spaces and talking about art in whatever way the respondent suggested, lays bare is the way in which art buying, as a practice, manifests as part of some people's life. It can thus be read to leak and seep into other areas of the buyers' lives and so offer another way of reading a present.

The collector of art, like the art public, then, is not one kind of individual, a fact often lost in theory that considers 'collecting' as a practice, as I discuss below. Ivor Powell has suggested that '... collecting art, as much as the more abstract and attendant business of discourse generation, is an active and dirty process that takes place in real, profane time, and in the always compromised real world' (2006: 26). Yet for Powell, in South Africa there is also a political agency involved in collecting works of art as it shows art works 'at work':

... the fact that a private collection is ineluctably idiosyncratic at some level, reflecting personal choices, preferences and tastes, ... also gives it a coherence that other species of collecting lack... constructing a serious and systematic art collection represents a dynamic rather than a static engagement with history and reality. At every level what is demanded of the collector, as well as practitioners engaging at different levels with the cultural discourse of the time, is that art needs to be conceptually wrenched from the morass of over-determination to which it has been subjected. At the same time and in the same gesture it needs to be revisioned and recontextualised in ways that allow elements of a different telling of history to emerge... (27).

Powell is making two points in this extract. The first relates directly to concepts explored in the introduction to this section around 'interpretation' and reading of art works, which he cautions could become 'overdetermined'. It is a process that was put to the test in the previous chapter as one that is primarily concerned with works of art as signs and as coded for a reading. The second point is that a person's private art collection allows for a

reading on a different plane: one that is at once about the collector and, perhaps more significantly, allows for a recontextualised version of periods in history of art, or the history of a place. In this sense, the individual art collection represents another form of seriating (Bhabha's notion (1994)), where objects are brought into new relations with each other and so tell new stories – in this case, that of a time and a place; a country and its history. Powell was making this point in the context of considerations about the exhibiting and cataloguing of the large Campbell-Smith collection in 2006, which, as many of the writers in the catalogue note, includes some of the farthest ranging art works in terms of racial representation from this country's past. Powell suggests that this collection comes to stand as a particular version of the narrative of this country through the self-conscious effort to include art by black artists, and so reflects the political climate in the country through a temporality inscribed in a life-long active process of art buying

As much as the history of a country can be re-read through the personal decision making of an art collector, the works also speak back to the one who chose to position them in the particular series that they are found. Both Bal (2006) and Baudrillard (2009) have theorised this relationship between collection and collector; between the act or impulse to collect and social traits. Baudrillard writes within a tradition that was explored in Chapter Two in relation to seeing consumption as fundamentally a social and referential act. In his essay 'Subjective Discourse or the Non-Functional System of Objects' his concerns are primarily the antique object rather than the contemporary art object. He ascribes to the antique object qualities of 'homeliness', 'belonging' and 'historical depth' that more 'modern' decisions taken in home decoration lack (42 – 47). He moves on to consider and analyse collecting specifically, and it is here that something can be learnt about the art buyers I am about to discuss. Baudrillard makes an analytical distinction between 'objects' and 'utensils' to denote the dimension of ownership as he understands it. He explains '(i)f I use a refrigerator to refrigerate, it is a practical mediation: it is not an object but a refrigerator. And in that sense I do not possess it. A utensil is never possessed, because a utensil refers one to the world; what is possessed is always an object abstracted from its function and thus brought into relation with the subject' (48). The main point of his psychological analyses of objects, and collecting relations, is the notion that the collector is perpetually in a process of 'collecting' versions and ideals of the self – the objects exist within the realm of intersubjectivity (51).

Bal, in an attempt to come at the concept and process of ‘narrative’ from a different angle (narrative being one of her core and long-held conceptual interests) (272), reads the process of collecting as a story with a beginning, middle and end. She quickly realises that collecting has no beginning, since the first few objects might be argued to serve functional roles (she is referring specifically to the collection of vases of a friend of hers). She asserts in response, ‘the beginning, instead, is a meaning, not an act. Collecting comes to mean collecting precisely when a series of haphazard purchases or gifts suddenly becomes a meaningful sequence. That is, the moment when a self-conscious narrator begins to “tell” its story, bringing about a semiotics for a narrative of identity, history, and situation’ (273). Her point is thus similar to that of Baudrillard in that what she sees as the fundamental dynamic at work within collecting is the telling of personal stories, searching for ever more authentic meaning structures within which to better understand the self – the self as reflected, narrativistically, through objects within a choreographed series.

Both Baudrillard and Bal seem fascinated with the collector as species that create a meaning structure and narrative that leads her away from the everyday. Bal’s interpretation is decidedly more playful and kind to this compulsion than that of Baudrillard, who sees it as an undeniable ‘retreat’, a ‘real’ ‘regression’ away from the world of social relations, to one concerned with the mastering of the inanimate world (51). For him ‘objects undoubtedly serve a regulatory capacity with regard to everyday life, dissipating many neuroses and providing an outlet for all kinds of tensions and for energies that are in mourning’ (51). Baudrillard cautions strongly against ‘the vast literature that sentimentalises inanimate objects’ (51) and the act of collecting, that mask this fundamentally negative aspect of subject relations that collectors have with objects – as a regressive act. While both analyses are convincing on a theoretical level, both lack what Powell referred to as collecting’s ‘dirty’ processes that take place in ‘real, profane time in the always compromised real world’. It is this side of ‘collecting’ art that I came across most during the fieldwork that this study draws on.

Oupa Morare³⁴⁵, a successful surgeon in private practice in Benoni, in the East of Johannesburg, has been buying art, and subsequently, following Bal’s theory, started *collecting* art, since his university days about two decades ago. My connection with Morare

³⁴⁵ Interview 6 December 2008, Oupa Morare, Private Buyer.

came through Baylon Sandri who referred to him as ‘the guy who buys all of Sam’s (Nghlengethwa) work’. Sandri does not represent Nghlengethwa as an artist, the Goodman Gallery does, but Morare has bought work from Sandri’s SMAC gallery, and he described him as a buyer with an impeccable eye. On the Saturday morning we were scheduled to meet, I arrived at his large, suburban house in Benoni, long before he returned to it from a breakfast at the near-by Eastgate shopping mall, and I was let in by his domestic worker. This gave me ample time to look around his house and art collection before he arrived.

By the look of the face-brick exterior, glass ceilinged patio, slate flooring and carpeted rooms, the house itself seemed to date to the 80s. In South Africa, that sometimes means (as it does in this case) a building style comprising of a confluence of different building materials, fighting for attention and mimicking a post-modern architectural movement. Inside, the house had many different reception and ‘lounging’ areas, each with its own interior decorating identity and filled with works of art – mostly South African, but some seemingly from Cuba (he later confirmed that he had visited the Havana Biennale at two occasions) and one or two by artists from other areas in Africa. The room in which I was stationed had dark, un-plastered face-brick walls, black slate tiles, a very large flat-screen television and bed-sized black leather sofas. On the wall opposite the television hung one of Sam Nghlengethwa’s ‘jazz’ works spanning almost the entire wall area – also in dark purple and grey tones, so adding to a general murkiness in the room. In contrast, the room next door was brightly painted, sported a purple and green carpet and was decorated with small drawing room-style chairs. On the one wall hung a series of medium-sized Robert Hodgins’ paintings, and opposite that, all on the same wall, a relatively large Kentridge print, a similar-sized Johann Louw drawing and small collaborative prints between Zwelethu Mthethwa and Nghlengethwa that I had never seen before (Dr Morare explained that he and two other buyers bought this entire series between the three of them and so they were never exhibited). This was the room in which the interview was conducted.

The furniture throughout the house had the look of a local middle-of-the-range furniture outlet, such as Lubners or Ellerines, and stood in a quirky relation with the art works, so as to add an almost ironic touch to the interior decorating. The house did not seem lived-in - everything was immaculately clean and in place. It was only the art works that, in a

more or less jarring manner, brought individuation into an interior that might well be photographed for the cover of one of the above mentioned furniture store brochures. For example, my encounter with a heart-wrenching, black and white Andrew Tshabangu photograph of two black figures standing in the mist by a grave site, hanging above a rose-coloured, marble counter-top in the kitchen, was a defamiliarising experience to a seasoned gallery-goer like myself.

Morare, now in his late 50s, explained, after pointing out that his birthday is shared by Desmond Tutu and Karl Marx, that in the township where he grew up, the only art he ever came across was 'the famous Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper'. This work, he pointed out, is a common feature 'in any location, in any house in the location, in the dining room, you will find a replica of the Last Supper'.

His first encounter with contemporary art came when he was looking around for a local patron to fund his medical studies and was told that a certain Mr PJ, 'a prominent lawyer in Benoni' who had started a 'law firm with Oliver Tambo and Mandela, someone every one looked up to', might be able to help. This man 'stayed in a big, big house you know, unlike the four-roomed matchboxes that we used in the location'. Like me, Morare arrived for his appointment before his host did, and had time to look around:

So there was this monolith of a house and I had made an appointment and for the first time I had to knock, you know at the location there was no doorbell, it had this massive gate and I was scared and I think the maid opened to this big yard and she ushered me to the study, PJ was busy somewhere in the house. So for the first time in my life I saw a house full of art.

Morare remembered how he saw 'the real' lithographs by Fikile Magadla³⁴⁶ that often appeared on the cover and inside of the political periodical *Staffrider*. Providing a neat narrative twist to the story about the origins of Morare's collection, the lawyer told Morare that he did not have funds available to offer a bursary for Morare's first year of study. However, PJ told him, should he be able to raise his own funds for a first year of a BsC degree, and pass his courses, he could come back the following year for an artwork and a bursary. The following December saw 'a repeat performance of the same story: I

³⁴⁶ For an excellent overview of Magadla's career, see Siebrits 'Drawings of Beauty and Mystery.' *Art South Africa* Vol 2, Issue 2. Summer 2003, 22.

knocked and he had forgotten me and said how can I help you, and I said remember I am the same guy, I have come to collect my artwork and hopefully you will give me money to continue, I think I have passed well, I am going to medical school now, I did BsC for the first year'. Morare left that day with a bursary and an original 'Thami Mnyele'³⁴⁷: 'Man, I kept that painting throughout my student years, you know the students were having posters, I had my original one and I had a story to tell and I was a hero, "this guy is so forward thinking", and as soon as I graduated and I could afford buying art, I started'. He later cultivated a friendship with artist Sam Nhlengethwa through their mutual love of jazz and became one of Nhlengethwa's most avid collectors.

During the course of the interview, I asked Morare to point out one work that he would like to discuss, which for him held special significance. This had become a standard question to buyers and as was the case with every one of them, Morare had to give it serious and considerable thought. Eventually, he led me to the other side of the house past a series of bedrooms to the main bedroom at the end of a corridor. Along the way we passed early Johannes Phokela's, Santu Mofokengs, and a remarkable, signature Joachim Shonefeldt wood and paint piece, which he had commissioned from the artist depicting his mother's grave and his childhood home. In his room, the furniture, once again, seemed to have been chosen by someone else, yet he assured me, he 'lives alone; no children'; or selected with far less keen an eye - the bedding was patterned with the figure of a slender 'African' woman carrying a pot on her head. He pointed to the piece right above the bed and explained:

This work by Nhlanhla (Xaba), he was a very visionary artist, he was kind of before his time. I bought it some seven years ago, it was during the height of genocide in Rwanda, and I was so touched. This is a river, full of... you don't see the river actually it is corpses in the reeds and even the refugees that are running away from the genocide. And you can see there is nothing growing here it is all scorched earth. And these are the little kids trying to run away, and these were unfortunate they were not able to make it, they died and this is a messenger of death, it is a person who has been decapitated, no head. And these were the ones who were able to, who were fortunate to cross over and it is a passage. And after that Nhlanhla died in a fire, he died in his studio in Newtown, and it was so... and it is in my bedroom, I think about life and I think about the transition and how easy it

³⁴⁷ Mnyele fled into exile to Botswana, but, seen as a political artist against the apartheid state and was eventually killed in June 1985.

is to move from a point of comfort to nowhere and the recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa reminded me so much of this painting.

It is clear from Morare's own description of the work that he finds it eternally moving and evocative despite having bought it some time ago. He feels a very strong connection to the artist, who used to be a friend of his, and equally so to the subject matter depicted. At first sight and for the briefest of seconds it appears abstract and pleasantly colorful, but in no time, the corpses, blood and ruins emerge from the paint marks, creating a work that is not in the least decorative, but harrowing every time one looks at it. The work described by Morare is a medium-sized oil painting, yet he never mentioned this fact, nor the fact that it is brightly colored and painted in a loose, expressionist style. For Morare this piece, and many others that we discussed, were first and foremost important as *texts* reflecting his thoughts, or his life, or his beliefs. His was an interest in content rather than form. Asked why he bought art, he replied that it served two purposes: for 'embellishing' his house and, more importantly, for a 'spiritual' purpose.

Following the analytical impulses offered by Powell in his assessment of private art collections, one could remark that this large collection of Morare's is overtly political – more so than any of the other collections I was privy to. This reflects his interests, things he relates to having grown up under the worst of apartheid, yet are also works by his peers and friends. When discussing the political subject matter in the works of, for example, Johannes Phokela, he speaks of having been there and experienced what was being depicted in much the same way as writers on township art, considered in the previous chapter, wrote about that genre. Many of those writers argued this kind of art to be primarily of importance as documentation of a daily, invisible township existence – yet, the works we were looking at were crucially not township art, but highly complex contemporary art works by some of South Africa's foremost mid-career artists. Unlike, then, the work of Mbongeni Buthelezi discussed in the previous chapter, this was not mere image depiction, documenting the 'everyday', but added a real and engaged sense of a political climate. In this sense, moreover, Morare's collection differs vastly from that of Campbell Smith discussed earlier, where there was a self-conscious effort to buy the works of black artists at a time in the country when few others were doing it (mostly, as I have explained, since the work was not being exhibited by many of the galleries or museums at the time). However, there is also a temporality inscribed in the narrative of this collection: the older works are more political in subject matter, yet recent works by

the same artists reflect his own move to other collection criteria, such as an interest in jazz music, archive photography or relations with galleries and friends. Morare's own descriptions of the works we paused at in his house were within the register of anecdote: friends of his, places he had been, things he had experienced and had very little to do with decoding in art historical terms.

After having done a couple of interviews with buyers, this had become a familiar register for me and I was no longer surprised by how seldom my respondents bought art as a result of having read particularly favourable reviews or art critical comments on the work. Alex Dodd³⁴⁸, a freelance journalist who wrote many articles on the two Joburg Art Fairs for different publications also became a respondent for this study as she represented for me a different kind of an art buyer – one with less money and one who is actively involved in the art world on a daily basis as arts journalist. Dodd came at art via literature and journalism and is as comfortable writing about art in publications as she is on the topic of interiors. She lived, at the time, with her Brazilian husband in a small cottage-style house in Melville, Johannesburg, with walls covered in many small artworks. Melville is a suburb favored by academics as it is in close proximity to two large universities and is structured around a lively strip of restaurants and bars.

Dodd referred to the 'logic' of art buying described above through Morare's collection as one 'led by a personal mythology', which is how she makes her own buying decisions. Dodd differs from Morare in that she sees herself as fundamentally 'inside' the art community. She is an independent journalist often called upon to review exhibitions and as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, is fiercely passionate about the role of art in her life.

As I mentioned, Dodd buys with a far smaller budget than does Morare, but still 'sometimes (will) spend half' of her monthly salary on art. Standing in front of her art collection, she pointed to two small prints by Fiona Pohl. She explained one of the reasons she bought these works was because of 'the strong line and color', but primarily because it reminded her of Paris, and added, 'I just love Paris'. This set the tone of the art discussion after a fairly lengthy theoretical discussion on the state of art in South Africa, the place of the Joburg Art Fair and her analysis of the state of the country. This suggests that the moment we started our walk-through of her collection, much of the

³⁴⁸ Interview, 14 November 2008, Alex Dodd, Free-lance journalist.

‘theoretical’ register of her ‘writer’ persona slipped away, to allow for a far more personal engagement, such as ‘I bought these works because I love Paris’.

After passing a small oil painting of a giraffe, which she bought from a Zimbabwean curio shop, she pointed to two other works, one print by Claudette Schreuders and one by Lisa Brice which ‘are both woman drinking on their own, this one very awkwardly at a cocktail party which reflects all my art openings, terrible awkward standing, but also about autonomy sitting in bars on their own’. Once again her attractions to these two works, both by well-established and successful South African artists, lay in their ability to capture or demonstrate an experience central to her life. In this way Dodd’s life with art reflects what Mieke Bal describes in the aforementioned essay on collecting: ‘If I try to integrate my professional interest in narrative with the private one in collecting, I can imagine seeing collecting as a process consisting of the confrontation between objects and subjective agency informed by an attitude’ (Bal, 2006; 272). Bal goes on to see collections as made up of objects that have been ‘turned away, abducted from itself, its inherent value and denuded of its defining function so as to be available for us as a sign’ (282). For her, then, objects within collections are ‘information goods’, in a similar manner described by Douglas and Isherwood (1996), yet for Bal this is taken to the extreme within the syntax of a collection, where objects are placed in dialogue with other objects in a series. This seemed an accurate description of the collecting habits of Dodd and Morare. In both cases, the collecting of art objects, is an ‘act’ or ‘habit’ where the ‘personal mythology’ weaves a narrative between works that sometimes leaves the artist far behind, and mostly has meaning in relation to the other works, but primarily points back to the buyer or collector.

Dodd explained that another of her interests in works of art is the ‘sign’ of ‘spectacles’, or people wearing glasses. The work that Dodd decided to foreground as one to discuss specifically for the interview was the first work she bought. Her chosen work was a medium sized (about 1m by 1,2m) charcoal drawing depicting the face of a woman in extreme close up, where the whole picture-frame consists of the upper part of her face (eyes and nose only), with the words ‘Good Vision Should be Maintained’ written at the bottom quarter of the canvas in large font. Dodd explained:

It just always makes me think. I just love that phrase: ‘Good vision should be maintained’, it is such a strange term. I often think about it, because if

you take it un-ironically, I totally agree, firstly literally, you know, you need good vision, you need to see, you know, especially if you like art, but then there is also good vision needs to be maintained, like you have to maintain a good vision in this world, but then there is the irony as well as the fascism of the statement, you know it is a fascist statement as well, because what is good vision? It is like, moralistic and it could be pure fascism, like good vision should be maintained, it could be nationalistic. And then she is wearing glasses, I love, ... that is another theme that I am into, spectacles, because I love that whole idea about vision and refracted vision.

Dodd here is in active dialogue with this work of art – a dialogue of her own interpretation. The work itself, while clearly made to be didactic through the insertion of a phrase into the picture plane, is a fairly simple representation of a woman's face wearing glasses. Yet, for Dodd, it has come to embody a life stance, or philosophy of being. The work hangs in her study where she does most of her writing, and, it seemed, provides constant companionship.

In a similarly idiosyncratic manner she also 'follows' works that take skulls as primary subject matter, because, she said, 'I like skulls as well'. She pointed to one in particular by mid career artist Marco Cianfanelli where the skull takes form through the careful construction of text radiating outwards from a small figure in fetal position in the centre of the shape. The shape is made up of the text from love letters that the artist wrote to his wife. For Dodd this work, and skulls generally, point to 'the whole idea of what is going on in someone's head, the whole idea of what is inside your skull, your thinking'. Once again, this interpretation and collecting criteria is as much about an affinity that Dodd feels with the work as it is about searching for a didacticism that resonates with her own thought processes and her life experiences. While Dodd was more interested in a decoding of the art work and keeping the artist in mind, her primary point of connection with the work was extremely personal so much so that, like in the case of Morare, once the work takes its place in the collection, the meaning it might have had in the kind of reading I did in the previous chapter, was radically altered and left behind.

In contrast to these two buyers, Michael Roets³⁴⁹ has only recently become interested in buying contemporary art. My interview with artist Wim Botha led me to Roets, who is a financial director for an international media company that he started and owns with friends. Roets explained that he grew up in a 'middle class Afrikaans' family that loves

³⁴⁹ Interview, 1 October 2008, Michael Roets, Co-owner of Acceleration advertising and private buyer.

food and wine and while his family never visited art galleries, he saw art as a natural progression from his other two hobbies, 'food' and 'wine'. Art, together with these two other leisure activities, he commented, served to counter the 'overuse' of 'the analytical part of' his 'brain' required by accountancy.

Our interview conversation was peppered with apologies for not knowing the 'proper art words' or terminology in explaining his art collection, what he likes and why. He confessed that 'in the beginning', when he just started buying art, it was hard because 'I don't have that structure of how it all fits together'. His interest started a couple of years ago and he has since been on a personal autodidact mission of familiarising himself with contemporary South African art. He reads widely on the subject and stated that one of the surprising things about artists is that one could contact them and ask to meet them and get to know their own processes better: 'I mean they are generous with their time and they don't mind spending time with people who are interested in their art. I would not want to buy works if I don't really understand the kind of background and philosophy'.

It soon became apparent to me that Roets, while interested in the works and what they might be conveying or how they might 'look', was far more interested in artists and making connections with them through the works of art. Roets' collection is built around artist's personalities and 'philosophies' rather than works and he spends time assessing whether the artists he finds himself drawn to are what he calls 'career artists'. When asked whether he buys for investment purposes, he answered that had he been interested in that alone, he would have been 'buying different stuff' and that what he was buying was 'risky', but admitted 'to answer your question about investment, it is also about investment, I wouldn't like to buy people whom I think would stop working in 10 year's or 5 year's time'. It struck me, though, that even as he has the notion of investment in mind, Roets was more interested in creating a community of people through his art collection that take their career as seriously as he takes his and that investment in the true sense of the word would meet different requirements. All the artists whom he has mentioned as those to follow or 'collect', at the time that we spoke, share with him some key demographic features: they are white males in their thirties, and the majority are Afrikaans. He has works by Wim Botha, Michael McGarry and Conrad Botes.

The account of Roets' collection is particular here and differs from that of the other collectors I interviewed. I focus more on what he said and seemed to feel about works rather than how they sit 'in his life'. The reason for this, I would suggest, is that I met Roets in an empty boardroom in Johannesburg's upmarket suburb of Bryanston in a large office park. His company has a satellite office in this area which is only used to meet clients and not very well staffed. Roets lives in an inner-city apartment in Cape Town and between his frequent international travel and busy schedule we could never coordinate to be in Cape Town at the same time for me to see his collection first hand, although he was very eager for me to do so and to *show* me what he had bought. He seemed hungry to share this treasure with someone who had an interest. His emails from London or New York to me, during the time of trying to coordinate a meeting, always mentioned the exhibitions he had seen and the things that interested him about them, almost as the primary aims of these trips, even though they were clearly squeezed in between many business meetings. It thus happened that I had to experience his work via images on his computer and his own descriptions of them.

Roets was in two minds as to which artwork he should choose as his favourite to discuss. He finally settled on two, one recent paper carving by Wim Botha and a piece by Michael McGarry. I include here the latter only as it was at the Art Fair that he came across this artist's work – he lives in Cape Town and at that stage this artist was only represented by the Art Extra Gallery in Johannesburg. McGarry is a young artist who, according to his press release, has spent the past couple of years making 'theoretical' works that had no material form, working in two-dimensional design and writing art criticism. He has had two solo exhibitions since emerging onto the scene and immediately started drawing the attention of the various selection panels for local art prizes. He is also one of the three individuals that make up Avant Car Guard discussed in the previous chapter. All the available material on his work currently quote the same opening phrase from his representing gallery's³⁵⁰ web page as his primary concern, suggesting that this might be an overriding and long-held interest of the artist: '... the ongoing ramifications of imperialism on the African continent'. His most recent solo exhibition was entitled 'When enough people start saying the same thing', which the press document explained as: 'refers to the shift of power that occurs the moment a large number people are

³⁵⁰ McGarry is currently represented by Brodie/Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg. This gallery was formed in 2009 when the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town and David Brodie's Art Extra formed a business partnership. By the second Joburg Art Fair, Art Extra had been turned into Brodie/Stevenson.

unhappy with the status quo - irrespective of whether the leadership is democratic or despotic'³⁵¹. McGarry, like some of the artists discussed previously is, thus, interested in the 'sign' of Africa. McGarry's is a critical, ironic voice and seemingly influenced by watching news footage and reading research rather than venturing out into the rest of the continent himself, it is also highly theoretical. Roets too, has done far more traveling in Europe than in Africa and his point of view comes across as similarly influenced by reading newspapers.

Roets, furthermore, seemed to share some views with McGarry on the subject of 'Africa' as one not concerned with representation of it, but with a daily politics that influences his life. The specific work he bought was a sculpture, wall mounted, and consisted of a found Mercedes car door which had been modified to sport the words 'AU' on the outside. The work was titled, simply, *AU*. I asked Roets why he liked this specific work at which point he became very animated and involved in his answer:

Well, you know, I think I guess as a white South African you kind of ask yourself a lot of questions, and he does a lot, he asks some big questions about Africa and the whole thing about imperialism in Africa and the Chinese or whatever and you know that African Union one, the car door is amazing. Because firstly it is a found object but it is a Mercedes car door which has some connotation I guess for African leaders you know, it is the car of choice I guess. And then he painted the windows black. So who does that? Somebody who thinks they are very important. And he has kind of modified the door beautifully, little leather strips coming in and out of the strips on the door, so it is beautifully modified in a way that I think is very much an African way of doing things, you know where they often take something and adapt it 'African way', and he did that beautifully. So there is a lot going on when you look at that work and he has got a blue AU painted on the door and actually in the catalogue it comes with this kind of address which is the chairman's address of the African Union, which if you read it, it is just kind of very verbose and it says a lot but it says very little. It is kind of very 'Africa', you know what I mean, there is a lot going on, you know it is well intended ok, but you know.

Roets clearly enjoyed the freedom 'contemporary art' afforded McGarry, to make statements that have been latent in his own thoughts around 'the whole African thing' – artists, he said, 'can get away with it'. To his mind McGarry was not 'saying it is good or bad or the African Union is good or bad, but he, you know in Africa, let's face it not everything is working and there are some people who are trying to make it work, you

³⁵¹ <http://www.brodiestevenson.com/exhibitions/mcgarry/index.html>

know you are dealing with a situation where you come from a severe disadvantage of not having... Africa has to kind of get the ball rolling, but it is hard, it is like making a train move off the edge, it takes a lot of energy and that is where Africa is at the moment, it is going to take a long time, so anyway'. Roets enjoyed seeing his own ideas reflected in this work – ideas that he admitted might be considered not politically correct in many other circumstances. This, once again, affirmed a connection with a similarly minded individual – even though one can glean from his description that he appreciates the aesthetic qualities too, his connection with the work was with the way McGarry 'saw the world' rather than the work as part of a 'personal mythology'.

As an art buyer, Roets had the most curious relation to the 'world of art' of all the buyers that I interviewed. He displayed and spoke about a keen interest in knowledge, and had spent long hours educating himself on art generally, the art market, and South African contemporary art in particular, so much so that he now finds the *time* investment that he makes in art more onerous than the financial one (which in his case is substantial): 'if I look at the amount of emails I get everyday that is art related, you know there is a kind of a drain on my time. I almost have to set some time aside now to spend it on that, because if I just treat these things as they come in, it will take over'. Yet he still saw himself as not 'inside' the art community. He has been surprised by the 'connections' he had been able to make by meeting artists and gallerists individually, as the 'art world' to him is still a foreign, 'other' place that speak in a vocabulary that he might be caught out not to know. Even as I probed this preconception on what an 'art public' might be for him, he held firmly that the art world consisted of people who are different to him.

Speaking about the international art market, his ideas followed a similar pattern based on assumptions of 'others'. He commented that the reason for the 'boom' in the art market in India and China was the rapid rise in numbers of 'mega wealthy' people and explained it in the following way: 'so what do wealthy people do if they want to become, kind of, you know become more cultural, they have to spend their money on different things and that is where art has now gone through a boom of ten years and, you know, it is like, whenever you open the newspaper in the lifestyle section there is always something about it'. It is clear from our conversation that Roets came at art from 'the outside' and entirely driven by his own momentum – none of his friends or business colleagues share this interest. He had become fairly successful personally and had entered an upper middle-class lifestyle, which for him, meant counterbalancing his career with 'lighter'

things in life – art, he seemed to suggest is an obvious choice within that thought pattern. What is important here is that Roets claimed to not have gravitated to art for social reasons or to acquire an extra cultural ‘status’ dimension. His motivations for ‘collecting’ artists have much more to do with meeting and exchanging ideas with successful, and similarly minded peers and very little, it seemed, with attending exhibition openings or auctions. He even conceded that the people he spends most of his time with, his colleagues and friends, find his interest in art ‘weird’. Yet, he ascribed motivations of ‘showiness’ and ‘status’ to other ‘mega-wealthy’ people and so demonstrates what I have found to be a key element in perceptions around art and status. While it is certainly plausible and sometimes true that art fulfils the role of adding culture to a newly moneyed person’s persona, none of the buyers I met demonstrated this particular trend – however many mentioned it as a probable draw-card for others. In this Roets, much like the next buyer I would like to discuss does not fit neatly into Bourdieu’s theory around the connection between art and social status. It is true that such ‘leisure activities’ such as wine tasting and an interest in fine food, might be that of the upper middle class, but the buying of art within that practice is not for Roets ‘the ultimate’ form of fine living – as Bourdieu would suggest. Rather it is just another of the many activities that his lifestyle has made available to him. It is further noteworthy that he is alone amongst his newly moneyed peers and business associates in his art buying (almost obsession) and this ‘hobby’ has not occurred to his colleagues as a natural pass-time once they attained a certain level of wealth. Yet Roets himself seems to think that this ‘pattern’ from wealth to art might be an obvious one *for other people*.

The last example of an art buyer and collector that I would like to discuss, further complicated this widely shared assumption around why people buy art. He shares with the other three a genuine and highly personalised interest in art works and the world of artists. He too made reference to the way art could be used to bolster social status, yet found this hardly to be a trend in business networking. For him, art brought him closer to what he called a ‘simpler life’, thereby positioning himself in a unique relation to ideas around distinction as discussed in the work of Bourdieu (1998) which I have been referencing throughout this study. Bourdieu interviewed many people from different social backgrounds in France to whom he asked similar questions around habits of entertaining guests and cooking; he showed a range of images from fine art and played a range of music from different genres, and so formulated a complex theory of a person’s

social standing, education, and career in relation to taste and interest in matters of 'culture'. The study holds that 'cultural consecration does indeed confer on the objects, persons and situations it touches, a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation ... that is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not to fulfill a social function of legitimating social difference' (7). Much of what he found has bearing on a study such as mine that tries to understand how publics interact with art and much of it can be transposed onto the South Africa context of the Fair as I have demonstrated elsewhere, yet what is even more striking, are the ways in which contemporary South Africa has created publics that do not fit easily into Bourdieu's model. Towards the end of his study, Bourdieu summarises his thesis as: 'the loftiness of the references and, above all, the arrogance, the complacency, the insolence, in a word, the self-assurance, the certainty of having which is grounded in the certainty of having always had, as if by immaterial gift, ... is the exact opposite of the naivety, innocence, humility, seriousness which betray illegitimacy' (329).

In my interview with well-known African National Congress, National Executive Council member, former Cabinet Minister for Environmental Affairs and former CEO of Eskom, now executive chairman of his company Lereko Investments, Valli Moosa³⁵², he stressed throughout our discussion that he was an ordinary person who couldn't afford to buy expensive artwork. Even though my connection to Moosa came via Ross Douglas, who had met him at an intimate gathering at the Everard Read Gallery, and again at a dinner at Mark Read's house, Moosa insisted that he had no interest in the expensive art Everard Read sells. Moosa grew up during the apartheid years in downtown Johannesburg's then industrial area of Newtown, but has 'moved' a long way since then, and now his name sometimes appears on South African 'rich lists'³⁵³. This merely suggests that he has share options in many well-performing corporate companies and is not an exact measure of his 'wealth' – his house, in which we had our conversation, in fact was modest and homely, while being in a sought after suburb in Johannesburg overlooking a park. Moosa himself was an exceedingly warm and

³⁵² Interview 23 October 2008, Valli Moosa, Director of Lereko Investments.

³⁵³ I found the following on the Anglo Platinum 'Directorate' web page under new directors appointed after December 2007: Appointed a director on 23 January 2008. Valli is the executive chairman of Lereko Investments (Pty) Limited and President of the World Conservation Union. Valli is the non-executive chairman of Eskom and nonexecutive deputy chairman of Thebe Investment Corporation (Pty) Limited. His current non-executive directorships include South African Airways, Sanlam, International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Sun International and Imperial Holdings. (http://www.angloplatinum.com/printpage.asp?ref=about_us/au_directorate/au_dir_main.asp&Id2=)

charismatic character and literally spoke non-stop, allowing me few opportunities to interject with some questions during the half hour slot that he could make himself available for the interview.

At the time that we spoke Moosa had just left his position as government cabinet minister after 10 years, and so, he explained, had no furniture of his own: 'So we slowly started furnishing the place. Most of the things you see here had been bought at auctions by my wife. She goes to cheap auctions, this is cheap stuff. It is cheaper than you can get in a furniture store, but nicer stuff. It is cheaper than buying a lounge suit at the lounge store. And so the art is really to make the place look nice'. He continually asserted: 'I am not an art collector', as if to create a distance between himself and what being an art collector may designate socially. He explained: 'You know, I am in the investment business that is what I do to earn a living. But art is not my investment, and I don't have the money to buy expensive art, and I think I wouldn't buy anything that is over the top expensive'. He then pointed to a particular work painted by a friend of his and without being asked, offered: 'And if you want to know, I paid R10 000 for this'. He said that he often goes to this particular gallery when he has the time, to 'have a glass of wine'. On these occasions he would 'meet quite a number of people that I would know. And not sort of wealthy people or anything of that sort', then added 'for that you would need to go to the Everard Read Gallery'.

As I mentioned a moment ago, it was precisely through the Everard Read Gallery that I came to know that Moosa buys art, since he often visits Mark Read. I asked him about this and he replied: 'I do go there sometimes, because I am friends with Mark Read, we both serve on WWF. He is on WWF, and we talk environmental stuff. I have never bought anything from him, because I can't afford to'. What Moosa was trying to convey, was that for him art connects him with ordinary people and not with the 'rich'. It thus follows that what he buys has very little to do with 'social distinction', in the sense crafted by Bourdieu, but rather a negative version thereof, where art connects him to people less fortunate than he is. I demonstrate below how this is at work.

One could, of course, argue that he does not see the value in art because he did not grow up with it, yet this is unlikely to be true given his education and the amount of international travel he is exposed to. For example, his favourite buying spot is a

development artist residency space close to where he grew up, called 'The Bag Factory', where Morare is also a patron. Many South African black, 'struggle' artists, such as Sam Nglengethwa have their roots at the Bag Factory (Nglengethwa was one of the founders). He described one such buying experience in order to give background to the piece he had singled out to discuss as his 'favourite':

And this I bought, this guy works in the Bag Factory, you know the Bagfactory? I pop round to the Bagfactoryt from time to time when I have nothing to do, couple of hours free in the afternoon. Just walk around and say hi to, you know, David (Koloane), and a few other chaps there. Not really to buy anything. But I saw this guy there, he is a young fellow with dreadlocks and I said I want to buy that. And I said how much is it, he said R40 000. And I bought it and I think it is well worth it. For me that is what it is worth. I think that is how much the artist should be paid for that. The amount of time and energy, ...

To most South Africans, R40 000 is not a small amount to spend on art, which might be why he then felt the need to justify 'that is what it is worth' and tried to quantify it through the 'time and effort' that went into the making of the work. Once again, this is not to be read as a misunderstanding of value in art as equatable to quantifiable time and resources, but rather an elaborate form of apology for spending the amount of money on art. None of my other buyer respondents ever mentioned how much they had paid for a piece or even suggested that it was to be taken into account when discussing the work. While Moosa's words might seem like those described by Bourdieu as 'naivety, innocence, humility, seriousness which betray illegitimacy', it seemed to me a very well crafted veneer behind which a similarly well-crafted sophistication resided.

Some of the works that he pointed out to me were of Johannesburg – he called himself Johannesburg's biggest fan. These reminded him of where he grew up. Other works were less contemporary and had been bought in Mozambique. Many had political connotations, such as the one referred to earlier from the Bag Factory. This was the work he had singled out to discuss. It was a large painting depicting in colourful oils the facades of two buildings in full frontal elevation and so had a two-dimensional quality to it. Both of the buildings were slightly run down with elements of newspaper and text adding multi-media or collage elements that brought a didacticism to what would otherwise have been simply two painted building facades. Moosa described these added elements as that which drew him to this work:

... if you look here, and if you look here, look at this, and these windows do not have stuff inside, but he put his own stuff inside: 'Mr President it is time to go', referring to Thabo Mbeki, it was around the time of the Polokwane debate and all those things, you know. So he has put these nice little snippets that he has got there. I asked him what is this string doing there? And he said, well, it is a dilapidated building and the doors are boarded up, so the only way to get out, would be to climb up, so he put that there. That is what he said. And then he just put in different things. Like here is a bit of plastic bag. He is, I think, brave and innovative. And I like this, it is ugly and he has made it beautiful, maybe that is what it is ...

He concluded with: 'This is a country that has its real ugly parts to it, but it has its real beautiful parts to it. And he captured that.' Moosa is, thus, not merely buying art to decorate the house as he claimed at the start of our interview, it is an engagement, perhaps not as passionately as many of the other buyers discussed here, but involved and personalised and above all, didactic. Politics and the ingredients of the political is, as in the case of Morare close to his life-world and personal history. He too sees through the works a connection to the artists behind the works. He also likes the idea of supporting younger, inexperienced artists, and so to help them with their careers to become more successful.

Moosa's house was not filled with art works in the ways that the other collectors discussed here had filled their houses literally to the brim. Yet, he does, from time to time, spend substantial amounts of money on buying art and this sets him apart from the majority of South Africans, even those as wealthy as he has become. What his collection and approach to art serves to demonstrate here is a buying pattern that might be particularly local, where there is an element of what I referred to in Part Two as 'Corporate Social Investment' in his private buying, but also a connection with people that he describes as 'ordinary', perhaps scarce in the circles he has come to move in. In this way art buying for him is a habit and he is a collector that looks for specific works and arranges them in his house so as to communicate connections between them and connections to him. While he would not admit it, he is, in this respect, much like the previous three buyers that I have discussed in this section.

Beyond these four isolated examples, I came across many other art works in private or office spaces during the fieldwork period. Gallerist Linda Givon's³⁵⁴ house, for example, sports all manner of art objects, hung in salon-style from floor to ceiling. She pointed to them in relation to biographical information and as markers of specific times or events in her life, as others might page through photo albums. These works include early work by Sam Nhlengethwa that is strikingly political and very unlike anything he has shown for at least the past two decades. There are also early Dumile Feni's before he 'lost it' abroad, according to Givon. Other works were prize-winners in competitions that some of her own artists entered but did not win and she bought because she 'just loved it'. Many of the works in her office, where we had our discussion, were small sketches that told the narrative of political struggle during the years when she was one of the few gallerists to show black artists locally and abroad. These were gifts, or pieces that she specifically bought, and should one look for Powell's re-conceptualised or re-contextualised history of this country, Givon's study, bedroom, sitting room, and kitchen would provide ample material.

Givon came across as having spent a lifetime buying art, the way others might buy groceries. Collecting, in fact, might well seem a natural tendency for the owner of a gallery, yet both Warren Siebrits³⁵⁵ and Michael Stevenson³⁵⁶ made it clear that they do not buy art for private collecting, as that would put them in 'competition' with their clients. Siebrits explained that he would be placed in the awkward situation of siphoning the best works off for himself, since he has the first pick of them, and be embarrassed when he had a client for dinner and was thus exposed with 'you said my work was the best you had!' Justin Rhodes³⁵⁷ on the other hand felt that he should set an example to his young peers and build up an art collection that reflected the stance of his gallery as hip, daring and committed to the careers of younger artists.

Many of the individuals I described in Part Two, mostly those that have corporate positions were also surrounded by art in their offices or houses where we met. In

³⁵⁴ Interview, 25 November 2008, Linda Givon, Former owner and director of Goodman Gallery.

³⁵⁵ Interview, 25 March 2009, Warren Siebrits, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary, Johannesburg, co-owner and director

³⁵⁶ Interview, 31 April 2008, Michael Stevenson, Director and owner of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

³⁵⁷ Interview, 5 April 2009, Justin Rhodes, Co-owner and director, Whatiftheworld Gallery, Cape Town,

Francois Pienaar's³⁵⁸ office hung a large green and yellow painting of rugby players – abstracted, in cubist style. This, he explained, was hanging in the VISA VIP lounge at one of the rugby tournaments he attended as South African ambassador and he 'just loved it'. The Australian artist gave it to him as gift. Paul Harris³⁵⁹, in his skyscraper Sandton office, was surrounded by Thomas Baines oils, which, he explained, no one else wanted when a decision was taken to fill the executive offices with more contemporary work. Brand executive, Beth van Heerden³⁶⁰, told me that the loose, playful Kentridge print in her office, which I described as 'tame' to illustrate a different point, was also salvaged from a dark corridor somewhere in the FirstRand 'stable' when no one else had wanted it. She made it clear that what I might think of as 'tame' still requires 'a leap' from most bank employees. She furthermore relayed an anecdote behind a work that she bought from the Ame's d'Afrique gallery at the first Joburg Art Fair. The piece was two-dimensional with nails hammered into the surface. This work had become a battleground between her and her domestic worker: Van Heerden wanted to hang it in the kitchen where she could see it often, because, she felt it to be a difficult work that she had to become familiar with and come to 'understand'. Her domestic worker, however, routinely turned it into a decorative key-hanging ornament. Steve Bailes³⁶¹, buyer for FirstRand had surrounded himself in his house with botanical paintings, paintings of animals and his study in particular, where we had our discussion, bore a nautical theme. Most striking in his surroundings was the life-size portrait he had commissioned of the Queen of England in his entrance foyer – he explained that he was distantly related to the Royal family.

Journalist Johan Myburgh³⁶², whom I quoted in earlier parts of this study, was one of the most passionate art buyers I came across. He explained that what he currently looks for in art objects are those that have more 'negative' spaces, rather than 'positive' ones. By this he meant works that depict objects floating in space or which are primarily monotone and abstract. Myburgh buys only works on paper, which he mused, might be connected, somehow, to his profession as writer. He described in details how he could still, after years of having acquired certain pieces, place a chair in front of the work and

³⁵⁸ Interview 3 November 2008, Francois Pienaar, Head of Sponsorship FNB.

³⁵⁹ Interview, 20 March 2008, Paul Harris, CE Firststrand.

³⁶⁰ Interview, 6 March 2009, Beth Van Heerden, Firststrand Brand Executive.

³⁶¹ Interview, 17 September 2008, Steve Bailes, Firststrand Art Buyer.

³⁶² Interview, 10 November 2008, Johan Myburgh, South African arts journalist, Beeld

just stare at it, 'the way one listens to music'. Roets too confessed: 'when I bought this piece (a Conrad Botes) I could just sit there for hours and just stare at it, it is amazing'. Myburgh's art collecting philosophy was that the work has to be jarring and 'difficult' initially for it to sustain its spell over the buyer over the period of a lifetime. In my other conversations with buyers, it was often mentioned that when one buys an 'easy' work, one risks getting bored with it.

Echoing some of Bal's 'collecting' theories, Myburgh quoted Roland Barthes to explain that the buyer of art picks up the process of art-making where the artists left off to 'kyk dit klaar' (to complete the work by looking at it). For him this is an active process, a responsibility even, that the buyer takes on. The meaning, he went on to explain, that the buyer then ascribes to the work might not be the definitive meaning, but will always be a *valid* meaning, since the status of the work had changed to be part of the owner's collection. In this way the buyer-looker is tremendously empowered to be part of the process begun by the artists.

I mentioned upon opening this chapter that one of the arguments that I wish to craft on art buying subsequent to the interviews I conducted, was that a profound change in meaning takes place once the art object is bought and becomes part of a collection. Myburgh's opinion on the role of the buyer in the 'life' of the artwork exemplifies this argument. His thoughts, together with much of what the discussions above have been concerned with, illustrate how that change in meaning manifests and how intricately personalised it had become in the instances I came across. The individuals mentioned in this chapter are naturally also those at whom the Joburg Art Fair was aimed and those that this study, in one of its registers, considers its unit of analyses. They are people who live in contemporary South Africa and interact with the stuff of things like art fairs, as much as they do with government decision making and building sustainable careers in this country. This 'group' once again comes under investigation in the following chapter where, in a move to conclude this study, the Art Fair is considered as an event that articulates a moment in the post-apartheid through a close reading of Jane Alexander's installation, *Security* at the 2009 Joburg Art Fair.

PART 3

Chapter 9. Conclusion: Jane Alexander's *Security*

The post-apartheid is not a time or a period with a clear beginning and end. Rather, it is a circumstance in the making; unfolding everyday in the public domain – in the economic and the cultural spheres and amongst the many other societal spheres that it touches and alters. It is a context that has been simultaneously thrilling and shocking for what it has revealed about the possibilities for better lives and more opportunities; in its abundance and in its shortfalls. The Joburg Art Fair, I have argued, is a product of this period – at once a paradoxical and frustrating, but also an enabling environment – and some parts of this study has analysed it in this way accordingly. At the same time, while it is useful to analyse the Joburg Art Fair as a product of this time, I have argued further that it is equally useful to examine the Joburg Art Fair as a mirror on post-apartheid as it encompasses and refracts some key features of this social landscape. These features have been shown to be in dialogue with international trends and as examples of a local specificity. In this way, while I have discussed how such an event could have beneficial consequences for this society, this has not been a study that makes an argument for, or against, the phenomenon of this particular event. Rather, it has served as a case study through which to craft new analytical perspectives on the present. In this chapter, which, at the same time, is a conclusion, a powerful South African work of art is analysed and positioned in such a way as to allow for a re-reading of the terrains covered in this study. This is intended to bring once more into sharp relief what this study has to offer to existing literature on the nature of post-apartheid. Its form therefore is that of an unfolding, yet in-depth reading of aspects of the South African post-apartheid, placed alongside and intertwined with a similarly in-depth regard for what art objects reveal about this context.

Security by Jane Alexander was an art object exhibited at the second Joburg Art Fair and it stands in provocative, yet insightful relation to most of what this study has discussed in and around the Joburg Art Fair thus far. Through the guiding principle of 'reading' articulations of the contemporary moment in South Africa, this study has deployed many different lenses in order to bring various terrains into focus as they were relevant to the Art Fair. Alexander's work forces upon this reading a dark side, an underneath and a

polemic some of which the Art Fair in its form and conception negates, but which has been latent in the ethnographic fieldwork. The chapters have been structured so as to reveal paradoxes and frustrations embedded in the process of the event and what it took to 'make it happen', while also trying to read diagnostically from assumptions that prevail around how people live in the post-apartheid world. In this way, the inherent celebratory character of the event, its cultures of consumption and self-styling, have been positioned against the difficulties of creating it, its publics, as well as the political matrix that it speaks of.

The political has been shown to reside in its form and its funding, and in the most pronounced way, in the art that was shown at the Fair. A point that I have been intent on exploring in the chapters above, and which I will return to in this chapter is the way in which an initial reading of art fairs, including this one, suggests that it is best understood as an instance of neo-liberal, privatised, free-market exploitation of art and culture – in short, as an event crafted to suit the tamed and watered-down desires of 'lifestyle' consumption. This is a perspective that to some extent holds up in the case of the Joburg Art Fair. Nevertheless, as I have argued, the particularities of this event make for a more nuanced understanding of how such new forms of culture, displays of culture and cultural production reflect ways in which we live. The first part of the study brought into focus the rubric of the African contemporary, the Global South and a discussion around publics of the now. Then, in the second part of the study, the language of cultural economics was brought to bear on the company behind the Joburg Art Fair, the sponsor, and in proximity to what art is 'supposed' to do in society when the event is animated by money. The final part of the study zoomed in on art objects as instances and 'happenings' of visual culture and, primarily, aided in an understanding of the emergent in South Africa. Thus, the various lenses enabled a reading of the social, the economic, the cultural, as well as of epistemologies of place outside the West, and so, to use a term by Geeta Kapur (2008), a particular 'situationist cultural practice'³⁶³ was explored. I have positioned this summary of the terrains covered here to remind the reader before embarking on the reading of *Security*, so as to understand how this work, through the reflexivity it encourages, deepens the general analysis that this study has offered.

³⁶³ Geeta Kapur (2008) uses this term to suggest the necessity for postcolonial studies to look to places outside the West.

One of the aspects that this study has aimed to explore has been linked to a curiosity around what it is that has changed in the post-apartheid, alongside that which has refused to, or continue to resist such change. This is a reflection of my own subject position, having grown up at the tail end of the previous regime with much of my personal references and life worlds constructed during the period of post-apartheid. Throughout this study, a focus was placed on the intricacies of the immediate present as lived and practiced and presented by the Joburg Art Fair. Yet, in ways both temporal and conjectural, much of the analysis has been positioned against what came before, an apartheid and colonial past, and placed in a present referred to as 'post'. There is a danger in such a positioning of fashioning apartheid as trope for, at once, a linearity leading into the present, and a 'bulking' together of different concepts vaguely to do with discrimination, without taking on board the many contradictions and individualities that apartheid encapsulated and embodied through the lives of the people it affected. South African scholars writing both during and after apartheid have been acutely tuned into these contradictions with the, mostly historical, examples of Van Onselen (1982) and Hyslop (2004), providing key insights. There is no doubt that the momentous dismantling and end of apartheid had the effect of opening up vast new spaces for expression and the crafting of different presents and futures for many people in South Africa. The change in government regime is seen to have brought about the possibility of a radical politics of the human and the citizen, new to this country, and artistic practice has moved apace with such new possibilities to reflect it, and reflect upon it. Artists in South Africa, as I have discussed, have been keenly interested in political framing, probing and practices of unmasking to do with post-apartheid.

For more than two decades Jane Alexander has been working at the sharp edge of such an enquiry. Her mostly sculptural pieces are in continual dialogue with the South African past and present through recurrent re-workings of imagery, forms and iconography, spanning her artistic career. Within her oeuvre, one finds a narrative made up by transformations of figures and reinventions and 'cameo' appearances of the characters that she sculpts and positions in filmic, photographic, and dioramic scenarios, which gestures towards a longer timeline than that encapsulated by the viewing of one piece in isolation. The work itself, thus, forces one to see a continuum, a temporality, connecting years of production and necessitating both the palimpsest and the embodiment of the past to be brought alongside that of the present.

Her most famous work might well be the centrepiece in the South African National Gallery, and has become signifier for an embodied brutality at the heart of the apartheid regime (Powell, 2007: 35). This work is entitled *Butcher Boys* (1985-6) and consists of three human life-sized figures composed of uncannily life-like male features together with protruding anatomy of the bestial, sitting side by side on a bench. During the period from which this work dates, Alexander continued to craft half-human figures in a combination of realistic modeling and exposed bone structures that were outright horrible and shocking to look at. I am thinking here of *Butcher Boys* (1985-6) and, more specifically, of *Untitled* (1982), *Dog* (1984 – 5) and *Domestic Angel* (1984). Powell observes, however, that ‘at a certain point – in the early part of the democratic era in South African history – Alexander’s figures began gradually to metamorphose. The implicitly external violence (in works such as *Butcher Boys* (1985-6)) that is registered in the early work gives way to a more internal process no longer carrying the immediacies of violence, but instead are born out of a traumatized and tainted reality³⁶⁴. Powell is referring to a gradual shift evident in the work as actively *working through* a changing South African context. It is a context that has been emancipatory for many, but less so for the majority. I now briefly turn to some writers who have expressed severe criticisms of what post-apartheid has managed to deliver and become, before considering what *Security* adds to such a reading.

Post-apartheid exposed

Lindsey Bremner (1998), writing from the perspective of space, planning and architecture, positions apartheid in the following way: ‘Racial segregation became the fulcrum of the national and urban political vision of the apartheid state’. She motions towards the way in which ‘this simple dictum’ encompassed the major parts of people’s lives and so had the power to severely restrict both movement and advancement: ‘Under apartheid, racial segregation, practiced by previous governments to promote physical order and social control, became an instrument for the political and social exclusion of African people and the restriction to certain areas of economic life’ (Bremner, 1998: 2B). Moving into the post-democratic era, she describes the following phenomenon: ‘Since 1994 there have been far-reaching changes in the urban areas of South Africa, and they

³⁶⁴ Ivor Powell. ‘Inside and Outside of History.’ *Art South Africa* vol. 5 issue 4, winter 2007: 37.

have surely been felt most intensely in the large metropolitan areas – Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban’. Johannesburg, she continues ‘has become a field of contestation between extreme wealth and extreme poverty, between luxury and subsistence, idyll and inferno, excess and need. Many who were confined by apartheid to townships and rural Bantustans, or to the countries beyond our borders, have converged on the streets of Johannesburg to claim its promise of a better life’ (2B). Here she is gesturing towards the sense of immanent promise of betterment that the masses of South African citizens expected democracy would bring.

Also adopting the language of space, Patrick Bond (2007) sees the post-apartheid as a ‘renewal of socio-economic apartheid’ which left far behind the hopes and promises of the African National Congress before their landslide election victory in 1994 (91). He observes that between 1997 and 2004, ‘realestate prices in South Africa rose 200% (two and a half times more rapidly than in even the bubble-ridden United States)’ (92), a fact that speaks of tremendous economic growth. Yet it has become clear that the post-apartheid social milieu has been characterised by ‘jobless growth’ (Kesper, 2003: 86) leaving most of the country’s citizens unable to benefit from this property up-swing. In a familiar move he contrasts the Johannesburg inner city as a place of danger and decline, with the area where the Art Fair was located. His description does not try to mask his own disdain for the ways of living that this geographic demarcation has come to denote: ‘24 kilometers to the Northeast stands Sandton home to many billions of rands’ worth of 1990’s commercial property investments’ with skyscrapers and ‘Africa’s largest stock exchange’; ‘little residential Tuscanies emerged behind three meter high walls adorned with impenetrable barbed wire... Johannesburg’s cutting-edge high-tech surveillance systems are staffed by poverty-level black security-sector workers. In unison, these features conjoin conspicuous consumption norms, the psychology of class insulation, phallic symbolism, and a profoundly distorted political economy’ (93).

Bond sharpens his argument about a general regression within post-apartheid by looking at water and electricity distribution and management within the poorest sectors of society – a situation in which, after metered systems were introduced, many households live without water and electricity for a substantial part of each month and which, he believes, should be deemed un-constitutional (95). Bond’s findings around some of the cruelties of the post-apartheid add insight to an aspect of this present and expose the degree to

which change has left the country wanting. It is furthermore of significance here in terms of the context and purpose for which it was written. His article was published in a catalogue as recently as 2007 for an exhibition held in Barcelona, *Apartheid: The South African Mirror*, which suggests that South Africa is still very much viewed within this rubric as almost stultified in time. This relates to notions I explored in the third chapter under the headings of the African contemporary where I aimed to lay bare the manner in which Africa and specifically South Africa remains a fixed paradigm within much global scholarship on this place. One is, thus, reminded of two things: the first is of the necessity to create research around a present that is fundamentally changed and sufficiently nuanced in order that it might be played back to the global imaginary; and second of some of the urgencies around changes within post-apartheid that does not herald a celebratory approach but has had debilitating negative effects.

In the context of the Joburg Art Fair specifically, *Security* forces those aspects of the post-apartheid into the foreground at a time and in a place, as I have discussed, when many of the participants to the Fair were ready to 'move on' to more current and international subject matter, and many of the visitors to the event had become weary of the inefficiencies of the new regime and the ways it was affecting *their* lives. The Fair, as event, presented forms of escapism and a mirage of a 'normal', stable, Western metropolis, yet *Security* insisted on the compromises reached within this society.

The Bird in the Cage

At the Fair *Security* could be described in the following way: Two layers of razor wire circumscribed a 100 sqm space, with a one metre passage between the two layers. The demarcated space was in the shape of an elongated rectangle with breadth and length at a ratio of 5:1. These 'fences' were about two meters high. In the inside enclosed space had been planted squares of wheat to grow, and formed a 'lawn' or small field of sap-green carpeting, covering the entire inside area. Two of the boundary sides, the North and East sides, were flanked and positioned in proximity to the back walls of two other booths, leaving the remaining two open to the larger circulation aisles of the Fair. However, because the two sides against the white walls of the Fair had been positioned at a two-metre distance one could still walk around the entire piece. The space between the two sets of fencing was also carpeted, but here with a thick covering of red workers' gloves

(1000 of them) and machetes (1000 again). Five guards were stationed around the fencing - sometimes on the very outside of the fence, sometimes between the two fences; sometimes stationary, sometimes circling, or patrolling the perimeter boundary. They wore security guard outfits from a South African private security company and were all young, black men.

In the very centre of the inside, green clearing, was positioned a sculpted figure, facing down the long side of the space. The figure was a bird, it seemed, with vulture-like beak and eyes, and was standing on two uncertain legs like those of a small child, perhaps one affected by polio, with no feet. The head was that of a bird, the torso that of an old man or small child. It had neither wings, nor arms and was leaning slightly forward as if in anticipation of taking a step to roam its cage-enclosure, or mimic the patrolling of the guards.

Whether it was being guarded against an outside threat, or whether it was a threat that the outside needed guarding against, was not clear. It had features at once menacing, (the sharp, beak and dark eyes of the carnivorous bird), and vulnerable (the armless, wingless torso and unsafe, mutilated legs). This ambivalent subject positioning however, could not mask the fact of an extreme helplessness inside that cage. It was a figure whose 'capability', to use a term coined by Amartya Sen (1993), had been hampered by a dense layering of physical barriers and an awkward physiognomy that further restricted its' movement and agency.

'Capability' is a word used by Sen to speak of *quality of life*. This provides ground for looking back upon another issue that I have been intent on exploring in the chapters before. In many of the discussions, I have been interested in understanding how post-apartheid has made for new ways of living and of creating 'culture'. I have also asked whether scholarly analyses have managed accurately to portray and describe these ways of being, as well as the various ways in which South Africa has created unique subject positions. 'Capability' strikes me as a term with urgent repercussion for an analysis of the present in South Africa. It is also a term that can be brought to bear on how *Security* reflects this context. It is precisely the manner in which this term encapsulates an element of 'being-ness' that *Security* evokes and that I would like to explore further here.

The figure in the cage looked alive in suspended animation (not like a monument) - as were the guards that took steps every now and then. If these people and this thing were alive, what then was their 'quality of life'? When considering this concept, two sets of subjectivities demand attention: the one is that of the figure inside and the other is a collective one of the guards. The question of 'quality of life' bears upon both of these. In order to achieve more clarity within this term, one which Sen has used across his writing career, he positions 'capability' as against other units of 'economically' measuring the lives of citizens: 'It differs from... personal utility (focusing on pleasure, happiness, or desire fulfillment), absolute or relative opulence (focusing on commodity bundles, real income, or real wealth), assessment of negative freedoms (focusing on procedural fulfillment of libertarian rights and rules of non-interference), comparisons of means of freedom ...' (31). He concludes '(p)erhaps the most primitive notion in this approach concerns 'functionings'. 'Functionings' represent parts of the state of a person - in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life' (31). What is at stake is thus what a person is able to do with and within her life as it is presented to her by the features and constraints of that life. It is a concept highly suggestive for this piece in ways that I will now discuss.

Guards and Fences

I first consider the lives of the guards. Alexander contracted with a local private security company and hired five individuals to form part of this piece for the duration of the event. This implies that before and after the Fair they would have been stationed somewhere in the city outside a place of work, entertainment or living, providing protection to a segment of the city's inhabitants. The private security guards currently employed in South Africa form a veritable army of young men, always armed, mostly docile. In 2002, the industry employed 167 000 'active' security guards, which according to Baker (2002), was 40 000 more than the SAPS (South African Police Service) and 86 000 more than SAPS personnel who perform policing duties' (37). These guards could be found engaged in 'street patrolling, guarding private and public property, order maintenance, arrest, search, detection, surveillance, inspection, traffic control, crowd marshalling, risk management, the transportation of cash and personal escort/protection' (Baker, 2002: 29). Locally, security guards only have citizen's rights to own and carry a licensed fire-arm and use it in self defense or to make a citizen's arrest (37). Yet,

according to Hook and Vrdoljak (2002), the American equivalent has much more power and 'is now the nation's primary protective force'. This latter fact troubles the easy perception of private security as a South African, or developing country phenomenon.

As an industry, the occupational option of becoming a security guard mops up thousands of lives, annually, to be steered away from tertiary education or other skills training, or in fact unemployment, into the practice of looking after and ensuring the possibility of a certain way of life in present-day South Africa. These security guards are the thin veil positioned, sentry-like, between many South Africans and the desperate threat of violent crime, and so life can be lived in a way resembling the 'normal'. There is no denying that in terms of 'quality of life', 'guarding' surely reflects an extreme version of what Sen might see as restriction on human life 'functionings'. I am referring to the schedule of guarding that includes night shifts and so not conducive to stable family life; the unimaginable amount of hours spent (wasted) behind a make-shift desk or in a small 'guard house' raising the boom or opening the gate; and having to spend freezing Johannesburg nights unable to leave one's position for hours on end. Included in this restriction on functionality would also be a real threat to their lives, as many of them are untrained in fire arm competency (Baker, 2002) and virtually defenseless against the militarised tactics of crime gangs such as those that target shopping malls, ATM's and cash in transit vehicles.

In this way, guards are synonymous with crime and the fear of crime. Offering insight into the subjectivity of the viewer and vulnerable South African, artist Penny Siopis³⁶⁵, whose work was discussed in Chapter 7, commented in our interview, upon returning from a trip to Greece, that she was struck by the contrast between life in Greece and her South African habits. She wondered how a constant vigilance towards crime might impact on the soul: to not be able to wander the streets, and where once one might have been weary of 'break-ins' when one went away on holiday, now that fear looms immanently, including those times spent with one's family inside one's house. She mused in our interview on what that might do to one's thinking – does the restriction of physical movement through fear impact on the places one could go in one's head and the imaginations of what is possible? One's functionings? There has indeed been a troubling

³⁶⁵ Interview, 19 November 2008, Penny Siopis, South African Artist and Professor at the Wits School of Arts.

increase in crime, of which violent crime and break-ins have been particularly devastating to the lives of many (See Bloom, 2009). The drastic rise in crime figures are sometimes noted as being connected to more reliable crime statistics (Lemanski, 2004), yet is certainly also a product of what Bremner refers to as the dismantling of white 'immunization against crime by the state security system' of the apartheid government, 'whose strategies and tactics were designed to protect' them (1997: 2B). Bremner points out that it was predominantly the black, township population that experienced crime in Johannesburg during apartheid.

Working in conjunction with the sign of the 'guard' generally, and in *Security* in particular, was the highly charged one of the 'fence' in post-apartheid South Africa created by the double layer of wire-mesh fencing around the installation. At the Art Fair, I would argue, this sign had particular immediacy and currency. I attribute this to, first, the art object's quality as installation and thereby the fact that it seemed to 'take place' in the space shared by the viewer, but also to its scale, which was such that it invited the viewer to see herself as part of it. The South African viewer would, furthermore, no doubt be familiar with this sign, as razor wire and fencing are ubiquitous in suburban, industrial, business and school environments in South Africa. The scale of the art object was of such a nature that the area of green wheat resembled a small back garden, across which, looking through the double-barriered razor fence, the rest of the Fair and people on the other side of the installation formed part of the viewing experience to become an unchoreographed background of figures and colours. Mitchell (2005), in the volume referred to in the introduction to this part, *What Images Want*, positions sculpture as the 'most dangerous of the arts' (248). He is using an emotional word to signal the manner in which sculpture directly affects the environment of the viewer and so one might run the risk of being confronted, caught off guard, or simply arrested by its presence without the kinds of control, he suggests, the viewer has over how a painting affects one. He substantiates this by stating that 'the place, site, or location has always been a central issue for sculpture. Unlike painting, it normally does not carry its frame with it, and is thus much more sensitive to issues of placement' (249). A sculpture, as in the case of the bird-figure within this installation, 'takes up space' and thus activates a space. In this particular setting the brightly coloured red of the Vida e Café umbrellas (selling coffee to Fair visitors and always filled with people) contrasted in wonderfully optical ways with the green of the plants within the enclosure. One was thus forced, experientially, to see

the coffee drinking through the razor wire and as background to the strange and hampered bird-figure. One of my interviewees mentioned the 'Vida' coffee phenomenon, a local brand, as one of the more exciting and revitalising elements of post-apartheid – a globality and modernity from within South Africa. This introduced a multiple textuality of spaces (Pollock, 2001:19) consisting of contrasting features of the local landscape. In this way, many South Africans would have recognised the lawn-like enclosure, security guards, fencing and 'Vida' as ingredients of their own life-worlds and so might have been forced to insert themselves into the piece.

This gestures towards a further overriding concern that I have touched upon in all of the above chapters: the Joburg Art Fair public, specifically explored in Part One. I have been particularly interested in understanding and discussing the sector of society that the Art Fair called upon to be its public. Previously I referred to this social sector, the one the Fair was predominantly aimed at, as those who 'gate' themselves. It is a sector sometimes in international scholarship referred to as the 'elite', sometimes as privileged and sometimes as those who are interested in art for its ability to display status and social standing. It is true that guarding and fencing are entrenched characteristics of the lives of this sector, yet here I am interested in motioning a caution in the reading of the signs of the 'guard' and 'the fence' as a way of suggesting an ambivalence and more nuanced reading of this public.

This aspect of life in post-apartheid has attracted a large amount of scholarship and it has become routine for essays about crime, security, boomed communities or security villages to be included in volumes that consider the spatial aspects of, especially Johannesburg, but also other cities in South Africa (See, Beauregard *et al*, 2003; Judin and Vladislavik, 1998; Subiros, 2007). It is also a concept that seems to lend itself in deceptive ways to a reading that falls into a 'danger' I mentioned above of using apartheid as trope to signify forms of segregation, discrimination and exclusion that bears little empirical resemblance to how lives were actually lived. Accordingly, one often finds within such literature the gesturing towards 'new forms of apartheid' (Lemanski, 2004) within the concept of gated communities, security villages and boomed-off communities, as if to suggest that the situation of having to present a pass-book when found in the city after a certain hour, failing which facing arrest, could be equated to the forms of domestic life that have become popular, not only in South Africa, but also in other areas of the globe

(See Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002, Lemanski, 2004) (See De Waal, 1999 for an analysis of this as global phenomena).

What I am suggesting, is that many South Africans from diverse racial, gender and age demographic, live in ways that foreground considerations of personal safety, without necessarily spending most of their time concerned with issues of 'fear', or as many posit, 'fear of the other' or 'fear of difference' (Landman, 2002; Lemanski, 2004; Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002). There is clearly some truth to these claims, yet I am pointing to the need for empirical research within this phenomenon that would disaggregate the easy conclusions often reached. I am thus arguing that perhaps the sign of the 'fence' and the 'security guard' lends itself too readily to theoretical extrapolations that are blanketed across the post-apartheid. I would suggest that in post-apartheid South Africa, for example, one might consider the ways in which the township in which many South Africans grew up bears resemblances to life in a security village through its features of one entry and exit and relatively open, shared streets. It is also certainly not just the 'wealthy', as many authors suggest, that live in these ways; South African property developers have created security villages for a whole hierarchy of income segments, most of which are far from 'wealthy'.

When Baker (2002) makes the point that '(t)he rise in non-state policing in South Africa can be interpreted as one more aspect of the libertarian agenda promoting a shift from the public to the private' (31) one has to see it against what most South Africans know as a 'public' that has been forcefully engineered and has never belonged to all. Thus 'publics' and the notion of what a public space might be, were constructed for white and other racial groups and were shown by the break-down of apartheid to be a foreign concept. Similarly, when Hook and Vrdoljak (2002: 206) argue that security villages, such as the Johannesburg example of Dainfern Estate, might be positioned as far as possible to the north of the city to 'escape' the danger of the inner city, one should also bear in mind that large golf estates like Dainfern need large amounts of space which more often than not can only be found on the outskirts of the CBD. And so, while I would not deny that emotions are involved, some of which are fear-related, others might be ideologies of prestige, social emulation and even the pragmatism of a certain middle-class comfort. There is, furthermore, a danger of conflating a powerful property market and security industry with racism and fear of the other.

I would argue that *Security* was not speaking in these terms only, of the post-apartheid. Both the systems of 'guarding' and 'gating' are international phenomena (De Waal, 1999; Monterescu, 2009) that a local audience would recognise as familiar to their lives and not all of them would see it as criticism against a loss of 'public' space and exclusion. It is true that the security guards forming 'props' in this art work were virtually indistinguishable from the 'real' security guards guarding the 'space' of the Art Fair itself – roaming the floor between visitors, standing at the exits and entrances, rotating amongst themselves to the routine and internal logic prescribed by their occupation. Yet, the men in the art piece were, crucially, not guarding the visitors to the Fair. That the Fair took place in a highly regulated, safe and privatised space is undeniable and it is certainly possible that Alexander's piece was gesturing to some of that, yet, given how they functioned within the piece, I would argue, the guards had an added and more subtle function.

The men were stationed inside the piece not merely as sign of 'brute masculine protection', but as a reminder of their humanity and how they fit into the system in relation to the viewer and his or her life. The guards were 'coached' on the art object so as to be able to give information to passersby or those who asked them questions about it. This implies that while they signified all of the above information on crime, 'fear' and privatisation, their presence within the piece served to defamiliarise these signs and bring the guards in closer proximity to the Art Fair visitors than they might be when they are protecting *them* 'officially'. Accordingly, a more intimate relation to the people that were the guards was offered by Sean O'Toole, in his role as editor of the *Art South Africa* magazine. In the issue in which the 2009 Fair was reviewed he posted this paragraph at the very back of the magazine, without comment, as if just to give voice:

Who were the men guarding Jane Alexander's installation *Security* at the 2009 Joburg Art Fair: 'My name is Difference Terrence Mokoni. I am 31 years old. Difference is my real name. My mother gave me the name because I am different: my younger brother, for instance, is nothing like me. I come from Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga. I have been a security guard for five years with NFD Security Services. I have a Grade C security certificate, also firearms competency. I keep myself busy by reading newspapers like *Daily Sun* and *The Star*. My job here is to discuss this artwork with people who want to know what-what. Many people have asked me about it, if I am part of the artwork. Some ask funny questions, like whether the animal in the middle is a black or a white eagle. It is an

eagle, but it is also a human being. Just the other day my grandmother was talking to me about animals like this, dinosaurs. My grandmother taught me about those animals. I like looking at this artwork it reminds me of the last time my parents spoke about the civil war, when people used pangas to fight with. They always teach us kids about the civil war: even there at Bushbuckridge, we had civil war. Most of the art on display here I know, but this is the first time I have seen something like this. I like art. I have art at home, wooden sculptures of vultures, dogs, giraffes and elephants, which I bought at the Kruger Park. Even though they are quite small, when I see those sculptures I remember where I come from.’ (As told to Sean O Toole)³⁶⁶.

This extract, together with my personal experience of conversing with these men strongly impresses upon me the notion of an everyday in South Africa that is not just moving in one direction, from public to private, or where rich and poor share less and less with each other, but of a society in radical flux incorporating diverse personalities and possibilities. However, the apparent paradox of safety and pragmatism, lives lived in what has become excepted ways that might impair functionings in untold and un-researched ways, also existing as trope of Johannesburg to an ‘outside’, global world impact sharply on ways of viewing the Joburg Art Fair in the post-apartheid.

Global South

Furthermore, in relation to another of the lenses previously employed in this study, it is worth mentioning the following: ‘Guarding’, as I have said, is an international phenomenon, yet most often in considerations of guarding, gated communities and violent crime statistics in general, comparisons between South Africa and South America are made (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002: 196). *Security* was first exhibited as a commissioned piece for the 2006 Sao Paulo Biennale and there Brazilian guards were employed to fulfill the roles of their South African counterparts. Alexander, thus, gestures towards a real-life affinity between these two nations of the ‘Global South’ that adds a decidedly negative reading to the more scholarly imaginations of ‘shared histories’ or economic opportunities in ‘South-South’ relations³⁶⁷.

When considering the subjectivity of the bird-figure, a first reading along the suggested lines of ‘quality of life’ is also one that connects to a Global South place association, but

³⁶⁶ *Art South Africa*, vol 7, Issue 4 Winter 2008: 98.

³⁶⁷ See for example the exhibition catalogue *South-South: Interruptions & Encounters* by Aiji and Soske (2009)

this time through the economic imperatives of food and international imports and exports from 'developing' countries or those in the Global South. Virginia MacKenny (2009) wrote the essay in the Joburg Art Fair catalogue on this piece, which due to Alexander's aversion and avoidance of the press stands as one of a handful of analyses of this work. It is a piece no longer than 1000 words in which she chose to highlight the following: 'The vulture, a carior bird, is here isolated with a substance it cannot eat but that, once harvested and processed, becomes bread, the staff of millions. The mutant vulture, by association linked with the death of others, is, in these circumstances, vulnerable, but so too is the wheat, inaccessible to those who might need it and useless to the one who has access to it' (2009: 274). MacKenny is describing a paradox and conundrum that the piece is structured around where a food-stuff is being grown but cannot be consumed to save a life. In the instance of the Sao Paulo exhibit, the piece was exhibited for a sufficient amount of time (three months) for audiences to watch the wheat grow, mature and then start to die and rot. At the Art Fair, being a three-day event, the wheat retained its radiant green character until the piece was dismantled.

The paradox/conundrum of the figure in the wheat speaks in powerful ways of a situation described by Geeta Kapur (2008) in contemporary India. Kapur, in an attempt to lay bare the dire effects of some neo-liberal international economic policies, considers the situation of wheat exports from India to the rest of the world. India was previously in this study considered as a country which has far out-competed South Africa in economic growth over the past decade and sporting a much more powerful art market. Here another side of that economy is being gestured towards. Kapur explains the 'agenda' of neoliberalism in relation to food as:

undertaken in India, as everywhere else in the developing world, under the rubric of 'structural reforms', known to have tragic consequences for the national economies of such countries. Liberalization – the opening up of markets, the encouragement of direct foreign investment in hitherto 'protected' economies – sets off, it is claimed by mediating/controlling institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, a much needed 'migration' of capital from the north to the south. In actual fact, the advantage of productive capital inflows is far outstripped by the subordination of these national economies to the force of metropolitan capital and, simultaneously/ successively, to international finance capital (2008: 33).

She cites the real-life example of India in which during the period between 1998 and 2003, a huge increase occurred in food-grain stocks, concurrently with national 'sharply lowered levels of per capita food grain consumption'. Referring to a study by Utsa Patnaik, *The Republic of Hunger*, she demonstrates a 'paradox' of local starvation in the face of large international food exports at 'throw away prices' (34). Kapur thus concludes 'in order to maintain a deflationary course of the southern economies, it lets domestic deindustrialisation, increased unemployment, and a depressed demand structure lead large parts of the population into a downward spiral of poverty' (34) and that the 'growth' in the Indian economy can be seen as both 'conspicuous' and 'highly selective' (34).

During the year that this study was taking place, South Africa was for the first time in twenty-two years, declared a nett importer of foods, which means a radical deindustrialization, and deagriculturalisation, not comparable to the situation described by Kapur exactly, but pointing at a similar kind of paradox where food imports and exports are concerned. Bloomberg reported in October 2008 that South Africa was last a nett importer of food in 1985 and that its largest imports include rice and wheat³⁶⁸. This not only has the effects of destabilising the national economy, but points to mass job losses and food scarcity. These are facts that point back to the new government in concerning and questioning ways..

The (South) African Contemporary

A second-level reading of this work is one that evokes connections with an earlier work by Alexander, which the South African public could have seen at the *Africa Remix* exhibition in May 2007 at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. That piece was called *African Adventure* (1999–2002). In that work, a similar bird-figure featured amidst a 'motley' crowd of monkey-people, an ensemble of props and child bodies in adult attire. In Chapter 7, I considered some South African photographers who trouble the sign of 'Africa' and its relation to the West. This work by Alexander would be another of those examples, yet one so extremely idiosyncratic as to all but deny that there is such a thing as the 'African'.

³⁶⁸ http://www.freshplaza.com/news_detail.asp?id=31925

Simon Njami referred to this piece in his catalogue essay on the occasion of Alexander winning the Daimler-Chrysler Award (a local art award). His essay is referenced by Maren Ziese³⁶⁹ in her article *Jane Alexander's 'African Adventure' – A New Perspective*, in which she claims Alexander has not received sufficient academic attention as many writers simply find her work too complex. Ziese makes acute decoding gestures within *African Adventure* and it is useful to consider in relation to the bird in *Security*. For example, she demonstrates the ways in which this piece has multiple historical reference points by explaining the following:

... the russet coloured earth points to the ancestral history of the country and Khoisan; the Castle of Good Hope embodies, among other things, the early colonial history of South Africa; the refugee from Kinshasa can be seen in the context of 19th century colonial history, around the time of the Berlin Congo Conference (1884/85); the refugee also symbolises the period of African independence, the Congo one of the first countries to gain political independence (1960); the refugee also hearkens to the civil wars of the latter part of the 20th century; the black man stands for one aspect of the present situation of South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo; the 'Pangaman' refers to a popular Apartheid-era myth from South Africa.

In analysing this piece, Simon Njami saw it as a new phase of clarity within Alexander's work in which the viewer is given more clues as to what the artist is 'meaning': 'Humanised memories of the monsters of earlier years, these playfully intrepid little characters suddenly become recognisable elements of a specific context ... The setting and the characters are suddenly part of a tangible reality, in spite of her masks and their physical deformities. The title, the positioning of the subject and the implicit criticism of an all-embracing system bring us to a work that suddenly begins to speak ... this work as a tableau, reassembling the elements of a sparse, scattered world. Like the end of a historical period, of a section of a life' (quoted by Ziese). These references embodied in *African Adventure* are also present in the new incarnation of the bird in *Security* to inform it as sign. I am, thus, suggesting that the 'episode' of *African Adventure* is inscribed into *Security*. This implies that a reading of the way the bird manifests in the later work, created almost a decade later, should bear in mind what it 'used to be'.

The bird in *African Adventure*, also wingless and armless stood out within the tableau through its strange deep-blue colour, and while it bore many of the features of the

³⁶⁹ <http://www.artthrob.co.za/03may/reviews/sang.html>

Security bird, seemed much more alive and animated. First of all, it was a tall bird; taller than any of the figures in the piece and standing proudly erect. It was seemingly free to roam amongst the crowd of people, objects and animals and even seemed like a leader of sorts to the rest of the group. The tableau really did have elements of an 'adventure' as everyone seemed on the move, bringing with them toy cars, and other paraphernalia. In *Security* all the bird's companions were gone, it had been captured, or deemed to need protection, (or, perhaps, were on show to a foreign audience as a relic from a distant land), and in the process had lost its colour and had shrunk to half its original size.

Alexander's figures, in their disfiguration and morphological adaptations, are always startling and point fingers at the present to say, 'take note'. In this sense, they are the corollary of the everyday and seeks to make un-ordinary and unfamiliar forms that lures one precisely with their resemblance of the familiar - a hand, or torso, or shoe or child-body. I have demonstrated how this tactic was at work within the sign of the 'guard'. One notice for example that the bird figure in *Security* is not at all abject, or raw, it is calcified and seems to have hardened. On the plane of the psychic then, speaking of a collective psychic condition, one could read the bird-figure as the calcified remnants of a piece of the *African Adventure* as well as our own South African adventure, our own 'democracy' which we guard to hold up to the international world and to ourselves, yet, on closer inspection, bears little resemblance to what one might have hoped it would be, and what it used to be, fifteen years ago. Is it the result of what was meant as an 'extension of rights and a greater sense of belonging' to more of South Africa's citizens after the elections in 1994 (Mntambo, 2009)? Or might it be a version of the past that we insist on nurturing, and looking back upon, regardless of its increasing look of the monstrous and half dead. In this way, the bird points to a desperate need for new symbols, more fitting of where South Africa is and what it has become.

There is little doubt that the organism inside the double-wired fence will not survive. As I mentioned, we are told by the catalogue entry for this piece that the vulture does not eat wheat and so nullifies its symbolism of food for the masses and its potential to become bread in another form. We are also told that the wheat has a life span, which longer exhibits of the work 'played' out, where the wheat browned, died and rotted. This did not happen at the Joburg Art Fair – the three-day trade fair format does not allow for this other, darker dimension to unfold and declare its eventuality. At the Joburg Art Fair,

things remained bright and spotless in presentation and immaculate in its expression of newness and commodity fixation. It is, after all, a showcase, not an exploration, the former being of the moment, and the latter evoking a longer, more strenuous timeline. Accordingly the Fair could be said to have presented a compromised version of this piece (and many have noted this point) yet the readings I have explored here remained latent in the work and present for viewers to engage with.

Economic Considerations

Now bringing this piece into proximity with issues discussed in the second part of this study, the economic positioning of this piece vis-à-vis the Joburg Art Fair adds a further dimension to the analysis. It is safe to say that 99% of all work displayed at the Art Fair was for sale in one way or another. Yet, *Security* was not for sale. Following the lens used in the second part of this study, this piece also brings with it a cultural economics aspect, which points to relationships with the Joburg Art Fair organiser and the way in which Artlogic conceptualised the event. In the first year of the Fair, Douglas approached one of South Africa's top (if not *the* top) private collectors, Gordon Schachat, to fund a concept they had constructed called the 'Featured Artist'. Douglas had met and discussed this possibility with Robin Rhode, a young South African artist now living in Berlin. Rhode had not exhibited in South Africa since leaving the country and his career was just starting to garner serious international interest, attention and support. Schachat agreed to become involved on the condition that he would be able to purchase the works he funded to bring to the Fair from Rhode's New York galley, Perry Rubenstein. These works were expensive for the collector, but would now adorn, and vastly improve, the interior of his personal office in Johannesburg. After the occasion of Rhode's presence at the 2008 Fair he has become an increasingly important young international artist, perhaps culminating in being commissioned to 'make' the advertising campaign for the new BMW Z4 launched in 2009. Schachat was thus enabled to buy a substantial amount of his work just before its prices would have increased exponentially. Rhode was also a trump card for the first Art Fair with no qualms about speaking to press and making provocative remarks such as this in an interview with him in the 2008 catalogue: 'in today's world money and art are the same currency. New money. New art' (2008: 160a). Rhode drew large amounts of press attention to both the Art Fair and the *gordonschachatcollection* in mutually beneficial ways.

The *gordonschachatcollection* decided to replicate the model of the collaboration between the Fair and themselves through the 'Special Project' of the 'Featured Artist' in 2009 with *Security*. This work, however, was not on offer to the super-collector, and so his 'philanthropic' gesture towards the Fair could not benefit him materially by the expansion of his personal collection. Rather he had to view it as 'brand building' exercise. In fact, Alexander is not represented by a gallery, neither locally nor abroad. I have been told that she only allows her work to be bought by museum collections. In the article by Ivor Powell quoted from earlier, he begins his analysis of Alexander's work with this point so as to position her as outside a sometimes 'glib' art industry. Powell states: 'Alexander has always been reticent around her artmaking and never willing to sign on the dotted line, that line at which control would be ceded over to price, profile and, to a greater or lesser extent, production' (2007: 35). Powell makes the point that since dealerships and gallerists have taken control of the careers of artists, they are predominantly those who take up the task of publishing monographs, or catalogues on the artists, as well as sending information on the artist to the press. The net result of Alexander's exclusion from this 'machine', he states, is that regardless of winning a major prize 'every five years or so', and 'in the past year' having 'produced three major pieces for international showcase exhibition', she has received hardly a 'whimper in the local media' and very little, in-depth, information on her work is available (35).

As artist then, Alexander stands in negative relation to the Fair system of relying on artists to give their works to gallerists to be shown and bought and so sustain countless little businesses, while also enabling the unlocking of the relationship between buyers of art works and the work itself as explored in the previous chapter. This presence of *Security* at the Art Fair thus at once negates some of what the Fair attempts to inspire and instill as a relationship to art objects based on ownership, but also, in ways that I believe has far-reaching effects, points to other roles that art fulfils in the broader public intellectual life of a city and a place. It is testimony to what I have come to call the 'ambivalence' that resides in the Joburg Art Fair, that this work has been facilitated and incorporated into the Fair. It further introduced a fuller and expanded version of art to the 'public', which in turn forced the 'public' to consider art differently, as well as their relation to it. I was told by the research assistants who engaged with the survey respondents discussed in Chapter 2, that many asked what form of art *Security* would be

classified under so as to pick that category as their new favourite. Many also spontaneously mentioned this piece as that which they most 'liked or disliked' about the Fair.

This aspect of 'ambivalence', I believe, is the most powerful contribution that the event makes to the public realm and to a reading of what I have been referring to as the contemporary moment in South Africa. After giving some consideration to what the 'contemporary' signifies in everyday usage and as a term both 'against' and intertwined with Modernism, Terry Smith (2008) formulates it to mean 'contemporaneity consists precisely in the acceleration, ubiquity, and constancy of radical disjunctures of perception, of mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them' (2008: 9). Kapur (2008), writing in the same volume, positions artworks and art practice in a way that mirrors some of what Smith ascribes to the contemporary, as 'always made up of a set of paradoxes nurtured in the imaginary and working *with*, but also *against*, the norm to undermine its authority in favor of a new configuration of symbolic meaning' (31). It is precisely this positioning that *Security* took up in relation to the Fair. It is also, I have argued, the particularly paradoxical, frustrated and frustrating, yet pragmatic and creative stance that the Joburg Art Fair takes up in relation to its present and as reflection of this present.

The Joburg Art Fair Positioned

Keeping this relation to the contemporary in mind, the Joburg Art Fair might be read as what John Law referred to as a 'messy object'³⁷⁰ for study – one which demands multiple methodological approaches and denies simple conclusion. To this end the study was purposefully divided into three distinct parts that each demanded its own disciplinary approach. The reason for this has been mentioned elsewhere as a way of marking three different, yet overlapping terrains that the Art Fair illuminates, exist in and relies on. While different analytical angles were used and different arguments were at stake within each part, and to an even greater extent within each chapter, there have been overarching concerns that each terrain expressed from a different angle. This chapter has highlighted

³⁷⁰ Law used this term in a conference in 2009 titled *Objects, What Matters* hosted by CRESC, Manchester.

most of these in relation to *Security*. By way of now, finally positioning this project, I turn for assistance to three concepts, the meeting point of which I believe most succinctly manages to capture the way in which the Joburg Art Fair sits in the present and reflects elements of that present. Two of the concepts I would like to explore are raised in different contexts by Achille Mbembe. The one is that of reading Johannesburg through the lens of ‘superfluity’, and the other is a more recent consideration of the role of cultural funding and international funding bodies’ relations to Africa. The third concept is that of ‘public culture’ discussed previously and as laid out by Appadurai and Breckenridge.

In his analysis of Johannesburg, Mbembe (2008) positions the story of the city as one that has moved from mimicry to mimesis, where mimicry refers to its colonial origins as mining city following the trends from abroad in style and architecture, and mimesis is positioned as ‘the capacity to identify oneself or establish similarities with something else while at the same time inventing something original’ (39). He begins by looking at the origins of the city and its apartheid past, one built with cheap labour out of gold (a useless substance in itself) and from there moves on to examine two instances of the contemporary in Johannesburg. The first is a gambling house cum shopping mall, Monte Casino and the second, an enclosed, privatised residence cum work cum entertainment development, Melrose arch - both in the north of the city. This work by Mbembe is part of a trend to understand Johannesburg and South Africa not through the numbers and diagrams of a particular mode of scholarship intent on ‘measuring’, but rather to focus on the city as place of desire, the everyday and enactments of fantasy (see also Mistry, 2009; Nuttall, 2009).

I found in his description of his two case studies a sharp resemblance to certain elements of the Joburg Art Fair. Both of the sites that he looks at are places of conspicuous consumption that have styled themselves to mimic far-away places: Melrose Arch has pseudo street names reminiscent of little English villages, such as the ‘High Street’, and Monte Casino has adopted, without any irony, a full-blown Italian village decorative style, complete with laundry hanging from fake windows and bicycles painted to lean against the ‘weathered’ walls. Both of these sites, he points out, are inward looking, creating a reality inside its boundary that seeks no spillage into its surrounds from the outside world, in this way resembling the temporary world created inside the convention

centre as international 'non-place'. He explains with reference to the Melrose Arch example: 'The complex is designed to turn the urban street inward and so internalise its own set of public spaces and services with privatized layers of shops restaurants, offices, and condominiums' (61). The two spaces have been built around a new class-, rather than a racial, separation between citizens as it appeals to middle-classness in general. Mbembe sees in the use of pastiche a strange version of 'white nostalgia' for European countries, yet mentions that 'paradoxically' Monte Casino caters to a sector of the white community who might never have traveled, as well as 'members of the large black middle and lower middle class' (63). While the Art Fair arguably caters to a sector very familiar with international travel, and this being one of the reasons for its ideological positionings as something 'normal', it has a similar paradoxical relation to its public as one that is unformed, at once residual and emergent, and racially diverse.

Mbembe's analysis pivots upon the notion of the 'hysterical' to which the decisions within these two spaces point. Hysteria, he writes, is about reminiscences: 'repressed memories that fail to be integrated into the psyche' (62) and so it is a continuation of a hysteria 'inherited from the racial city'. It is a process in which 'while bearing witness to a demand that the past be forgotten, this architecture asks the spectator to forget that it is itself a sign of forgetting'. Hysteria is thus used to denote a break with a troubled past, where both an active forgetting and an accompanying repression is at work. The result is a violent and restless break with a past that has not been assimilated, or processed into the stuff of the present. He explains: 'The rupture between the racist past and the metropolitan present, between memories of things and events, renders possible the production of new figural forms and calls into play a chain of substitutions... this is an experience of fragmentation and of permutations that may never achieve coherence' (63). Before discussing this observation as it relates to the Fair, the last element I would like to bring to this analysis from Mbembe's writing on Johannesburg is his notion of 'the moment of metropolitan modernity'. This he describes as: 'found in the way that the circulation of goods and commodities, as well as the constant process of buying and selling, results in the liquidation of tradition, and its substitution by a culture of indifference and restlessness that nourishes self-stylization' (38).

In his reference to forgetting, Mbembe makes a point in step with that by Terry Eagleton (1990) in *Ideology of the Aesthetic*. In this seminal volume Eagleton is tasked with

positioning and analysing the ubiquity of aesthetics throughout Western philosophic thought. In the introduction to this volume, he discusses the aesthetic as precisely the necessary ingredient against the kind of hysterical forgetting that Mbembe speaks of. Eagleton, writing almost twenty years ago speaks of that time in ways that resonate powerfully with the post-apartheid and what Mbembe has theorised these urban features of the landscape to suggest: 'We live within societies whose aim is not simply to combat radical ideas – that one would readily expect – but to wipe them from living memory: to bring about an amnesiac condition in which it would be as though such notions had never existed, placing them beyond our very powers of conception' (7).

The Joburg Art Fair did try to fashion itself as such a place of inward-looking, privatised, and isolated self-stylisation – as place of forgetting in some senses. It was adamant not to speak the language of re-dress or heritage and so received local criticism for being overtly commercial and therefore exclusionary. This fact made accessing the larger government grants sometimes available for the arts impossible and also created antagonism within the local art community towards the event. It furthermore styled itself on an international model which, perhaps, does not translate easily into the particularities of the local, yet allowed it to resonate with a latent desire for a more 'western' city and reality, one sometimes referred to as 'normal'. In relation to what Mbembe positioned as a desperate need to forget, 'move on', and a resultant hysteria, it is necessary to give consideration again to Handelman's guidance in the reading of events mentioned in the first part of the study. One of the points raised by him is that one should look at both what an event contains (as much of this study has tried to do) *and* what it masks (1998: xxix). It is true that an analytical strand running through the Joburg Art Fair is one that masks the country's past and the past of the racial city through 'lifestyle' and consumption much like might be the case within the more hyperbolic examples of Melrose Arch and Monte Casino.

However, I would argue that the *gap* that Mbembe gestures towards between the country's racial past and the metropolitan present which, in his view, is conducive to hysteria, within the Joburg Art Fair is filled in by the *practice* of the event: bringing different and new publics together, *engaging* with funding bodies, and, crucially, within the art works themselves. Here, regardless of following many of the guidelines for creating a simulacra of what it might mean to be 'metropolitan' or 'global' without really having the

underlying economic, political or social stability which enables things like art fairs in other places on the globe, this event nevertheless reflects the South African public back to itself and creates a valuable archive of 'ways of living'. It shows the present, the African and the South African, to be complex and demanding of deeper reflection, primarily through the works of art that act as densely coded signs and texts. Furthermore, the 'public' that it calls into being, I have pointed out, is one that is diverse and fragmented; harbouring 'ideas' about each other rather than seeing themselves as part of an underground, sub-cultural or cult-like movement. It is a public that the director describes as interested in 'contemporary culture', spanning the realms of actuality, interior decorating of an 'international standard', news, politics and contemporary art – a public, in short that seeks to see themselves reflected and interested in decoding their everyday through this cultural interaction. It is also, as the visitor count increase from 2008 to 2009 reflects, a growing audience, both in numbers and in diversity.

In the Introduction, to this thesis, I made reference to the ideas put forth by Appadurai and Breckenridge and their editorial decisions in the journal *Public Culture*. It is telling, then, that the audience referred to above fits exactly the profile of a global citizenship described in the very first sentence in the first volume of this journal as long ago as 1988: 'The world of the late twentieth century is increasingly a cosmopolitan world. More people are widely travelled, are catholic in their tastes, are more inclusive in the range of cuisines they consume, are attentive to worldwide news, are exposed to global media-covered events, and are influenced by universal trends in fashion' (1988: 5). In their first attempt to position their aims within the, then, brand new journal, they position the notion of 'public' so as to challenge understandings of the 'cultural' that refers to a 'national' culture that prevailed since the end of the Second World War (6), thus one that is increasingly transnationally influenced and shaped by the private sector, but also as a new way of looking at the fields of anthropology and history. The former, they contend is based on the study of 'small-scale, well-bounded and stable societies', which are fast vanishing from the global world as these ideas are transported through diasporic movements, adopted through tourism, and so mutates and morphs across vast geographic and temporal planes, together with 'profound internal debate' and conflict. In relation to the field of history, the term 'public culture' is also positioned so as to challenge what was at the time the prevalent form of looking at societies: as a history

from below that further entrenched a hierarchy between 'high' and 'low', 'popular' and 'elite' cultures (8). According to the authors the contemporary forms of 'cosmopolitan cultures' render these approaches inadequate and in need of expansion. The value of the Fair as site for study is captured within Appadurai and Breckenridge's description of what their journal set out to do as the study of the 'way in which public life in the contemporary world is being culturally articulated' (5). These articulations would include, as this study has argued, those of the 'public' the 'social', the 'economic' and finally that of 'cultural production' all of which the Joburg Art Fair has been positioned here to speak of.

Fitting then with a public culture approach would be a much more holistic analysis of culture in general and instances of culture in particular. This would entail a much neglected examination of the funding mechanisms underpinning these instances, how they connect to national states, to private entities and to the 'cultures' that are adopted in the funding body as 'partner'. In terms of what a sustainable art fair demands, I have demonstrated that South Africa does not have a large and growing local art market, and neither are foreign art buyers flocking into each Joburg Art Fair to benefit from the value, commercial or ideological, that could be gained from African contemporary art. In that way, the Fair's first order principle is one that could be said to be fabricated. It is this element, discussed in the second part of this study that makes for such a precarious year-on-year projection.

However, Mbembe (2009), in the second article that I would like to turn to now, mentions the Joburg Art Fair specifically as a positive instance of a corporate-funded venture that develops the continental art market and should be encouraged. Some of what this study has been interested to communicate is the impossibility of such an event, and perhaps *any* large-scale art event to exist in contemporary South Africa without the buy-in from a corporate sponsor. This relationship, I have further demonstrated, comes with what some referred to as 'a marked territory' suggesting the compromises needing to be reached by the cultural organisation, but is also in itself a highly fraught, negotiation-driven process in which the 'merits' of sponsoring the arts are not always the main motivating factor. In his discussion with Vivian Paulissen, 'an expert and consultant in cultural funding policy', Mbembe points out that at a time when the world can most benefit from an engaged and sympathetic relationship with the cultural productions of

Africa, the relationship between international funding bodies and the continent 'has never been so bad'.

Mbembe lists some constraints within international funding relations to the arts and culture of Africa, reflecting 'local and global trends' that hampers the life of the arts in contemporary society. I refer to these here to provide key coordinates for a final positioning of the Joburg Art Fair. The first is that of 'a neo-liberal drive to further marketise and privatise all forms of art and life'. These traits are clearly evident in the structure of the Joburg Art Fair, which potentially, severely restrict art's own ability to critically engage with capitalism as a world system and is what the Fair received its most severe criticism for (2). Second, he positions 'the relentless pressure from African governments to consider art and culture as a kind of "social service" whose function is to cure the ailments of poverty and underdevelopment'. Once again, this has direct bearing on the Art Fair and its struggle to position itself as a force both locally and internationally – locally it cannot find substantial funding from the government (which is by far its largest potential funder); and internationally the audience sometimes expects an African fair to represent only the work of 'struggling artists' – a criteria that would not apply to other international fairs. Another constraint that bears upon the Fair would be what he calls the 'humanitarian impulse of most Western donor agencies' bent on seeing Africa as a 'hopeless' place in need of 'rescuing', rather than a place that has an everyday, where citizens carve out metropolitan lives for themselves and strive to slot into a global system on equal levels with international counterparts. This point of view has long reigned in the arts and routinely raises its head in comments on African contemporary art and its non-connection with the 'real' Africa. It also names a site of struggle for the African artist to be seen, internationally, as just another artist, contemporary or otherwise, without the constant geographic labeling. Lastly, Mbembe reflects on the manner in which art from Africa is viewed not in the terms of the international contemporary, but in terms of a 'collective act'. This is predominantly an ethnographic approach that seeks out Africa's 'authenticity' and thereby its 'difference'. This notion of difference is one that the current national government has bought into apace with international funding bodies and which excludes from its 'criteria' the practices of contemporary art. It is a flashpoint for discussions around the African contemporary that resounds throughout the fourteen months of field work on which this study has been based.

In the final analysis, it is here that the Joburg Art Fair is brought into the most urgent relation with post-apartheid, Eagleton writes of a contemporary condition in which aesthetics is often regarded as too soft an approach to studying the social world. He opines: 'I also have my sights on those on the political left for whom the aesthetic is simply "bourgeois ideology" to be worsted and ousted by alternative forms of cultural politics. The aesthetic is indeed ... a bourgeois concept in the most literal historical sense, hatched and nurtured in the Enlightenment, but only for the drastically undialectical thought of a vulgar Marxist or 'post-Marxist' trend of thought could this fact cue an automatic condemnation' (8). Eagleton's point is relevant both in terms of how scholarship generally sees the arts and for how many people saw the Art Fair. It asks of this study, that took art as its organising principle, to reflect on the ways art is situated in the contemporary world to speak to the many aspects of the human throughout history that Eagleton claims in his study has been its role. As a methodology and research aim it is also positioned against what I have mentioned as some of what Bourdieu (1998) argued in *Distinction*. I have demonstrated how in this study he ascribes to art only the possibility of engaging as 'status' and only for those who 'know how to' and not as vehicle for political enquiry.

Where does that leave a notion of 'art in society' in a context globally, but more pressingly so locally, where art museums and state support for the arts is clearly dwindling. How are we to understand how art can exist and take on new forms in what is increasingly a capitalist society? How, furthermore do we debunk unexplored yet frequently aired opinions around the negative connotations of art in proximity to 'lifestyle', and money in proximity to art, if it has become increasingly clear that these are the new ways in which cultural practice function? I have offered here that this new incarnation of culture, as in step with lifestyle and self styling, embody very personalised and idiosyncratic meaning structures for different individuals. Furthermore, while the sponsorship relation for this project exposed conflicting notions of what art could do in society, it merely pointed to the work to be done in trying to bridge the gaps in perception, rather than a reason to denounce this kind of event. Lastly, and agreeing here with Eagleton, this study has attempted to make a more urgent point around the necessity for the arts to speak to broader publics and I have attempted to point out and demonstrate the depth that can be acquired by interacting with these objects in a manner that constitutes a hermeneutic reading of the contemporary moment.

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