

https://dspace.org/

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

Watson, Deirdre

2006-11-17T10:46:41Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1854

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

'SHIFTING EXPECTATIONS'

Word and image are 'woven together in actual communicative practices' (Mitchell in Raney 2003: 41). This relation between word and picture is evident in the theorization of visual images (art history, theory and criticism), where the choice of task seems hopelessly contradictory: 'The choice is between linguistic imperialism and defensive reflexes of the visual' (Mitchell 1996: 56). To me, the voice of art is often silenced, altered, even diverted by the heavy theory and critique (astute or not) that one has to grapple with before getting to the work. I have tried to peel the onion – hoping to come to the core, hoping to find a point of access from which art can be understood and questioned.

Shift.

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

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

I shifted my position from the forlorn act of peeling to one of creative exploration. Not necessarily exploring the specific space between word and image, but rummaging 'the space between'; always hovering amid opposites. This space provides an opportunity to confront and debate the many issues that stem from the relations formed in its fluidity. It is a space that informs my thinking. It is a space of conversation. I see not only my writing, but also the art that I scrutinize as conversation. *My* conversation is captured in the linear structure of this thesis, but the conversation of art is dynamic. It is informal

and flexible – following not one path, offering no answer, giving the potential at each moment for surprises and transformation. The idea is to ponder contemporary art's dialogue, the manipulators thereof and the indispensable factors constituting this notion: space, grammar, medium, criticism.

To me, from Foucault (1986), from Lefebvre (see Soja 1996: 311), the relevance of **space** in contemporary society is conceived as an actually lived and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time. These notions are in continuous exchange, continuous play and reverberated by Hani Rashid in *Art in Question* (Raney 2003: 160). He sees spatiality as 'a term that encompasses the entirety of a spatial condition, which can include events, it can include geometry, it can include information, it can include the temporal. The spatial concern is made up of all of these facets. It is not just one or the other, but an unpredictable combination of them'. I believe that this explanation offers understanding to the concept of the 'space between'. This space, as mentioned earlier, informs and encompasses the meditation of current art practices. It is a postmodern space that embraces the diverse, the eclectic, and the plural. It has been described by Penny Siopis (2003: 53) as 'part of current thinking which understands space as substance; as material and imagined, physical and abstract, virtual and actual'.

Many artists have explored oppositional thinking and many theorists are working with the concept, albeit in varying ways. These multitudes of thought, word, and action promote and prod my own (continuous) contemplation of this 'in-between space'. The essence of this space is aptly captured by Okwui Enwezor's *n(m)otion* of 'to-ing and fro-ing' (Raney 2003: 99). He seeks to constantly rework opposing categories, to find ways of inhabiting the space between them. It is a matter of 'to-ing and fro-ing' between

zones which are themselves unfixed, in order to find a more mobile, complex understanding, a different ground from which to speak – a so-called third space. Homi Bhabha in *The Commitment to Theory* (1995: 23) expresses this phrase, 'third space', stating that 'the pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space'. This is the space between opposing gestures. It resists the binary thinking of someone like Ihab Hassan (see Harvey 1990: 43; Brooker 1992: 11-12), who polarizes modernism and postmodernism. It partakes in postmodernism's logic of 'both/and', not one of 'either/or'. Thus, Hutcheon (1988: 53) would say, it is 'less a case of postmodern play versus modernist purpose, than a case of play with purpose'. The same is true of all Hassan's oppositions: postmodernism is the *process* of making the *product*; it is *absence* within *presence*, it is *dispersal* that needs *centring* in order to be dispersal; it is the *idiolect* that wants to be, but knows it cannot be, the *master code*; it is *immanence* denying, yet yearning for *transcendence*. The two sides of polarized concepts live within and through one another.

The relationship, also understood as a 'dialectical trope'[1] (Mitchell 1996: 53), thus resists stabilization as a binary opposition, shifting and transforming itself from one conceptual level to another, and shuttles between relations of contrariety and identity, difference and sameness. It is a place where artists continuously shift perspective to address (consciously and reflexively) one of the most troubling questions of contemporary art theory and practice: who is contemporary art for? It is indeed a question of audience. However, to me, this question also envelops the subject of purpose and plan. These factors meet not only in the abstract third space, but also in the

physical space where audiences are confronted with this 'art thing'. I have contemplated this notion and to my mind, art is a business. It is a business with the strategy of (visual) conversation. Its continually changing purpose, shapes these assumed conversations differently. The conversation can be a subtle nudging or an outright display of concern. It can be silent: the silence of having too much to say. Not all conversations are good, but this is arguable, as it is partly a question of *taste*. What's more, these postmodern conversations certainly offer no answers.

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

Art is a business. It is not necessarily a profitable business, and situated in the art world rather than the business world. 'Art' often finds itself working at the intersection of these two fields, where material and symbolic capital meet uncomfortably. The ill-fitting nature of the juncture between these two forms of capital can be seen in the writing of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, for whom the field of cultural production is an 'economic world reversed'. Randall Johnson, the editor of Bourdieu's seminal work *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, gives the example that writing a bestseller may signal a barrier to symbolic power. This conflict between cash and symbol[2] is especially visible in South Africa, where a lack of material support in the arts means that more and more artists have to conflate the two forms of

power. The tight economic climate and consequently *this* 'conflation' bring the agency of the artist into question. Working at the borderline of shifting fields (art and business), inflates the agency of the artist, assuming the propelling of the artist's 'power' into a wider sphere. It brings art to a wider audience. Or does it? Or, is it a selfish act of agency despite audience? The artistic working space sandwiched between these entities, is by no means easily defined. It can, however be understood through the processes of Kurgan and *Trinity*. These artists have laid out various aims for their practices. The Trinity Session have a specific modus operandi of 'making art into a professionally run business', resisting over-concentrated specialization. They professionalize the already serious business of art by conflating it with other professions in an effort to be a continual force in building a cohesive and dynamic cultural ecology (local and global). This process is made 'public', dismissing the mystery of art, through works such as *M.O: Trinity Session Artministration*[3]. The *modus operandi* of Terry Kurgan overlaps with and diverts from the imperatives of *Trinity*. Terry Kurgan's work over the last number of years has been characterized by two prevailing concerns. Firstly, her interest in the complex relationship of domestic and family photography to the construction of personal and cultural identity and memory, and secondly her engagement with and commitment to public realm/public space projects and collaborative practices. The conversations of these artists, move between polarities that represent a general 'to-ing and fro-ing' in contemporary art practices. My focus will be on the shift between the 'business world' and the art world, the meeting of popular culture with 'high art'. This necessarily encompasses the meeting of various other polarities, the confusion of various borders. Both Kurgan and *Trinity* work on a broad range of projects, continuously moving through permeable borders to contemplate different audiences and different

languages. Their moving between these structures has radically different outcomes, making the probing into their art an act of increasing interest, conflict, and enjoyment.

Before proceeding, I would like to clarify the meaning of a few terms that I will refer to continually during the course of this text. The first term to be scrutinized is **business**. In this script, this term is arbitrarily used to make general reference to the so-called business world. The relation between the 'world of big business' and the 'cultural industry' came about in a conversation between Barry Ronge, Stephen Hobbs and Katherine Smith. Barry Ronge elaborated on an answer by Hobbs, saying (in Smith 2002: 66):

> You used an interesting term there, 'cultural industry'. *So few people think of it as an industry.* They think of it as an escape from industry. They think, 'there *is the world of big business, there is the world of culture'* (own emphasis).

This is evidence of the ongoing, general belief of the public(s) that 'the art world' is separate from 'the business world'. My argument sprouts from this assumption, as my interest lies in the fact that artists have come to work between the two worlds. An understanding of what these worlds encapsulate is conversely necessary. In the business world, 'businesses are established to perform economic activities' and, with rare exception (such as cooperatives, corporate bodies, non-profit organizations and institutions of government), 'they are for-profit ventures' (http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/business). In other words, one of the main objectives of the owners and operators of the business is to receive a financial return for their time, effort, and capital. On the contrary, there is a tendency to think of Contemporary Art as a non-profitable industry and in some forms, this deems to be

true. At the same time, considering the opening of International Markets and the amount of South African galleries[4] that have sprung up in the last few years, Contemporary Art has a lively market and is bursting at its seams. Alongside these developments, contemporary works (including installation), have found their patrons/sponsors in the business realm, commissioning work for various reasons and purpose, whether it be social responsibility or just kudos, we cannot be sure. Here, one immediately conjures an image of corporate collections embellishing the walls and foyers of tall buildings in places like Sandton, Johannesburg CBD and Cape Town. These investments by big businesses have been essential in the survival of art practices in South Africa. If you look at the 'collecting landscape, a lot of corporations are selling themselves on the basis of their cotemporary art collections' (Smith 2002: 67). BHP Billiton is one, Sasol is another, SABC yet another. Whatever the reason, 'the fact of the matter is that, that is where a lot of support is coming from' (ibid.). But, maybe the 'split' between the 'cultural industry' and the 'business world' is not only in terms of symbolic or material capital, since they intersect to some degree, and since 'high-art' and popular culture [have] long since converged in that pop culture provides valuable fodder for critical contemporary practice. The 'split' could be in the different spaces these fields occupy. This is where two other terms come into play, 'private' and 'public'. The art world has for a long time been confined to the space of the museum or the gallery. This space is a public space, but it is considered 'private' as it offers a certain sentiment, a certain meaning to an object that is placed inside its walls. This space is the privilege and want of a certain audience, where most others feel uncomfortable in these spaces, feeling bound to watch these works in silence and remark with profound insight. In this instance, one could argue that the gallery has been stained with a mark of elitism/privacy and (agree or not) it is going to take a

while for that perception to change. Notwithstanding, there is no need to disregard the place of the gallery and its patrons amidst the many platforms that are investigated by artists, but during the course of this report, the word 'private' will be used in terms of the artists' gallery-based works. In these works their personal thoughts, their 'hidden' conversations, manifest in a more intimate, private way than they would in public projects. And, unless specified otherwise, I will use the word public as metaphor for the space that seemingly lies between the art world and business, a space 'outside' the gallery. Business refers loosely to any other organizations that, as mentioned, perform economic activities (whether it is giving a service, manufacturing or selling products), including the above-mentioned non-profit establishments. This term also incorporates 'popular culture' – fashion industries, marketing and advertising. Public, in this context, is the space in which aspects from both the art world and the business world are 'mobilized' to conjure meaning in a 'third space' or 'in-between space'. It takes the form of the street, the park, the sidewalk, roads, even virtual space. To make work for the public sphere, as Kurgan suggested, is to make art (whatever the form) 'which has a relationship with the culture and economy of that space' (Kurgan 2004b). This space relates to Andrew Bolton's use of 'transitional spaces' in *The Supermodern Wardrobe* (2002: 7). He describes roads, railways, airports and the street as 'transitional spaces' and further states that it is within these spaces that 'the visual transactions of modern life take place'. He also equates this space with 'in between' or 'interstitial' space and mentions that this has been the 'focus of much academic interest and creative activity' (ibid.). The words of Michel Foucault, used by Bolton, are significant in understanding this ambiguous space (theorized earlier in this chapter) (2002: 7):

> There are […] in every culture, in every civilisation, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are

> something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found in the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.

It would most probably be more appropriate to speak of 'outside places' rather than public spaces and 'outsiders' rather than the public(s). The public(s) refers to the viewers that occupy these spaces. They are individuals from all spheres of life that, for a particular moment when experiencing an artwork, become a 'collective' – audience/viewers/participants. These individuals do not belong to this space as you would to your home. They are not defined by this space, as you would be defined by your workplace – a corporation or an institution. It is the space of many, where everybody who uses this space seems to be simultaneously 'outsiders' and 'owners'. This 'outside space' is anonymous and amorphous as the people who move through these spaces, continually change. This space is real and virtual. There is no easy way to describe this space, but I see it as a space that holds all identities in its wake. It is a space in which artists choose to take aspects from both the business world and the art world to communicate to the 'outsiders' who are using this 'outsider space'.

The postmodern artist accepts the potential open qualities of ordinary **conversations** in which rules can bend and shift so as 'to encourage the greatest flexibility of utterance' (Harvey 1990: 47). The ways things are said, change continuously. This is a self-conscious revising of the **language of art**, visible, for example, in Kurgan's work, where her mode of production has shifted. She started quite traditionally, where the works were always made for walls. Then, coming off the walls, moving into a more public environment where communication takes place on a different level than in the gallery

space. Art has many offshoots and each of these categories has become something in its own, yet incestuously entwined with all other categories. Artists have worked across the categories of performance, document, art, craft, and design. They use still and moving images, object-making, text, photography, sound, digital media, and a host of other means of exploring their subjects. Moreover, the setting for art is no longer just the studio and the gallery, but the highway, the book, the department store, the internet. My focus will be on the public language of art – public art[5]. These are contentious grounds where both art[6] and public are caught in the muddle of theorization around terminology. I, invariably, am also bogged down by the baggage of words (thus my interest in visual language), but wish through my conversation to detangle some complexities on the difficult question of what constitutes the public, public space or public intervention[7].

The public is seldom what you think it is. It is certainly not a homogeneous entity. According to Elizabeth Rankin in *On the conception and reception of art in public places* (1998: 5) 'current writers on American public art point out that the culture in which art is received today is extremely diverse, not sharing a common religion or a single ethnic base, for example'. This is evident in the diverse community of South Africa; where we are moving away form the almost comforting, yet disconcerting, certainties of colonialism and apartheid. It is in the slow revolving process of a democratizing South Africa that identity has been hung with the label of uncertainty. There has of course, been much discussion in recent years on identity politics and the historical changes from which such politics usually arise. Due to ongoing political and social change (both locally and globally), it has to my mind, become a normal part of life to question identities, to construct them reflexively rather than to simply recognize them.

How is it however possible to make sense of ourselves, if the boundaries that tell us who 'we' are, are incoherent, or fragmented, or fuzzy, or somehow unreal, or fluid or on the move? We can, regardless, as inter-dependant and cooperative neighbours in Mbeki's (oxymoronic) African Renaissance, dub ourselves, 'the new hybrid postcolonial subject' (Hall in Pile & Thrift 1995: 18). This new subject is a way of representing differences as not just a set of pre-given and calcified ethnic or cultural traits, but also as a process of negotiation, in which self and experience are never totalized and always ongoing. The aim here though, is not to mull over the situation of our (still) democratizing country and changing identities, but to establish some sense of awareness of the 'spirit' and issues of our country from which this art is born. The idea of achieving consistency or consensus is as unlikely as it is undesirable. 'Tension of diversity', as Rankin states (1998: 5), is a fundamental premise of all post-colonial cultures and integral to their art'. This diversity is prominent in public art, where, far removed from the institutional art world, audiences cease to be 'audiences' and become complex and multifaceted individuals. Even so, this means that present-day artists working in the public domain cannot expect uniform audiences and may find it difficult to establish to whom their art should be addressed.

Yet, the reception of public art is a critical aspect of its constitution. Rankin expresses that 'the role of the public in public art is not only nominal: it is a critical part of the formulation and cannot be ignored' (1998: 17). The artist must find ways to engage the public in the processes of public art. These strategies might be different to those used to engage with a gallery-audience, since the public(s) for public art often includes groups of people who do not necessarily attend museums/galleries. It must be acknowledged that goals of inclusivity can never fully be met, and that there will inevitably be a lack of consistency in the reception of works. To use the words of Rankin (ibid.), this 'does not

give artists *carte blanche* to operate autonomously if they are working in the public domain'. The artists need to cultivate sensitivity to possible audiences. Public art's own 'publicness' is thus at the centre of my inquiry: How can contemporary art and the broader, uninitiated, 'non-art-world' public meet and to what extent? Where do art experiences happen? What are the appropriate venues for contemporary art in South Africa?

To me, **public art** is work about the constituency of the public for the public. The audience is integral to the work. This relates to Kurgan's idea of public art, stating that 'public art has to have a very real relationship with and interaction with public life' (2004a). Terry Kurgan often interrupts her private work to work on public projects. One of these social interventions was her installation in Joubert Park. It might be identified as both 'public' and 'popular'. She worked with the photographers who have become a 'familiar sight', habitually seen in the city gardens and streets for decades. For Kurgan, the work is the process: the protracted exchange with the street photographers, her own negotiation around professional and artistic self-definitions of photography, the sharing of technologies and competencies, and the never-final documentation of the on-going process.

Public art, furthermore, has to be meaningful to multiple publics. This multiplicity is quite literally evident in the workings of The Trinity Session. They have come to work on a range of tasks, taking them through conventional as well as alternative spaces such as television, art festivals, the World Wide Web. This approach has indeed led to a large body of often contradictory projects, and the added challenge of keeping different forms of expression in different compartments and a 'hypothetical audience' with that! These

'working spaces' of both Kurgan and *Trinity* relate back to the notion of 'spatiality' where all factors, and essentially audiences, shape the meaning of the work.

The **space** of their work is also a social one. Someone is speaking and someone is being spoken to, even if it is unclear who the parties are, or where we as viewers are located in the exchange. A growing awareness of the inclusive 'ownership' of public culture emphasizes that those who make public art cannot ignore the need for communication with broader audiences. The nurturing of a dialogue between artists and the public is necessary so that the contributions of the individual artist to society might be better understood. Based on the premise that contemporary artists and the public have something to say to each other, the viewer's position takes shape as participant. To simplify, the 'power' shifts from artist to audience. The structural base of 'the work' shifts from language of theatricality and display – exhibition, show, opening – to the ongoing evolution of the discursive experience – dialogue, conversation. To move towards the act of conversation, is to move away from the notion that reality and value lie in a 'confrontation' with a given object or reality that contains, within itself, a privileged 'truth' about its nature and being. Conversation moves away from the temptations of transcendence and teleology towards a notion that cultural value or the 'truth' of art, lies in the contingent relations that come to be constructed through the working out of a particular practice, or in the performative act by which the work at once encounters its audience and constructs its community of interpretation. This coincides with Karen Raney's idea of 'enactment'. She goes on to explain (2003: 28):

> Formalism attempts to reduce an artwork to an object whose meaning lies in its structure; we perceive objects. Semiotics attempts to reduce an artwork to a code of signs to be deciphered; we read texts. The idea of enactment is more dynamic than either 'perceiving objects' or 'reading texts.' Performance

> implies immediacy, animation, transience, lived experience. In performance, there is no clean divide between making and theorizing. Making becomes theorizing and theorizing is done through making. When we enact, we set something in motion.

For post-modern artists, the making of their work, which is continually evolving and rethought, surges not towards any 'unified language', but to a place where the cultural producer merely creates raw material (fragments and elements), leaving it open to consumers to recombine those elements in any way they wish. There is thus an active renewal on the part of the artist to revise and implement new **'art languages'** and technologies in order to interact with their audiences. The modernist 'aura' of the artist as producer is dispensed with. As Harvey summarizes (1990: 55): 'The fiction of the creating subject gives way to frank confiscation, quotation, excerption, accumulation and repetition of already existing images'. The artwork, as such, is experienced as a creative site open to multilayered interpretation. This fits with, as stated by David Harvey in *The Conditions of Postmodernity* (1990: 53), 'postmodernism's preoccupation with the signifier rather than the signified, with participation, performance, and happening rather than with an authoritative and finished art object'. Modernism tended to keep form and material pure and ignore context (or rather to consider context as not relevant to aesthetic value). The postmodernist field provides positions for an artist to occupy and explore fields, while taking account of cultural determinants. Postmodernist artists are not constricted by any given material or medium, leading to much site-specific (Bhabha 1992: 310), ephemeral, collaborative work.

'If the notion of medium is a moveable thing, so is the line between art and other activities' (Raney 2003: 4). In recent times, new, hybrid kinds of practices have

developed combing elements from fine art with the language of other enterprises. Artists often apply the popular idiom (including fashion, advertising, architecture, etc.) for use. This 'opening-up' of art practices to other fields are confirmed in the words on Karen Raney in *Art in Question* (2003: 5):

> 'Research' has to a large extent replaced 'expression' as a model for art practice. In Britain and the United States, this may have to do with the absorption of art schools into the degree-awarding system, thus reframing art as an academic rather than a vocational – or anarchic – pursuit. But the deeper reasons for the research model have to do with art's opening up to the methods, imagery and structures of thought of other fields. Art practice has reframed itself as one branch of a vital and varied visual culture. Projects that look across disciplines are now commonplace and research provides a concept to link the activities taking place.

This **active artistic position** forges new languages as much as it (or in order to) invite the viewer into his/her field of practice. It asks for a responsive audience. The invitation is to indulge in critical meditation. It disturbs readers, forcing them to scrutinize their own values and beliefs, rather than pandering to or satisfying them. The production/reception relation is embedded in the postmodern (art) conversation. This relation is indeed beyond reader-response theory *per se*, and can rather be understood as an 'exchange of territories'. Research indeed suggests intellectual engagement and some degree of objectivity. Not only artists and curators, but audiences as well are assumed to be carrying out research. 'Viewers are no longer enrapt contemplators or appreciators; they are *consumers, participants, students of art*' (own emphasis) (Raney 2003: 5).

This notion might be a bit optimistic as **viewers** are often 'captured' in a prescribed system of viewing art. J.W.T Mitchell claims, in *Word and Image* that the 'visual language' is something that needs to be learned just like any other language (1996: 47).

There is a differentiation to be made: we learn to see, but we are not taught to see. Mitchell regards the visual field as grounded in social exchanges (learning), but not mainly in pedagogical exchanges, stating it to be 'typically in more spontaneous and ordinary practices (e.g. an infant mimicking the facial expressions of its mother)' (Raney 2003: 43). I feel that the pedagogical structure has a part to play, as the societal structuring does not always allow for the visual learning that is necessary for the changing practices of the visual field. To reinforce this point, I quote Elizabeth Rankin (1998: 5):

> [P]opular taste is not above reproach, and could benefit from better education in the arts. A public that is prepared to meet artists halfway, and to attempt to find points of access to new work rather than rejecting the unfamiliar out of the hand, is likely to be the recipient of a more stimulating visual environment than one that demands conservative, easy-to-understand artworks. A supportive audience is as necessary to generate and sustain worthwhile public art as the accountability of architects and artists, as well as their patrons, and responsible interaction between them.

The societal make-up and pedagogy in existing South African art education and visual literacy[8] are still largely preserved for a minority audience, and many others who view contemporary art practices are left bewildered and sometimes 'disgusted'. These audiences need a place to 'look' from, a base. This basis is not a fixed set of ideas and rules, but a change in perspective – from considering things – whether objects or texts – to placing oneself within actions and processes. Here, meaning is open, fluid, unstable, ambiguous, and constantly being made and remade. Meaning comes from a dialogue between the subjectivity of the viewer and what is being confronted. As result of the dialogue, both viewer and object are defined and gain identity. Meaning

is not created or found; it takes place'. About the act of looking itself, James Elkins writes (in Raney 2003: 30):

> There is ultimately no such thing as an observer or an object, only a foggy ground between the two. It's as if I have abandoned the place in the sentence that was occupied by the words 'the observer' and I've taken up residence in the verb 'looks', literally between the words 'object' and 'observer'.

Furthermore, David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990: 49) poses the (postmodern) problem that, 'knowledge can now be coded in all kinds of ways, some of which are more accessible than others'. In order to broaden the audiences' perception of art, artists constantly employ new media to establish communication between an artwork (artist) and its viewer. There are innumerable points of contact between producers of cultural artefacts and the general public: architecture, advertising, fashion, films, staging of multi-media events, grand spectacles, political campaigns, as well as the ubiquitous television. It is not always clear who is influencing whom in this process. We cannot make assumptions though, that the viewer understands popular language better. There can be no shortcut to the democratization of artistic production or circulation. Homi Bhabha proclaims in *Conversations at the Castle* (1998: 40) his idea about this 'democratization', stating that 'populist, agitprop approaches arrogantly assume that the "people" or the "masses" will follow'. We cannot, he further suggests, be 'sanguine that the instant connectivity and accessibility of the new digital technologies will necessarily democratize artistic practices and communities'. Illustrative of this, is the reaction by some audiences, voicing that The Trinity Session force almost too many layers of meaning in their work and these are often misinterpreted or not understood at all. As Gillian Anstey stated in a *Sunday Times* online review of their exhibition, '*M.O'*.

(http://www.sundaytimes.co.za): 'Art has long moved beyond the pretty picture on the wall, but it does become confusing when it's inaccessible on even a simplistic level'.

Nevertheless, I would argue along with Nannie Doyle and others, that what is positive, not negative about postmodernism, is that it does not attempt to hide its relationship to consumer society, but rather exploit it to new critical and politicized ends, openly acknowledging the 'indissoluble relation between cultural production and its political and social affiliations' (Doyle 1985: 169). Popular media can subsequently and paradoxically, be used to establish some point of entrance for audiences as 'much of postmodernism is consciously anti-auratic and anti-avant-garde and seeks to explore media and cultural arenas open to all' (Harvey 1990: 59). Photographs are a method of documentation. It is infused with meaning of reality and idealism, memory and loss. Terry Kurgan's use of photography naturally shifted from 'documentation' to becoming the work itself. Kurgan's purpose has been to use her skills as an artist to empower and engage with a specific audience outside of the 'art world'. Here, *Maternal Exposures* (1999) will serve as an example. Kurgan used photographic images, text, and sound to inform mothers about pregnancy and motherhood, 'attempting to represent the experiences of birth and pregnancy stripped of their baggage' (Kurgan 1998: 23). The mothers could relate with the photographic images and sound, interpreting them from their personal position. *Trinity*'s project to connect TV reality show, *Big Brother II* with curating art, and their book *Broadcasting Quality: The Art of Big Brother II* shrewdly show the multiplicity and ambition of their tasks. With this project, they laid claim to the television space, language and audience. Art was neatly placed within the realm of television in order to bring art to a broader audience, to 'popularize' art. But, did it

enhance the viewers' interests in the contemporary and the public language of artists? Does this working boost the agency of artists?

This brings me to the pivotal point of most of my thoughts and practices – agency. I have turned to the practices of other artists (see chapter two; Terry Kurgan and chapter three; The Trinity Session) to question my own uncertainty of the agency of today's artists. This uncertainty is a mixture of the potential excitement and 'execution' that lies in the field of visual production. I am simultaneously comforted and 'uneased' by the fiercely contested territory of the (inter)national art world. I am suspended on the edge, lulled by the prepositions of the business world, the economic field. As an artist, I find myself between two fields, not wanting to choose, wanting – yes – to make the jump to both sides, hoping – indeed – the collision would be centralized and balanced.

The final chapter will deal with an idealistic 'jump' in my own art practices, where reconstruction lies at the centre of its intentional conversations. A conversation that is not only self-reflexive, but also one that will manifest in a space filled with the possibilities of **community**, **resistance**, and **change**. With this, I do not instigate a Utopian social or political change, but a shift in thought; a shift in expectation of what art should be and that some art could indeed stimulate a conversation relevant to a wider sphere than the apparently 'holy-few' of the art world. The question however remains, 'are *audiences* prepared to make the shift to active participation?'

CHAPTER 2: TERRY KURGAN

'POSITIVE INTERRUPTION'

The public and the private conversations of Terry Kurgan cross over one another. This crossing can be a smooth blending between private thought and public issues or a harsh meshing of two opposing worlds. The public process is a continuation of her personal interest in human contact, yet sometimes the thoughts of the artist seem to be interrupted by the structure of her public projects. To me, this interruption facilitates a positive exchange between 'the personal' and the public, leading the artist to feel her way towards new and energetic patterns of ideas of which the edges are constructively blurred.

My interest lies in the public manifestations of Terry Kurgan's work, aware of the fact that the private 'looking' informs her public gaze. It is not the gaze of a photographer who wishes to document, to represent 'otherness', but one who critically interrogates the construction of a narrative of identity through photographic images. Kurgan says (in Smith 2003: no pg. number):

> [B]y reading through and around the surface of a photograph, layers of meaning can be peeled away, revealing not truth (of course), but rather, for the moment anyway, a certain sort of self-knowledge and narrative of identity.

She uses photography as the conveyer of complex messages, yet a medium that is easily 'read' and understood according to a visual language system that is associated with the realm of the 'real' (Smith 2003: no pg. number). It acts as agent, as active visual communicator, linking 'the private' and the public.

I will be looking at the way in which Terry Kurgan uses mainly photography as means to capture and articulate her creativity, looking inwards as well as outwards. I am interested in, and will investigate in this chapter, the place where she interrupts her own 'looking' with the words of another, creatively responding to a given brief, and communicating with a public audience. This space of communication is a space opened-up for discussion. A 'space between', previously explained as a matter of 'to-ing and fro-ing' between zones which are themselves unfixed, in order to find a more mobile, complex understanding, a different ground from which to speak. This motion of 'to-ing and fro-ing' is reiterated in the movement of the artist's daughter Jessie when she is skipping, playing a solo game of jump-rope, 'trying to get to one thousand' (Kurgan in Smith 2003: no pg. number). This futile action – the image of Jessie and a pink skipping rope animated against a decaying building – is captured by Kurgan's video. (IMAGE 1) The camera remains still as the girl skips for six or so minutes, counting all the while; she then skips out of the frame, only to return and repeat the performance. Inextricably part of the whole, this video forms one half of *Skip*, Kurgan's exhibition at the Bell Roberts Gallery, Cape Town (2003). *Skip* not only has reference to the skipping of the child, but infers the action of the artist as she 'skips' between the private realm and the public. It is thus apt that *Skip*, the video, backs up against a re-presentation of another of Kurgan's projects, the creation of a mobile photographic studio with the freelance photographers of Joubert Park in Johannesburg. (IMAGE 2) This project was initiated and produced within the context of the *Joubert Park Public Art Project*, and was Kurgan's response to a brief that asked artists to interact somehow with what happened in the park and the relationship between the park and the Johannesburg Art Gallery.



IMAGE 1

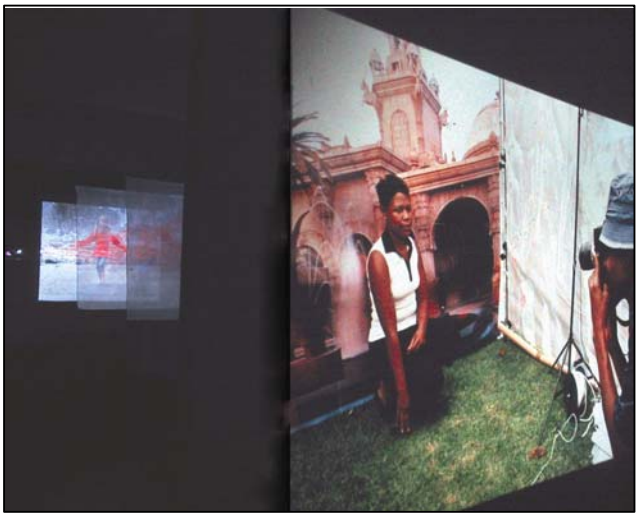


IMAGE 2

Kurgan took this invitation, with her interest in the politics of the photograph and photographic practice, and the futile attempts to get the city to donate an abandoned building to use for a photographic studio, as her cue to explore the physical 'in-between space' – the park – but also the ambiguous and abstract space between art and business. With business, I refer to both Investec and First National Bank. The artist got buy-in/funding from these corporations, which she then invested in this social based project. Without them, the 'sturdy, mobile studio' (easy to 'roll up' each morning and easy to 'roll down' each evening) would not have been possible. This studio at hand – equipped with props, lights and a selection of backdrops chosen by the photographers reflecting what they thought would attract and interest their clients to be photographed against (including the Jo'burg skyline and the Lost City) – and the freelance photographers on board, meant business and many '***transactions***' with the park goers. It doubled up as a piece of public art within the park. (IMAGES 3, 4)

The park can be described as a so-called 'non-place'. 'Non-places', are defined by Andrew Bolton in *The Supermodern Wardrobe* (2002: 7) as 'spaces' that exist in

opposition to ‘places’, defined in anthropological terms as places that have acquired meaning as a result of human activities. Bolton goes on to say that ‘[n]on-places lack meaning in the classic anthropological sense because nobody feels any attachments to them. They are not organized as signifying spaces that create a “public”. Rather, this is a “public” constituted as a regulated flow. Precluding collectivity, they are spaces that everybody uses individually’ (2002: 7). This conjures Kurgan’s interest in, in the artists own words, ‘life going-on’, in people, in the individual. In this case, it alludes to her relationship with the park photographers[9] with their sandwich boards promoting their particular styles, as well as the individuals performing in front of the camera. These characters (this inferred audience), become the medium. They responded and took part in the creation of the artwork. The work is the *process*: the protracted exchange with the street photographers, her own negotiation around professional and artistic self-definitions of photography, the sharing of technologies and competencies, and the never-final documentation of the on-going process. This process is (re)presented[10] through a slide show in *Skip* (the exhibition) that tracks the development of the Joubert Park photographic studio project as a visual narrative, from early planning meetings, through the construction of the studio, to examples of each photographer’s work. Here, the ‘public individual’, the users of the park, are the essence of this public conversation.



IMAGE 3



IMAGE 4

Returning to the exhibition in which both *Skip* (the work) and this (re)presentation were shown, this public conversation seems very far from the private communicative process of its partner. The criticism launched against this inclusion, or rather the observations of Michael Godby, were that the public work distracted from the complex process of viewing and experiencing the new video (see Godby 2003: 66). However, I rather perceive his observation as an (unintended) glimpse into the artistic position of Terry Kurgan. It is a *(mis)reading* that amplifies the often 'messy and undifferentiated spaces' where two apparently separate realms – private and public – come together. Private, as explained in the first chapter, refers to Kurgan's personal/hidden thoughts that materialise in her gallery-based work. Kurgan's work is a positive immersion into this 'space between', where she does not hesitate to create work for both public spaces/semi-public spaces and museum/gallery spaces. She is incessantly aware of the different audiences and languages of both these spaces and explains (2004a):

> I see [the gallery] as a space where people who are interested in art exhibitions, go. The content of the work is communicated in a language that is very particular to the gallery space. Whereas, some of my installations have been permanently installed in public spaces, I am aware that these spaces are in use, that people are just moving through them all the time, going to other places. It is a very different audience that is exposed to that kind of work, but it is usually also communicated in one form or another to those gallery audiences. Usually my documentation is shown, but most recently, *Skip* was an attempt to bring those two things together.

With *Skip*, Kurgan consciously merges these two languages in the domain of the gallery, revealing her commissioned/sponsored work parallel to her gallery-based work. Both are equally important to her realm of production. *Skip*, the exhibition, brings together in a shared space two aspects of Terry Kurgan's practice that, despite materializing in very different contexts and intended for different users and

'functions', are conceptually integrated. Kathryn Smith explains in the useful leaflet that accompanied the exhibition that for the past several years, Kurgan's work has been divided between that which my be called 'private', that features intimated, personal and family concerns, on the one hand, and 'public', that represents the real or documentary, collaborative and, one might add, pedagogic concerns, on the other. (2003: no pg. number).

Her interest in collaborative practice has led her to do several projects in the public realm. These include the following exhibits: *Maternal Exposures* (1999, A series of permanent installations designed for Groote Schuur & Mowbray Maternity Hospitals, Cape Town); the design and installation for *Beyond Racism* International Conference in Cape Town (2000); *Moving Pictures* shown at the World Aids Conference in Barcelona (2002); *Skip* (Bell-Roberts Art Gallery, Cape Town, 2003) and the cultural development of Constitutional Hill (Johannesburg, 2002). Kurgan works on a broad range of projects, continuously contemplating different audiences and different languages suitable to the public realm. By looking at each of these projects (separately, but not in isolation), I will assess Kurgan's sensitivity toward the exchange of ideas. This encapsulates the 'publicness' of such an exchange, the language she uses (including the appropriation of popular idiom) and the average audience's possible participation.

I will start with Terry Kurgan's most recent public project. It included a series of three collaboratively produced installations on Johannesburg's latest and, according to Smith (2003: no pg. number), 'most ambitious', urban regeneration and heritage project, ***Constitution Hill***[11]. Kurgan states in *Constitution Hill – A Cultural Development* (http://www.artthrob.co.za/02nov/news/constitutionhill) that the project in large

'involves reconstructing a site that has historically been a place of secrecy, hardship and incarceration, into a beacon of democracy, human rights culture and sustainable urban renewal'. The three living exhibitions were interwoven for the period between August 2002 and August 2003, with the busy construction site and derelict fort and prison buildings. These exhibitions were part of a feasibility study and business plan for a contemporary museum-like institution[12]. The study comprised the first phase of the project in which Kurgan felt that she 'could be an artist' (2004a). But, it is not the artist in isolation, but one who collaborates. Ochre Communication produced the Constitution Hill series of installations for the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) when the site first opened to the public in August 2002. Kurgan was part of the curatorial team for the installations that also included exhibition designer Nina Cohen, writer Mark Gevisser and TV producer Lauren Segal (http://www.artthrob.co.za/02nov/news/constitutionhill). Thus, collaboration here, referring not only to the relationships she builds with the subjects of her work, but also the relationships that are established with clients, contractors, and other professionals, including architects[13], graphic designers, writers, composers and others. This 'professional alliance' describes 'a burgeoning practice in the production of contemporary South Africa art that tries to define and develop the "space between" art and business in a proactive and productive manner' (Smith 2003: no pg. number).

In this **collaborative** project, the (autonomous) artist 'responds very creatively to business needs' or requirements of the JDA (Kurgan 2004a). The brief given by the client offers a framework to the artist. For Kurgan, it is not a frame that binds, but one that gives the opportunity to use her personal insights, techniques and experiences to come up with a creative solution. The impulses of the artist take backseat to the need of

the client, but Kurgan moves (happily) between 'cliental needs' and 'contemporary art' to find 'a more mobile, complex understanding, a different ground to speak from' (Enwezor in Raney 2003: 99). Here, Kurgan communicates from the 'space between.' Kurgan used photographs as one part of her formal means throughout the project. This method conveys her particular interest in 'what [photographs] mean, how they mean, how to read them, how we use them, their power and ambiguity – the complex structure of the messages they convey' (Kurgan in Smith 2003: no pg. number). The complex layers of the photographic image resonate, like the site, layer upon layer of history and meaning. The three large temporary installations in which Kurgan made use of photographic images, interacted with certain key spaces on the site: The Fort Entrance, The Rampart Walk, and Woman's Goal. It was a kind of litmus test. All these exhibitions are starting points to indicate or assess how Constitution Hill will eventually operate as a heritage, education and tourism site. In the Memory Room, which is located in the Women's Goal, visitor's could listen to recordings of ex-prisoners' memories, other people's responses, and record their own memories and responses to the installations on specially created software. Also in the Women's Goal, Kurgan designed in her own distinctive personal style, a haunting installation in silk[14], sound and photographs, entitled *Three Women.* (IMAGE 5) She worked with the notion of the palimpsest, where the site already tells 100 years of history. In the strange ballroom-like atmosphere of the Women's Goal atrium, she laid out artefacts and images that tell the life stories of three very different women: Daisy de Melker, Nomathemba Funani, and Jeannie Noel – a murderer, an ordinary woman spurred to become a pass resister, and a leading political activist. Each one had a table of objects and as you bend over the table, it would trigger a recording of a live interview (in the case of Funani and Noel) or a recording of De Melker's personal court transcript, read by Sandra Prinsloo. 'The

soundscape by Phillip Miller', as suggested by Alex Dodd in *Living History* (2002: 8), 'added a touch of eeriness' to the already intimate experience. The sound, used in conjunction with the photographic images and objects, makes for a sensual, yet understandable experience.



IMAGE 5

> The Fort Ramparts provide a unique vantage point over the site of Constitution Hill, Hillbrow, the city of Johannesburg, and, indeed, South Africa. They are a bridge between the past and the future, as represented by the Constitutional Court. But the past remains misunderstood and the future still under construction. Using South Africa's Constitution and Bill of Rights, this exhibition looks at where we are today, standing on the ramparts of a society in transition, looking back at the difficulties of the past and the possibilities of the future (Kurgan, http://www.artthrob.co.za/02nov/news/constitutionhill).

Through the second half of this passage, Kurgan offers us a theoretical reading of *The Rampart Walk* installation. In its physical form or on site/sight, the installation is a

series of semi-translucent images and text screens erected on the northern perimeter of the fort. (IMAGES 6, 7) This installation is charged with contradictions and has been designed in such a way that the words featured speak of various constitutional ideals, but the images married to them represent real-life abuses of these ideals, both past and present. This obliquely impresses on the viewer the fragility of human rights and the hefty social challenge embedded in the words and notions of our Constitution. As such, the ideal, 'everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing[15]', was printed on a panel through which one of Hillbrow's many apartment blocks was directly visible. Juxtaposed with this panel was an image of the family in one of the apartments and their 'view' of the site from their window. This image shows a family that is crowded in the small space of their apartment. To them the ideals embodied by the constitution, are only a dream...



IMAGE 6



IMAGE 7

Along with the Rampart Walk installation, *Three Women* and the Documentation and Memory Centre, another installation examined the ambiguities of criminality. It hung in the entrance to The Fort. All of these installations were installed to, as I have mentioned, introduce the site and its purpose, but also acted as an invite to public and visitor to respond to the questions they pose. These were questions regarding the

possibilities that the site offers in the future, but also questions that wanted people to share a past or present story of hardship and struggle, but also of triumph and prosperity.

The central concern around the Constitution Hill project was that every aspect around creating and planning for these exhibitions, had to deal with people's stories. The stories of all the stakeholders (the term that was used commonly) would shape the story of the site, impregnated with impetus of telling a century's history of South African. The stories of 'the people' will shape the nature of the objects that would go into those heritage spaces, where each had to somehow, peel back the layers of lived experience. They are the stories of former prisoners and wardens, current experiences of people living right adjacent to the site in Hillbrow, memoirs of those who are no longer living. They are stories told by those who came to the sight delivering something, helping to install the exhibition, those groups brought to the site in an organized way and groups that just came randomly. Everybody had a story to tell.

The Memory Room is evidence of this. A lot of information was gathered there and the people who left their names and addresses were contacted. One story that came from the Memory Room, was the story of a man, John Mahapa. Kurgan reflects (2004a) that 'he was desperate to tell the story of the PAC'. He gave her a list of about 272 people from 1960 who had been detained with him, involved in PAC organized activities that landed them in jail. These people were brought back to the site to tell their stories, to contribute to 'shaping' the heritage of Constitution Hill, of Johannesburg, of South Africa. This history of ordinary people reveals the impact of major historical events, such as colonialism, the growth of African nationalism and apartheid on individuals and their small circles. It takes us from the national stage and places us in a local setting. We

encounter not nameless representatives of a group, but unique, real persons. What in the end emerges is not their cultural or religious background, their colour, language or position in society; but their humanity, how they related to others and coped with prosperity and adversity. I recall the words written by Nelson Mandela in *Group Portrait South Africa* (2003: 4), proclaiming that 'recognition and knowledge of the past is a first, crucial step towards true understanding of the present; that despite all the outward difference, personal experience of loss and loneliness, happiness and success, is universal'.

Bringing personal experiences to the realm of the public is a thread that is interwoven throughout Kurgan's engagement with these kinds of projects. But, this public project is as much a 'public-making' of personal stories as it is a reclamation, almost 'personalizing' of public space that was previously maintained by the laws of Apartheid. The changes at Constitution Hill represent the flux of Post-Apartheid contemporary Johannesburg (that is Johannesburg in 2004), where the city now 'seemingly invents its own rules, transgressing previously workable boundaries, both conceptual and physical' (Dunlop 2000: 3). So, as Kathryn Smith suggested in *Skip* (2003: no pg. number), 'it makes perfect sense that the public realm is recognized as a rich opportunity to engage with histories of the present'. This refers to the tendency of contemporary South African artists to critically and energetically engage with the public realm. It is about the repossession of 'both a collective sense of community', and 'a personal space of agency' (ibid.). This coincides with a statement (by all-female art and architecture practice *muf*, based in the UK) found by Terry Kurgan while doing research on The Constitution Hill project (Shonfield 2001):

> If democracy requires that we each have an equal relationship to one another, then the only place where we remain sufficiently free of definitions, unlike

> home or work, is the public realm. This is not to say that the public realm is anodyne and free of meaning, but it is the space where, more then any other, we are able to experience those unexpected encounters of momentary wellbeing that confirm for us the inclusive pleasure of being a citizen. Public space is also the place of lived experience of democracy.

This brings me to Terry's design and installation for *Beyond Racism* International Conference in Cape Town (2000) and *Moving Pictures* shown at the World Aids Conference in Barcelona (2002). These conference 'spaces' are adopted for the elevation and understanding of social living, social equality. It is 'public', as it is concerned with social issues that have impact on the South African society and the world at large. These conferences give us not only a different view on democracy and fairness, but it also gives us a different framework or rather a different perspective from which to view the public function of art practices. Art here, in a way, is at the service of political and social change, not necessarily overtly activist art, but political in terms of the issues dealt with – human behaviour and others.

Art here is also at the mercy of the 'world of media'. These projects are social communications projects, but they serve as inspiration and challenge for an artist such as Terry Kurgan. She expresses her love for these projects for reasons that you 'get a very tight brief' (2004a), knowing that the client has some kind of social communications objective. Moreover, Kurgan can meet these needs using her own knowledge of new media and, in fact, 'make beautiful objects' (and have the necessary funds to do it!) (2004a). She combines, or works between the realms of art and business, art and social communications.

The content is pretty much a given, but the way this content 'takes shape' is at the hand of the artist. Various factors impinge on the manifestation of the work, such as the space and the audience. Kurgan considered these when she made the installation, in consultation with the architect Nina Cohen, for the *Beyond Racism* International Conference (2000). (IMAGES 8) This consideration brought to the fore an inspiring and questioning display of images at The Cape Sun Hotel in Cape Town, where the conference was held. A corridor, which led the delegates to the conference room, was lined with large format digital prints. These prints were 'of photographs of people from all over the country taken from a series which had appeared in the press, combined with quotes on how they felt about South Africa now' (Williamson, http://www.artthrob.co.za/00aug/artbio). These images were challenging, asking questions to those who had to move down the passage to get from one point to another. People were, in a way, forced to confront the issues around racism in a country still 'undoing the racial inequalities of our past' (Mandela, http://www.beyondracism.com/news_mandela.htm). As Nelson Mandela stated in his conference speech in 2000 (ibid.): 'We owe it to the world, both in recognition of their contribution to our struggle and as an obligation not to fail the hopes held for us, to eradicate racism and to build a non-racial future for our children'.



IMAGE 8

There is, however conflict in the voice of the artist as she speaks of these projects that lie close to her heart, yet sometimes interfere with her own body of work. This interference could be seen in comparison with the interference of the client in the AIDS installation, *Moving Pictures, Moving People,* Kurgan made for the Barcelona Aids 2002 Conference. (IMAGES 9, 10, 11) Even though a media company, Effect Media (now Ochre Media) commissioned her, the client ultimately was the Department of Health and the project was constrained by *politics.* At the last moment, Kurgan was forced to include images of President Thabo Mbeki and the Minister of Health (2002), Nkozasana Dhlamini Zuma. Despite this intrusion, she managed to bring people's personal stories, entangled with the discrimination, taboo, stigma, and shame that surround HIV and AIDS, into the public space. To do this, the artist (ironically) tried to avoid politics, in a time when the Department of Health was not providing anti-retroviral[16], preaching the necessity of good nutrition, olive oil, and garlic to people who could not afford food, any food. The artist tells the story of how she went around the country, looking at just how this terrible epidemic was (as it still is) desolating a population, looking at society and the extraordinary things that people were doing against incredible odds. Working in collaboration with Cohen & Judin architects and filmmaker Sam Smirin, Kurgan designed a multimedia integration of three film projections, photographs and texts. According to Kurgan, the creative approach was grounded in developing an installation that communicated a sense of the many layers of the South African HIV/AIDS epidemic, locating it in a broader social, historical, economic and political context. The work communicates through the personal register – people and their stories, up close and personal. Her words reiterate through the project, where she seems to return repeatedly to a place where private experience shades in to public performance ***and vice versa***:

> I do this I think, firstly to conflate and confuse the distinctions between them. But mostly, to make of the public domain a more human environment. Not that

> I imagine art has the power to change the world, least of all mine, but it's a way of beginning to examine and reflect upon internal life processes and how those impact upon all the things we do out in the world (Kurgan in Williamson, http://www.artthrob.co.za/00aug/artbio).



IMAGE 9



IMAGE 10



IMAGE 11

With this last sentence, the artist refers to the idea of making private concerns, those things that are often bound to the kitchen or to the bedroom, part of public conversations. This is a central part of her 'private enterprises', for example, in *Family Affairs* (1999), even *Lost and Found* (2000), where the artist takes private experiences into the public domain. Once there, 'certain perceived private realm experiences carry in their wake a host of related political, public, social and gender issues' (Kurgan in Smith, http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/art). It is about making existential difficulties and making them accessible to a larger public through her visual language. She adds, that 'I never feel as though I am revealing my own inner family life. My own family are the objects, not subjects, of the work – what or whom I use to tease out other issues' (ibid.). Thus, despite the fact that the artist often finds her participation in public projects as interruptive, in the sense that it is not necessarily part of her 'private' body of work, interruptive as the content might diverge from her own choice, she still entangles the 'private' with the public. Here the 'private' does not refer to her own thoughts or experiences, but the personal life and experiences of those who have AIDS. She brings

the hardships of this epidemic to the fore, into the public realm – enmeshing 'private' and 'public' conversations.

This is also the central concern in *Maternal Exposures* (1999), a series of permanent installations designed for Groote Schuur & Mowbray Maternity Hospitals, Cape Town. (IMAGE 12, 13) Like all her work, this work carries layers of meaning, both conceptual and formal. I will not only assess it in terms of its own qualities, but also use it to pull the strings of Kurgan's practice together. It will serve as model from which her practices have grown, critically and purposely plaiting the strands of the private and the public.



IMAGE 12



IMAGE 13

> As South Africa looks forward to elections in 1999, the culture of democratization requires continued activism and intervention if it is to be nurtured into an enduring process. The demise of the legal system of apartheid and the rise of a new nation changed the conditions of the production and circulation of documentary images and photo journalism. Freedom of press and freedom of expression, entrenched in South Africa's new constitution, have engendered new challenges for the concerned image-maker. Histories and conditions previously unseen came to surface, generating a space of questions and debates (Bester & Pierre 1998: no pg. number).

In *Stating the Nation*, Rory Bester and Katarina Pierre wrote this excerpt in consideration of the exhibition *Democracy's Images: Photography and Visual Art after Apartheid*. These words frame the time in which Terry Kurgan's *Maternal Exposures* was born. Coming from an era where national liberation was the most important thing, Kurgan (like other artists such as Penny Siopis and Jean Brundrit), wanted to bring into conversation that which was previously deemed as private. This brought with it the awareness of a **new space for photography** (other than documentation) as much as it alluded to the discrepancies of Afrikaner nationalism. The urge to 'open the door' on private experience, flowed from the 'atmosphere of candour', evident in South Africa during that time (after 1994). This was evidenced for example, 'by the media foregrounding of issues such as public health and reproductive rights, domestic violence, rape, child abuse and sexual harassment' (Kurgan 1998: 2). Kurgan's personal history[17] heightened her interest in the 'reproductive body' and possibly her choice to attend the abortion hearings that were held in parliament in October 1996. The idea for an exhibition, resulting in *Bringing up baby: Artists survey the reproductive body*, was conceived during this time. The hearings were important because 'for once, issues which are usually thought of as strictly private were being talked about outside the kitchens, bedrooms and other domestic spaces in which women usually talk to each other' (Kurgan 1998: 2). Society, through media reports, was forced to confront sex, rape, incest, pregnancy, birth, single parenting and 'a host of other usually silenced and personal issues' (Kurgan in Baleta 1998: 8). These (and other) **dramatic changes in the social and political context** created the necessary public space for this exhibition. As curator and contributing artist, Kurgan confronted the notion of 'privacy', through this exhibition and artists were invited to contribute to the challenge of 'the boundaries between the public and the private, the political and the personal' (Kurgan 1998: 2).

These notions lay at the heart of this exhibition, where several artists explored the terrain of childhood (See Kurgan 1998: 2-3). Appropriately, *Maternal Exposures* was first exhibited as part of this show.

Maternal Exposures has **psychological depth** as it emphasizes that mothering is a complex, difficult, often ambivalent experience; it is emotional, spiritual, and physical. It acknowledges families, relations, and childhood; taking into consideration the impact of childhood experiences that will 'absolutely and sometimes irrevocably have an impact upon your adult life' (Kurgan 2004a). With this, Kurgan refers to women/mothers in general, as well as her own reluctance to part with 'our own infantile associations with our mothers, who are tied to our earliest, most primitive experiences' (Kurgan 1998: 1). The making of *Maternal Exposures* offered Terry a space for Freudian contemplation of 'child-parent attachment' and 'identification', reflecting, as mentioned before, on the powerful impact of the events, feelings and experiences of the early years of one's existence. Kurgan adds (1998: 1):

> Growing up involves confronting the mother's separateness, and the loss of a seamless, unified world. Culture complicates this process by supporting and perpetuating our infantile longing. My own children provide the intimate, deep and often ambiguous ties that bind me to this topic. Representing them in my work over the last few years has been a tunnel back to certain of my own formative childhood experiences, and has helped me to acknowledge some of the inherent contradictions between the image of motherhood and reality.

Most images of motherhood were (it is more publicly debated and theorized today) wrought with sentiment, idealization, and religion. Kurgan's purpose was to 'strip the image' – layer by layer – in order to reveal the actual lived experience of giving birth, an experience that is complex, varied and ambivalent.

One could venture to say that art, here, becomes more than a conveyer of intimate and layered messages. It becomes, or rather is essentially, a way of dealing with trauma and loss. The art practices and the research involved with this kind of project, brings to the surface personal questions and insecurities. This is evident in the process and intentions of the artist, who wishes to publicize the private. But, through this process, the artist also tackles personal fears that might play out on various levels of her life. This projection is a reflection of my own interest in art as therapy, but offers some, speculative insight into the creative being of Terry Kurgan. This projection, however, does not seem so far from the actual purpose of Kurgan's art. She chooses to continuously focus on issues 'close to her heart' and 'close to home'. The artist does not wallow in this self-reflexivity, but by process of 'working-through', she inscribes the image with personal meaning. She then takes, as she did with *Maternal Exposures*, these personal reflections to a wider, public audience.

Kurgan's purpose has been to use her skills as an artist to empower and **engage with a specific audience outside of the 'art world'**. In *Maternal Exposures* (1999), Kurgan used photographic images, text, and sound to inform mothers about pregnancy and motherhood, 'attempting to represent the experiences of birth and pregnancy stripped of their myths and ritualism' (Kurgan in Baleta 1998: 8). The mothers could relate with the photographic images and sound, interpreting them from their personal position.

'Form and content is inextricable'. These are words uttered by Kurgan in an interview during 2004. It is also more than words; it is a principle that is palpable in the criticality of her practice. *Maternal Exposures*, as it is installed in the corridor of Mowbray

Maternity Hospital (Cape Town), is impressive in scale as you walk next to it. The work is 13 m long and 2, 5 m high, and consists of a grid made up of 116 panels. Each panel is a black-and-white digital photographic print on transparent film, which is laminated onto acrylic. The grid is lit from behind by rows of neon tubes. Every fourth panel has written quotations, taken from recorded interviews with women, printed in black with keywords highlighted in red. This structure carries strong, complicated ideas of mothering. The visual style of the photographs refers to the conventions of documentary photography, and almost all the women look back directly at the camera. Robyn Alexander in *Sunday Independent* (2000: 10) noted that 'their expressions vary enormously. Some look serene, others proud, exhausted, resigned, happy, determined, placid, scared, even conspiratorial'. Some are pregnant, some have given birth. Others hold their babies, but each does so in a different way. Some images show babies on their own. For Sister Austen, one of the nursing sisters in charge of the antenatal clinic, the impact of the work comes partly from the manner in which words and pictures form 'a more holistic picture about the whole pregnancy thing' (in Alexander 2000: 10). The highlighted words provide further layers of connotative meanings, making the viewer aware that it is not just a reiteration of sentimental ideas about pregnancy, birth, and motherhood.

All in all, it is poignant. This is persistently confirmed through the fact that Kurgan still gets word from the staff that 'it moves people' (2004a).

The work is **interactive**, **communicative**, and **informative**. Kurgan uses the **visual language of the photograph** to incite conversation between artist and viewer. In fact, the whole process of initial contact, interviews, the taking of the photos and the taking

into consideration of the specific perspective/experiences of the mother, was a conversation between artist and 'subject'. The work includes the *process* and indeed, made for a striking installation that resonates the layers of dialogue invested in its making. This 'methodology' is repeatedly used by Kurgan. Or, rather, Kurgan continuously returns to the exploration of photographic meaning. Whether this is through play with her own children, consultation with the park photographers or going around the country to investigate AIDS from the position of the people, it implies a development of ideas, layers of negotiation, seemingly, captured by the camera. For Kurgan, photographs 'represent the impossibility of the desire to hold, or contain, some concrete reminder of present experience. Photographs are tied so precisely to a particular moment that they are always simultaneously a record of something or someone no longer there' (Kurgan in Smith, http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/art). Yet, the artist attempts to hold onto present experience, continuously searching to give material form to 'subjective experiences of familial relationships, memory and desire, and the relationship between visual records and absence'. Kurgan's use of large-scale digital prints, first used in *Lost and Found* (2000), is an innovative way of dealing with these themes. She employs the same technique for The Constitution Hill installations (2002) and for *Skip* (2003). Kurgan states (in Williamson, http://www.artthrob.co.za/00aug/artbio):

> I wanted the translucent silk on which the photographs are printed, and which appear and disappear (at the mercy of the Johannesburg light), to mirror and appear to echo memory itself: a screen or scrim through which people and events are recollected and forgotten.

Photographs, like memory, are personal. Conversely, when they are made public, these images are open to multiple readings. People infuse the image with their own emotions,

their own memories, their own thoughts. The **known idiom of the photograph is used** to establish some point of entrance for audiences. It is successfully employed by Kurgan to establish a shared understanding of universal, yet personal notions of reality and idealism, memory and loss. It is successfully employed to establish conversation, an exchange of ideas, where both artist and audience are equal in the equation.

We cannot equate success with **public response**, but response, or some kind of evaluation is necessary for art practices, especially those in the public sphere, to rearticulate and develop a language that is sensitive to its 'public'. The artist must find ways to engage the public in the processes of public art. These strategies might be different to those used to engage with a gallery-audience, since the public(s) for public art often includes groups of people who do not necessarily attend museums/galleries. Evaluation is important in the public realm, as it offers some framework for artists' creativity. This is almost a necessity in light of the 'few local models or discourses that frame this kind of practice' (Smith 2003: no pg. number). We, as South African artists, are in the process of theorizing and testing a discourse for public art practices. Each project contributes to this theorizing process. For *Maternal Exposures*, apart from the fantastic response, Kurgan got the doctors and nurses to respond to a questionnaire that she had put together. With the Constitution Hill project, the Memory and Documentation Centre was evidence of the massive response to the site. This shows the effectiveness of this 'opinion poll', it shows the internal need for people to lift their voices from the privacy of their homes and proves the success of the process taken up by the HET team (see note 12).

This team, as previously explained, went through a lot of trouble to get the interest and stories from ex-wardens, ex-prisoners, and others. The active artistic position of this team signifies the necessity for artists to take on an active position in order to, or with the purpose of encouraging response. Artists' active renewal of their visual language is one of the necessary processes to encourage conversation between artist and audience. This active shifting is visible in Kurgan's work. She consciously moved from a quite traditional method, working with lithographs and drawings, to reinterpreting her photographs (previously, just documentation) to become the work. This is a process of constantly redefining and improving form. This 'redefining' is a necessary action of postmodern artists, **continually questioning where they work, what type of work they do, and what kind of actions can be classified as work of art**. Kurgan does not claim to have a way to popularize art, to have agency, but what she does assert, is that she wishes to facilitate interaction; dialogue.

This active artistic position forges new languages, yes, but in turn it asks for an active response from a critical 'art world', as well as an involved audience. There is *hope* for some form of interesting and critical response, but artists' works are often met with silence, or bland feedback. Kurgan finds this frustrating, and she states (2004a): 'There is no lively conversation going on. There is no healthy critical discourse out there.' What is more, if there is any conversation, it is the same old bland uninteresting responses by the same people. This is a depressive situation, which I try to explain with hesitation. For one, I believe that the self-indulging notions of the precious art world hamper its 'public face'. This world seems trivial from the 'outside'. It is a world, seen from the 'inside', quite literally, the inside of its institutions (galleries, universities), as a place where artistic agency seemingly does not have any value beyond those enclosing

walls. This is simplifying very real, complex problems and consequently, artists have taken steps towards a form of art that is more 'accessible' and available to a greater audience. The evidence of this is seen as art, more than ever, spilling into the public arena. Evidence is also seen in artists' use of certain 'business propositions' or rather elements from various other fields (including health sectors, community services in Kurgan's case) in conjunction with art practices. A new ground (both abstract and actual) is formulated where these fields come together, providing a different place for artists to speak from, and a different audience is addressed. The purpose, as I see it, is to give *art* a voice outside the art world. That is what Kurgan is trying to do when she makes 'art and cultural interventions in the space between the two worlds' – 'art and business' (Kurgan 2004a). By taking part in commissioned projects, she draws ideas from both these worlds, seemingly eradicating the border between art and business (business referring to the 'business world' as I explained it in the first chapter). I say 'seemingly' because this is a difficult endeavour and the distinctions between one kind of working and another are still evident. She does however bring aspects of these worlds into the public arena, where she is working on the *border*, in neither of the two fields. In this middle field, this third place, this in-between space, she interacts with a greater audience (an audience other than the gallery audience) and works with social issues in this 'outsider space' that are not only relevant to herself, but also to others. This makes her work even more accessible and 'conflates' the agency of the artist, taking it beyond the four walls of the gallery, the university, the museum.

To use features from the 'business world' to enhance the language of art practices, is one way of 'growing' a new audience for contemporary art practices. This 'tactic', where artists set out to work between two fields, could be seen as one of many similar

strategies that wish to take art into the public realm. I am however, interested in arts' relationship with business, and would advocate for this approach, believing that the 'art/business combo' should not be seen as a 'possibility' but rather a 'necessity'. With this, I do not praise every artist who sells fake copies of artworks; neither do I preach the conflation of academic art with 'crafty chic'. I do, however believe that art institutions could introduce artists to business prospects, which include the *specialization/professionalization* of their own practice. These things are just not known. To my mind, it comes down to the sharing of knowledge, to conversation, even if it were not framed within educational institutions. The fact is that art institutions do not give students agency. Agency, within the academic field, yes, but 'border-crossing' lies within the individual's pursuit. I do understand that the working of the art world rests upon the idea of symbolic capital and that this is indeed important, but I do question why 'contemporary art', the way I understand it, is not necessarily a sustainable (profitable) business. All artists have 'another' job, whether it is teaching or other sideline gigs. Only the top few artists (the likes of William Kentridge) can sustain themselves through their art practices, especially in light of the frame of conceptual art, where art is not necessarily made with the intention of profit. This is indeed a difficult notion that cannot be tackled in the limited space of this report. It is a difficult notion, as it continuously comes down to the push and pull between artistic 'celebrity' and 'sustainability'. And 'sustainability' or indeed survival cannot be ignored as all other 'fields', in fact, the world, are structured on the basis of economic or political capital.

Secondly, viewers are often 'captured' in a **prescribed system of viewing art**. I believe that the South African education system has a role to play in the growth of and understanding of academic art practices (not that I necessarily have faith in the

efficiency of our education system). The purpose would be to give 'art language' a position next to the language of science, accounting and other subjects. It would be giving people a base to speak from, where this basis is not a fixed set of ideas and rules, but a change in perspective. This is a *change*, from the position of considering things, whether objects or texts, to placing oneself within actions and processes. Here, meaning is open, fluid, unstable, and ambiguous and constantly being made and remade. Meaning comes from a dialogue between the subjectivity of the viewer and what is being confronted. Kurgan enthusiastically verifies the importance of art education through her annoyance of people's expectations that the language of art should be completely accessible and understandable, whereas the same is not expected of, for example, the language of a 'bunch of data-analysts' (Kurgan 2004a). She is currently involved with her daughter's school, trying to get art to be put on the curriculum. This action is further fuelled by her frustration with people who, on meeting her, hearing that she is an artist, ask; 'O, do you paint?' This frustration is shared by me (and I am sure many other artists!) It also *substantiates* the 'expectations' (and I am generalizing here) the wider public has of current art practices. The need for some basic tutoring is dire. Yet, if one takes the dubious position of education in our country into consideration, on whose head will the onus fall, and if it is taken up by schools, do the practices/languages of Contemporary Art justify a place in the curriculum?

Kurgan uses a visual language that is like a meaningful conversation. You never walk away without valuable thoughts. Through the powerful photographic images she so often uses (whether on photographic paper or printed on silk organza), she communicates layers of meaning. She is intensely aware of this meaning and how it is conveyed through the image. Conversely, she is just as sensitive to the reception of

these messages. These messages have a 'very practical relationship with public life' (Kurgan 2004a). They go beyond the 'decorative[18]', critically questioning relevant issues around art itself, around the content of art, around the complexities of art audiences. She is part of a necessary process in our country, where 'public identity' is 'reclaimed' and 'rearticulated.' She is part of the process in which a 'new' history for art is being written. Hers is an active 'reconstructing' of the identity of art to purposefully interact with business and people.

The 'identity of art' is complex and multi-levelled. It is a wide range of, often conflicting, projects that shape the face of art practices in our country. This notion runs through the workings of Terry Kurgan, who is in the process of building up her 'artistic identity' consisting of a wide range of projects, wishing to extend its tentacles further – locally and globally. At present, she is quite literally building this 'identity' by doing a catalogue[19] that will include her entire *body of work* – that is, private and public. Through this catalogue, the skipping between these fields will be evident as her practices have, for the past years, crisscrossed between them. 'Skip is', to use the words of Kathryn Smith (2003: no pg. number), 'to skim the surface, to pass over or omit something that results in a break in continuity, or to surreptitiously make a gateway'. The public enterprises of the artist often break and 'brake' the continuity of her private ventures, yet the **private fuels the public and visa versa**. Her project slides between different poles, unlike 'William Kentridge, who has one extraordinary project where one work is a building block for the next' (Kurgan 2004a). To me, Kurgan's is an extraordinary project that slips, yes, but that has spurted the growth of her two-way practice. Growth is not easy, but this infusion between 'art and business', resounding in the public arena, ignites into the lively language of the artist. A language that stirs

conversation and takes Kurgan into one of her developing projects – a collaborative excursion into photography and the inner city (Johannesburg) with Jo Ratcliff. This project is in *process*. Kurgan is always in *process*. A *process* that inflates the agency of the artist and, irrevocably, adds to the conversation and accomplishment of her personal endeavours as well as public art.

CHAPTER 3: THE TRINITY SESSION

'SURVIVAL TACTIC'

Hypertext is text which is not constrained to be linear. Hypertext is text which contains **links**[20] to other texts. The term, hypertext, is explained in *The Oxford Dictionary* (Waite 1994: 309) as 'provision of several texts on one computer system'. To me, hypertext (hypermedia[21]) serves as metaphor for the working method of The Trinity Session, where the functional structuring of the group provides *for several projects in one system*. This 'system' consists of three individuals working in collaboration. Understanding the restrictions and the opportunities for cultural practitioners in a transforming city such as Johannesburg, they position themselves as 'individual artists investigating different aspects of this context, and as a collective, combining resources, strategies and networks' (http://www.learningfrom.com/trinity). They have set their sight on diverse tasks, working as an 'independent contemporary art production team, practicing in public art projects, project initiation and production, curating, researching, and critical writing' (http://www.onair.co.za/thetrinitysession). The aim of this chapter is to investigate the character, reason and manner of this approach and the place of the audience in this kind of conversation.

In search of the rationale behind The Trinity Session's work, I went onto the infamous World Wide Web and found the following statement:

> The most thrilling moments in any exhibition are when the art catches us off-guard, takes us by surprise, and launches us into moments of unpredictable insight, wonder, and pleasure. Unfortunately, the very act of exhibiting an object as 'art' often dampens the possibility of this happening (Ralf Rugoff, http://www.onair.co.za/thetrinitysession).

These are the first words you read when going onto the current version (2004) of *Trinity's* website, available online at: http://www.onair.co.za/thetrinitysession. At first, it seemed to be romantic and distant from the actual practices and imperatives of this group, but on close inspection, it revealed to be some sort of explanatory note attached to the multiple ventures they take on. The quote speaks of preconceived ideas and explains a 'fundamental desire' of the group (Smith 2004), a *desire* to shift people's perceptions and 'for the blinds not to go down when they hear the word art' (ibid.). It is about the introduction of 'alternative ways, showing alternative platforms or presenting alternative approaches' (Neustetter 2004). It is about the surprise of the viewer 'stumbling across things', seeing the potential of some kind of creative intervention in everything. *Trinity's* projects are fuelled by the urgency to 'get as many people interested and/or involved in the types of art consumption that they are interested in, because it eventually grows the community, it grows the platform for exchange and collaboration' (Hobbs 2004).

US art critic and curator, Ralf Rugoff's quote introduces us to the intent or the desire of the group. One could say that this proclaims the 'inner being' of The Trinity Session. This desire, manifests externally in the group's **forceful production tactics**. They 'thrive on multi-faceted production' in a country, where 'the rules are only now being written', where art is continually being redefined, taking into consideration the short history of South Africa's democracy (ten years in 2004) and the impact of the cultural boycott[22]. The demise of apartheid and the opening up of international platforms disrupted the cocoon of artistic practices under apartheid. This brought as much celebration about newfound opportunities and audiences, as it carried inherent problems.

One of these problems is the continuous lack of financial support. 'The Trinity Session is a direct response to certain galleries at a certain point closing down,' and drastically declining resources (Hobbs in Smith 2002: 67). The group was founded at the end of 2000, with the intention to 'get organized around your own resources and build relationships with people'. The idea is that these relationships support each other, and in time, 'start to build that identity so that people start to see that there is a presence, and take cognizance of that' (ibid.). One could venture to describe the founding of this collective as the **first 'forceful tactic'** in their line of production. A tactic, to fulfil that 'internal urge' captured by 'Mr Rugoff'. The force of their tactics, to me, is presented in the form of their names and contact details that follow the quote on the same webpage. The group is introduced to the viewer as three *directors.* This term immediately conjures a position of power as it is most commonly used in the business realm, where the 'main Macs' of the company are known by this idiom. That is exactly what the threesome of The Trinity Session set out to be four years ago, and have become over the past years in which they 'have tuned a fanciful idea – an independent arts consultancy – into a profit driven reality' (O'toole, http://www.artthrob.co.za/04jan/artbio). They are:

Stephen Hobbs sh@onair.co.za / +27 11 403 8358 / (0)82 8977498 **$**

Kathryn Smith ks@onair.co.za / +27 11 339 2679 / (0)82 7737033 **xk**

Marcus Neustetter mn@onair.co.za / +27 11 339 2785 / (0)82 9291569 **|||||**

Their offices are at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, Loveday Street, Braamfontein, South Africa. They are the administrators/*artministrators* of The Trinity Session, as well as The Premises, their gallery/project room at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre. Despite this self-avowed power position, they are young, approachable and have a hands-on approach, only now moving in the direction of working with assistants, where

the work is partially carried out by these recruits. This, as Smith suggests enables them 'to do a lot more engaging with clients and/or work on new project proposals' and bring them closer to what directors are 'supposed to do' (2004). Individually, they are also practicing artists in their own right. These individual practices are kept 'private' in the sense that 'rarely ever does The Trinity Session showcase one of its individual members' work', says Hobbs (2004). This notion is asserted by the individual voices of Smith and Neustetter. Smith says that 'my own work about fantasy, death and desire, all that kind of stuff, is my own weird private space in my head and I prefer to keep it there' (2004) and Neustetter asserts; 'when we work as individual artists, we keep that very separate' (2004). This is a continuation of their 'personas' before coming together. All three were independent artists, curators, arts administrators, writers, consultants, researchers, educators and material/virtual networkers' (Siopis 2003: 53). But, it is 'a bit of a chicken and egg thing', as it is also the merging of these individual endeavours that produces the dynamics of the group. The content of their separate enterprises slowly started to merge and this content gave 'direction as to how [they] will work on projects, create projects and look for alliances in the commercial world on the basis of body technology ideas, urban ideas and electronic arts ideas' (Hobbs 2004). Each of the mentioned ideas is largely associated with each of the partners, where Smith's interest is in body technology, Hobbs' is city related and Neustetter's concern is with the digital realm.

The identity of the group can be explained through an installation entitled *Tricrotic,* one of the projects *Trinity* did for the 16th Rencontres Vidéo Art Plastique festival in France, 2002. (IMAGES 14, 15) With *Tricrotic*, they deliberately tried to create a portrait of an individual within a collective. It comprises a stack of three huge projection screens

lifted off the floor, resembling a house of cards. Smith tells that 'each screen was made exclusively by each' member, with the idea of a *cadaver exquis*[23] (exquisite corpse) in mind. By way of its construct, the portrait of three separate artistic identities becomes a singular portrait, 'tending towards a **synchronicity** despite revealing distinctive modes of practice' (http://www.onair.co.za/tricrotic). It is very much about 'three voices vying for a place all the time' (Smith 2004). This ongoing process 'to define an authorial identity for a tripartite collaborative' such as theirs, is represented by the continuous shifting and changing of the screens. This 'personal architecture' is further explained with relation to a haiku poem[24]:

> [T]hree brief lines communicating one significant message, made sense as a **starting point** for Tricrotic, an armature around which to extend the range of complexities, idiosyncrasies and ironies we love about working as a unit (own emphasis) (ibid.).



IMAGE 14



IMAGE 15

And indeed, it was a starting point for what has become 'a fourth partner.' To some degree, *Trinity Session* has its own identity, which is continually formed and fuelled by the identities of Hobbs, Smith, and Neustetter. Neustetter explains the relationship between the three as 'nurturing', where they gain from each other's project, networks,

and interest areas (2004). This relationship has now (in 2004) – over a period – 'become one thing' (Neustetter 2004). From the time that *Tricrotic* was made in 2002, The Trinity Session has become something 'bigger' than its individuals have, and there is less of a defined line between their individual identities (ibid.). As Neustetter emphasizes:

> [O]ur individual interest areas are becoming more layered and we are becoming more involved in each other's projects. Therefore, naturally, taking more interest in it and [the relationship] becoming more of a merger and less of a defined line.

An interesting example of this absorption of each other's work is the fact that Smith has been invited to a digital and media centre for women in Canada, April 2004. Here her field starts overlapping with the interest of Marcus Neustetter that usually fuels the 'new media' component of The Trinity Session. Even though Smith works with photography and video, she admits that her involvement in the digital/electronic media of production in South Africa as part of The Trinity Session added to the invite coming her way. 'It is this whole package thing. The invitation is sort of 60% Kathryn the artist and sort of 40% Kathryn, member of The Trinity Session and it is just lucky that I am a girl, because that deals with the whole *only for women thing*' (Smith 2004). This merging between the partners' fields of interest, is also made visible in a playful portrait made of Trinity 'as artist', we see a shadowy identikit of *Trinity's* three pairs of eyes, three noses, and three mouths. (IMAGE 16) Made by pressing their faces against a digital scanner bed, this image communicates a serious, yet playful search for a group identity, as it conjures up the image of today's artists, 'a split subject always in process, a series of functional fictions …' (Siopis 2003: 53). Collaboration, here, is also a means of breaking away from the notion of the solitary genius making 'masterpieces'. This

'newly formed' *subject* wears 'the many hats of artist, administrator, curator, publicist, accountant, critic and so on' (http://www.learningfrom.com/trinity), leading to the inclusion of a myriad of media and practices. *Trinity's* art practice includes writing, curating, researching, teaching, consultation, spatial design and designing magazines, as well as making photographic works, audio and video installations, even 'television curating'. These varied endeavours, as Karen Raney states in *Art in Question* (2003: 2), 'are all part of what has been called a "splintered" practice that begins elsewhere, outside the artistic frame'. She goes on to say that 'this approach to art can be seen in terms of the impulses of modernity which Stuart Hall identifies in postmodern practices: modernism in the streets, the anaesthetization of daily life, and the proliferation of the media, sites and means of signification'.



IMAGE 16

'The Trinity Session becomes the hub that actually runs the rest' (Neustetter 2004). *This fourth thing* has the structure of a small business. However, the notion of The Trinity Session as business, is one component of their proposed plan. Neustetter explains (2004):

> There are three components. There is the collective working under the name of The Trinity Session in the art field, producing projects, curating, and so on.

> Then there is the individual working as artist, and then the third part, where The Trinity Session is being recognized *as an artist*.

The Trinity Session is another artistic identity and 'the artist' is at work when exhibiting *its* multitude of projects in *M.O: Trinity Session Artministration*, the group's first solo exhibition held at the Standard Bank Art Gallery, Johannesburg, May/June 2003. (IMAGES 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22) This exhibition presents almost two years' worth of Trinity Session projects, ranging from artistic experimentation to applying similar skills to research-based or commercial projects. The exhibition is split into two rooms. Between them, in the entrance to the gallery, is a large sign with the name of the exhibition, *M.O*. On the floor is a grey design, which includes a picture of an atomic explosion and the words Trinity Site, New Mexico and the date July 16, 1945. The collective gets its name from Trinity Site, New Mexico, where the first nuclear test took place. This is reflective of the explosiveness of the group, as Penny Siopis writes in *The Space Between* (2003: 53):

> Split-second energy, fission, fusion and much else are evoked here, leaving no doubt as to the collective's explosive launch and dynamism. 'Site' has become 'session'; the place of time and movement rather than fixed, static 'locus' of action. Trinity is always in session.



IMAGE 17



IMAGE 18



IMAGE 19



IMAGE 20



IMAGE 21

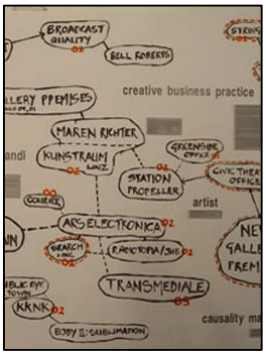


IMAGE 22

The whole exhibition seems to carry evidence of an explosion. An explosion of ideas and practices scattered across a variety of fields, including any possible project that somehow requires some artistic, creative, interpretive process. The room on the left shows artefacts, snippets of some of the 50 projects they have worked on since getting together. The second room shows the evidence of an ongoing process, their *M.O.* 'M.O.' is explanatory, referring to both 'modus operandi' and 'mobile office'. 'Modus operandi' encapsulates the plan and working method drawn up by the Trinity Session in order to 'survive' and 'revive' the 'cultural industry' in South Africa, a climate less favourable to contemporary arts and culture. This room reveals 'the information which clarifies how they work as a collective' (Anstey, http://www.sundaytimes.co.za). As you enter the room, US art critic and curator, Ralf Rugoff greets you with his words in vinyl lettering on the wall. This quote, as discussed earlier, carries the *desire* of the group. The rest of the information in the room requires ***more*** reading. Stephen Hobbs shows little sympathy, because 'that is the form in which that material comes, it comes in text' (2004). It seems fitting to take you through a wordy tour of the not-so-visual display. You would find, *inter alias*, a list of words projected onto a wall and a neon sign, **The | Premises**, the name of their gallery. There are also rows of pens and rubber bands, and a date stamp is housed in a glass cabinet. An organogram provides intrigue

as it includes some thought-provoking definitions. An artist, it says, can also be regarded as a 'practical philosopher'. A list of words, with definitions, are insightful and worth contemplation. It reads:

> Movement colour – influx control
> Lonely artwork – a public art piece that is not seen
> Rural legend – exhibition openings

All of this needs some **explanation**. The organogram is their business plan and the list of projected words is simply the list of items they needed to put the show together. The thinking behind the organogram is 'quite rare', maintains Hobbs (in Anstey, http://www.sundaytimes.co.za). 'How many businesses do you walk into; open their archives to reveal the inner mechanisms of their workings of their daily practice? We are working quite deliberately against the typical character of the exhibition process as a secret mystical process', he says (ibid.).

The whole show is a 'good deconstruction' of their processes (Hobbs 2004) as it reveals the 'visuals that come out of the conceptualizing of a small business' (ibid.). It was however, a 'cleaned-up version' of their actual processing procedures. It makes for rather bland exhibition material, unlike their presentation of *Mobile Office: Bereau de Change*, where they take their work quite literally out of the office. (IMAGE 23) The intentions of 'mobile office', according to Smith, 'works on the principle of making our working process transparent and sharing resources wherever possible. Mind maps, organograms, budgets, and 'to do' lists of current projects and relationships are displayed and refined in the public arena, with input and engagement from passers-by. As such, the relationships between artistic practice and the social realm are displayed, and strategic survival tactics in communities financially unsympathetic to arts and

culture, are shared' (Smith, http://www.artthrob.co.za). This event has been hosted at various venues, which include the Hause der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, the Public Eye in Cape Town and the Kunstraum in Linz (ibid.).



IMAGE 23

The gallery is usually seen as a place with a **more 'private viewing experience'**, a bit elitist at times, but it is inherently a public space (even though it is sometimes hard to perceive it as such). One does however wonder why *Trinity* would take their usually 'public practices' back into the gallery. Stephen Hobbs answered to that in stating that the 'context of the gallery was important, because this is one of the first places that you get defined as an artist and that definition, as much as it is something that you resist, is something you need' (2004). We must also remember that *Trinity*, the artist, is still *an artist in the making*, despite the already established professional practices of *its* directors. Stephen adds that 'we wanted to be non-objective about the way that we presented our material. We did not want there ever to be any official presence of art, what we wanted was for there to be the presence of ephemera' (2004). But, these objects gets the status of art, due to their presence in the gallery, carrying a playful reference to the readymade. It quirkily reminds us of the conceptual act of Mel Bochner[25] in 1966, who had to organize a Christmas show of drawings at the gallery of the New York School of Visual

Arts (Godfrey 1998: 115). He asked several of his friends to lend him drawings, telling them that they did not necessarily have to be 'art'. After the gallery director showed her dissatisfaction with this, he Xeroxed his hundred drawings, reducing them each to a standard page size. Having copied them each four times, he put them into four loose-leaf notebooks and placed those on four sculptural plinths. This exhibition, which Bochner called W*orking Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed as Art*, has often, as stated by Tony Godfrey in *Conceptual Art*, 'been cited as the first exhibition specifically of Conceptual art' (1998: 116). He goes on (ibid.):

> The viewer became a reader, and an active participant: as there was no immediately obvious art on show, the readers had to make or deduce the art experience for themselves. […] The exhibition was uncomfortable for the visitor, both physically and mentally: the drawings took a long time to decipher, leaving them with aching backs, and an uncertainty as to whether they had in fact been given an 'art' thing to contemplate.

But, his was a representing of the idea as an art object, and *Trinity's* exhibition is about the 'documentation' of processes and projects, represented by objects, diagrams or words. It did however require a similar act of participation by the audience, who was invited to take part in the process through the act of reading. It was for the viewer to interpret that, which was laid before them. The viewer had to become a thinker. Yet, on the other hand, 'the gallery has a context of *the two-second glance*', and the pleasures must be strong ones to keep the viewer's attention (Graham 1996: 173). Some chose to ignore the text (and indeed, missed the point), but the choice not to read is also a 'participatory action', even though it is one that the artist does not necessarily promote or wish for.

The words/objects/diagrams in this show are evidence that reflects the many platforms of their work. The Trinity Session's *modus operandi* revolves around the idea of making 'contemporary art a professionally run business, and this means diverse tasks,' says Neustetter (in Siopis 2003: 56). This approach has indeed led to a large figure of diverse, often contradictory projects, and the added challenge of keeping different forms of expression in different compartments.

Their ***Modus Operandi*** is a little paradoxical. 'They resist over-concentrated specialization, and make a speciality of what they call "the space between" sometimes radically different experiences. This space – with its contradictions – becomes form and action in their hands' (Siopis 2003: 53). The notion of 'space between', as I explained in the first chapter, provides an opportunity to confront and debate the many issues that stem from the relations formed in its fluidity. It is a space of conversation that includes the dynamic conversation of art. One that is informal and flexible – following not one path, offering no answer, giving the potential at each moment for surprises and transformation. The relationship resists stabilization as a binary opposition, shifting and transforming itself from one conceptual level to another, and shuttles between relations of contrariety and identity, difference and sameness. It is a place where artists continuously shift perspective to address (consciously and reflexively) one of the most troubling questions of contemporary art theory and practice: who is contemporary art for?

The **logic** behind *Trinity's* work, is 'about looking at how people interact with art and culture, looking at what is being validated and what is being ignored, and trying to find ways of accessing new audiences' (Smith 2004). The current urgency is to **highlight the**

role that the visual arts have to play in our society and the kind of contribution it can make. *Trinity* is interested in introducing the myriad of possibilities the 'conversation of art' has to offer. They do this through initiating and/or participating in projects aimed at popularizing contemporary art. The group is very much aware of the fact that there is no easy way to popularize or democratize artistic production. This, however, does not stop them from testing and using 'whatever platforms are available, all the time' (Hobbs 2004). They work on different platforms, described by Penny Siopis as 'platform-hopping' (2003: 55). My interest lies in *Trinity's* interest in 'public intervention,' where I venture to see them as kind of 'public educator' in various environments. The chosen works/environments include: *Search* (Ars Electronica Festival, 2002); *In no particular order*: *A History of South African Video Art* (March 2003, Klein Karoo Festival [Oudtshoorn]); *Safe Food* (*Trinity's* project for the BIG Torino [Biennale for Young Art] in Turin, Italy, 2002), and the physical exhibition, *Safe Food: Mr Delivery* (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2002). Furthermore, *Trinity's* project that connected the TV reality show *Big Brother II* with curating art, and their book *Broadcast Quality: The Art of Big Brother II* (2002).

Before I continue to assess the various social spheres with which this group has already engaged, I would like to contemplate – only in short – the term 'public art'. This is surely a contentious term often misinterpreted and misused by artists and public alike. But then, 'public' is also contentious, because how could one ever be sure of who and what the public are? This is the reason why Smith prefers to speak about *publics* and why The Trinity Session refers to their public practices as 'socially implicated'. In *Art in Question*, Karen Raney suggests that this sense of 'uncertainty about the vocabularies used to talk about art … suggests that categories are being reconsidered and reformed'

(2003: 1). This uncertainty also suggests a critical considering of previously named categories, and how one could place current practices in relation to these categories. Terminology, as much as it is used to communicate mutual understanding, also (at times) perpetuates confusion and misinterpretation. Smith confirmed my thoughts around the perception of this term, saying that 'when people speak about public art, the perception is that it is just a sculpture that is placed outside' (2004). This, indeed, is not very public and I agree with Smith when she states that 'there's got to be a very careful consideration of the context in which the work is placed' (ibid.). For a long time, public art conjured the image of a big corporate building having some art in its foyer, or the dusty colonial statue in the town square. Elizabeth Rankin asserts that 'street and shop signage and advertising billboards probably seem more interesting to the public, not least because their relative unpretentiousness makes frequent change possible' (1998: 10). She goes on, saying that 'by contrast, the term "public art" denotes "permanent art," and the works soon lose even the exhilarating connotations of controversy that may have accompanied their installation' (ibid.). Over time, they become nearly invisible – blue-chip decorations for blue-chip buildings. But, 'South Africa is changing, and the public's perception and understanding of the role of public art and public sculpture in particular, is set to change too. Nothing is any longer, so to speak, cast in stone' (Brand 1997: 54). These words were written in 1997 and they are still relevant today. We do see a lot of art spilling out into public spaces. Here, the materials and the domain of action are continuously questioned, challenged and changed. The audiences are tested as the boundaries are being pushed. This is exactly what *Trinity* is doing (Neustetter 2004):

> Testing the waters all the time. So, whether it is *Big Brother* or interventional work, it is about developing new platforms, testing new/responsive audiences. I think every project that we do, we not only think of what probably has to be done, but also whether it develops an *audience*.

Smith adds to this when she says that 'it is about seeing ingredients that seem to work, and just testing them a little bit here, and then in a way coming up with our own language' (2004). The so-called ingredients she talks about refer mostly to aspects of the British model, because public art has been 'happening there for long enough for some really solid criticism to be built around that kind of work', but there is an awareness that South Africa's dynamics are different and therefore these 'ingredients' need some testing. It also needs a lot of research around how the space is used and how art can be 'imposed' or rather introduced to arenas where it is least expected. I would like to appropriate some of Rankin's words in saying that to me, what *Trinity* is trying to do, is to give art the intrigue of 'street and shop signage and advertising billboards', 'unpretentiousness' and open for 'frequent change'. The wish is to make art 'permanent', not necessarily as a statue on the square, but as lingering thoughts in the publics' mind, even as a medium through which sustainability is possible. The desire is to *capture* the 'exhilarating connotations of controversy that may have accompanied their installation', and for people to just accept the possibilities of art practices. With this sense of direction, they stand at the centre of a new paradigm of local art production, one that challenges the myth of the hermetic artist who comments on, but never participates in civil society. When it comes to public interaction/communication, The Trinity Session '**Just Do It,'** albeit, with 'rhizomatic' logic.

> What is being sensed and articulated, is a new kind of interconnectedness, which is about multiplicities, not unified things. One metaphor is weaving, where patterns emerge from a matrix of overlapping threads. Another is the rhizome, the rootlike stems of some plants, which form a network underground. Whereas a tree is rooted to the spot, rigid and unitary, rhizomes are underground, creeping horizontally in all directions. Instead of a centre and a periphery, there are many centres moving towards and away from one another.

> Digital networks have this kind of structure. ***They are made up of threads and links that have no absolute centres or organizing hierarchies*** (own emphasis) (Raney 2003: 27).

Link 1: The **Ars Electronica Festival 2002**, held in Linz, Austria.

The theme of the Festival was **UNPLUGGED** and examined the relationship between art and technology, featuring loads of interesting 'tech, music and media stuff' and attracted visitors, speakers and artists from all over the globe to the picturesque town of Linz. The Trinity Session was part of two projects there. Firstly, the group was the South African facilitators for the RADIOTOPIA project. (IMAGES 24, 25) RADIOTOPIA explored 'radio' as the 'most globally accessible medium for communication and information exchange', which, despite its dismissal as an outdated technology, can reach across cities and remote areas and act as a means for building local and international community. It was basically a global sound exchange project, where The Trinity Session contributed their sounds to the project in Linz, and held a local DJ event in Johannesburg. This local/global exchange is an important aspect of *Trinity's* work, where contemporary technology has created a means for instant transmission of information, allowing rapid artistic intervention to take place on a global scale. But, what is also important, is the 'unplugged-ness' of some communities in Africa, and how networking takes place 'off-line.' This was also presented as the focus areas at the conference in Linz. (IMAGE 26)



IMAGE 24



IMAGE 25



IMAGE 26

In a conversation with Neustetter, he **entertainingly** expressed the group's love for *foreign currency* when asked about global exchange, but this has not lured them from their commitment to South Africa and the importance of local/global trade. Neustetter asserts that 'an essential process to almost every project that we've been doing, was looking at how we can bring things back home' (2004). The exchange is mutual, also asking what South Africa can offer to international audiences. Neustetter comments that 'up until now, we have been able to, at most of the events we've done, offer something valuable,' including the representation of other local artists on an international market (ibid.). With this strategy, they are building more of a network than focussing on individual gain and exposure.

The notion of 'networking' and global exchange forms essential parts of the second project for this festival, SEARCH, portraying protagonists of the emerging digital urban culture in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Digital culture in South Africa is developing at a rapid rate with digital activities responding to the international corporate counterparts that have been taking ownership of spaces such as the web. The concept of SEARCH is a workshopping, discussion and collaborative production platform that first starts in South Africa, extends to Linz and returns as a network of relationships and collaborations to South Africa (http://www.onair.co.za/search). The local/global nexus will be further discussed in relation to another of *Trinity's* project- combo's, *Safe Food* for Turin and *Safe Food II* for Johannesburg. I will here focus on the point of 'networking' or what The Trinity Session, calls a 'network neighbourhood.' This concept is partially explained by the desired mechanism of the group, drafted in their 'narrative biography' (http://www.onair.co.za/thetrinitysession):

> By acting as correspondents and consultants, and approaching the work process from a network and 'accommodation and exchange of information' angle, the

> purpose of our working dynamic is to produce in a cross-platform, multidisciplinary way with artists, institutions and corporate brands and services. Our interests lie in interdisciplinary working methods, conceptualizing and interacting with like-minded partners.

To further explain the idea of a 'network neighbourhood,' I will share the anecdote that Neustetter told me in explanation of this notion. He tells of the doors (the only part of the gallery that still exists) to the previous incarnation of The Premises at the Civic Theatre onto which people's names were placed in vinyl, gold lettering. These names were of those people that *Trinity* had worked with or wishes to work with. So, as Neustetter asserts (2004), 'even if they had nothing to do with the gallery, it was our way of affirming our neighbours that we would like to work with them in the future, whether it is the physical neighbours, or the conceptual neighbours'. On the opening night of their new exhibition-space (also called The Premises), these doors were visible to some of the patrons who came from the basement-parking zone. Some people passed to recognize their name. In this action, they became involved *before they even knew they were involved.* They ended up working with some of those people! Cunning operating, I tell you, giving credit to those they work with, confirming working partnerships and sharing resources. This is an essential aspect of all their projects. For example, *Safe Food*, where they represented all the partners on a plaque/shield, in order for them to stand out as something special, something precious and, at the same time, 'acknowledging that without them, [they] probably couldn't exist' (Neustetter 2004). The developing of these kinds of exchanges and strategies is where the concept of the *network neighbourhood* comes from. *Trinity's* networks are extremely elastic, threaded through electronic fields, as well as stretched over more earthly, grounded terrain. Hobbs explains (in Siopis 2003: 67) the space of *network neighbouring* as 'quite an

elusive, strange and ambiguous kind of space,' but it simply comes down to notoriety and people taking notice of the group. He continues, saying that 'we try to channel that constructively into processes that build up visibility for artists, build up visibility for ourselves, and that look at new strategies for producing, curating, researching, designing and communicating what's really dynamic about living in the world of art' (ibid.). The SEARCH project was an extension of this 'networking'-concept. It is an 'ongoing research/art project, which works towards, and archives, the process of developing an *art network neighbourhood*, by setting up further projects that pull networks together' (Neustetter in Stern, http://www.onair.co.za/mn/rhizome_interview). This project's main principle was to find out what the local, specifically South African possibilities for setting up a kind of digital network, would be. This network, not necessarily existing virtually, but actually existing in resource-sharing, physical relations, parties, and so on.

The participants were from Johannesburg, as well as Cape Town. The Trinity Session delegation included Marcus Neustetter and Stephen Hobbs, Maria McCloy (editor) and Zubz – Ndabaningi Mabuye (webmaster) from www.rage.co.za, Francois Naude and Damian Stephens of No Organization and their respective sites www.altsense.net and www.dplanet.org. Also part of the team were writer Stacy Hardy, sound artist James Webb and graphic designer Dineo Mokgoasi who is working on creating a network of black creatives and outsourcing them to the corporate world and putting their work on-line. (See http://www.rage.co.za). Different people were involved for different reasons, representing different ways of working that currently exist. These seven South African Digital Media 'activists', artists and people working in the industry, were invited (and funded, thanks to *Ars Electronica*) to join Neustetter and Hobbs who went as facilitators. Before their trip to Linz, the group held workshops in Johannesburg at The Trinity

Session offices and the JHB Civic Theatre. According to the group, these meetings allowed for participants to share their interests and current practice, it stimulated discussions and the sharing of ideas and opportunities, and also led to ideas around how to address the working dynamics during the visit to Linz. The Johannesburg workshops resulted in the method and activity in Linz. The manifestation in Linz took on various forms, of which I am only going to focus on the concept of 'The Elobby computer workstations', 'The Kitchen', and how it focussed on audience interaction – an essential part of public conversation. (IMAGES 27) The Trinity Session reports on their website of interaction in the 'elobby', where persons who wanted to check their email and not necessarily engage with the SEARCH team in an optimal way, often invaded the space. They had to readjust the facilities by turning the computers around, using the plasma screens for presentation purposes only. Neustetter conveys that it 'also resulted in small tongue in cheek experimental productions such as trying to sell the internet access to the visitors by putting up a notice: "Internet Café – **Euro 5/15 minutes** – come surf the internet in the company of finely South Africans" and James Webb's rejection noise' (http://www.onair.co.za/search/search). This crafty reaction became telling of the way in which *Trinity* and the rest of the participants shrewdly use environmental factors to inform and 'control' their process and outcome (in other words, their 'art work'). Reported on the same site, was the fact that the workstations were also used to present information to visitors particularly when there was much traffic such as during the seminars and the opening event. For this purpose, interactive works and sound reactive material were presented. (IMAGE 28)

'The Kitchen' was used for the discussion and workshops amongst the team. As Neustetter expressed (in Stern, http://www.onair.co.za/mn/rhizome_interview), they

'basically sat down for five days and networked!' He tellingly goes on, stating that 'the nine of us talked about structures, concepts and ideas, as well as politics, social forums and pop culture' (ibid.). Audience members were welcome to join the discussions and listen in on the working process. This reminds of and works on a similar idea as The Trinity Session's *Mobile Office*, which is an ongoing exploration that examines the adaptability of alternative locations as working environments. The extent to which these spaces can be adapted towards the administrative and artistic needs of the collective, is tested through the openness of the host to accommodate the office environment needs, as well as the values exchanged through interaction with the human traffic in each space or location. (See www.onair.co.za/mobileoffice).



IMAGE 27



IMAGE 28

The participants were continuously encouraged to communicate with and explain to visitors the process that they were engaged in. Most participants did in fact end up presenting and discussing the developments to a range of audience members. Neustetter confirms that their aim in Linz was to present themselves to the audience that moved through the festival, but at the same time, 'working very hard in trying to see what the similarities and differences were between these different circles of connected people, who never actually get together and merge' (2004). In this case 'a foreign festival, a foreign platform' was used to shift the focus to each other (referring to the participants)

and ‘develop something that grows beyond that’ (ibid.). Some of the relationships that were formed at the festival, resulted in several collaborations, and are still ongoing. For instance, Maria McCloy and Zubz both came back and set up several ‘networking parties’, as a side project. According to Neustetter, there is also a continuing ‘exchange of a very informal nature’. As result of this *exchange*, he (representing The Trinity Session) is currently involved with further research, looking at digital communities in Africa. This study is done for Unesco, where some of the research that they are doing, look at strategies that can be employed in Africa to communicate more effectively with the digital community. Without necessarily only ‘going the online route’, they set out to look at family networks, phone networks, and other means (Neustetter 2004). The **informal** collaborative, SEARCH, plus *Trinity* has already had a range of discussions on this project. ‘So, it has evolved into something else and it is continually growing’ (ibid.).

Overall, the interaction at the festival was positively inspiring, motivating and gave way to some interesting and dynamic conversations – conversations not only between ‘like-minded partners’, but also between international practitioners and appreciating audiences (unlike much of the criticism or even lack of interest in South Africa). These exchanges do not have a direct impact on the South African audience, but give way to exposure and growth that is necessary to find both ‘lo-tech’ and ‘high-tech’ ways to contribute and converse with local audiences.

The emphasis on **new media** brings another concern. As Bhabha states in *Conversations at the Castle* (1998: 40):

> There can be no shortcut to the democratization of artistic production or circulation. Populist, agitprop approaches arrogantly assume that the instant

> connectivity and accessibility of the new digital technologies will necessarily democratize artistic practices and communities.

The conversation around the use of new media is a long and necessary discussion in its own. What it comes down to, on a very simplistic level, is the fact that – as highlighted by Neustetter (2004) – 'the technology sector is very important to engage with, because they offer a whole new range of solutions that the art industry, unfortunately, is not engaging with'. Subsequently, this technology needs to be approached systematically. It is a process of taking it in steps. First, just getting the resources, then to get an understanding of the people in that field and hopefully, getting them to understand what is being done in the field of art. It might be that new media is still limited to a small group, but 'every movement – and it is not just in the arts, it is in technological development, it is in health sectors, in every sector – everything passes through a phase of avant-garde at some point' (ibid.). Whereas not everybody would agree with this, I would like to assert my belief in this statement. This is part of a continuous process of development. If, for example, one looks at cell phones, they were initially unavailable and not understood by a large sector of our country's citizens. The platform is now more accessible and better understood, despite the fact that we are still dealing with certain issues such as language. Are there any Zulu cell phones? New media is not a short cut to democratizing art, but 'if there is so much interest in such a large industry that we're ignoring, we would be stupid not to try and tap into it' (ibid.). Thus, we should not silence the few that do have a voice even though there is an assumption that they are arrogant in not serving the masses. They are still trying to at least give a voice… and this could be one of the savings elements of art practices, especially taking into consideration that more and more contemporary artists are working in the new media field (here, encompassing everything from video art to people doing things on radio, all the way through CD-Rom and web).

When it comes to technological media, **television** and radio are still the prolific mediums at present. This steers me to think about *Trinity's* project to connect TV reality show *Big Brother II* with curating art, and their book *Broadcast Quality: The Art of Big Brother II*. It also brings me to the second link of my excursion into their working process/journey.

Link 2: Curatorial and visual arts consultation for **Big Brother II** (2002). (IMAGES 29, 30, 31)

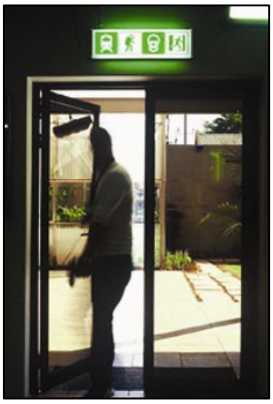


IMAGE 29



IMAGE 30



IMAGE 31

> Then there's always the cash
> Selling your soul for some trash
> Smiling at people, you cannot stand
> You're in demand
> Your fifteen minutes start now (McColl in Godfrey 1998: 379).

Well, The Trinity Session got about 3-5 minutes of media time on the opening night of *Big Brother II* and contemporary art got 24 hours of exposure for 78 days, 'a flagrant bid for that fifteen minutes of fame which an earlier generation of Conceptual artists had so ostensibly decried' (Godfrey 1998: 379). 'One is unsure at times whether outrage is being used as an artistic strategy or as a way of getting media attention, or even whether the two can be differentiated any longer' (ibid.). Well, I would not exactly say that the *Big Brother II* (2002) viewers were outraged about the contemporary art in the house; I

could in fact argue that *BBII*'s real sin was not that it was immoral or barbarian, but that it was boring. On the other hand, we were given more television time than Contemporary Art could ask for in a country that does not support its cultural structures in any substantial way. The work also got more honest opinions than what the audience usually ventures to give in a country where any substantial critical discourse is lacking or rather, in the making (however slow it might seem). Nevertheless, media attention it undoubtedly got, and **why should one discard any opportunity to expose, even popularize current art practices?** This was the attitude of The Trinity Session when they decided to curate the art for the *Big Brother* house. The group's desire is to work in the gaps between contemporary art, fashion and culture by interpreting and visualising trends and developments. With *Big Brother*, this is precisely what they did. And, as Penny Siopis asserts in *The Space Between* (2003: 56), 'whatever we think of *Big Brother*, watching 'reality' TV and catching a glimpse of something quite different (like Jo Ratcliffe's huge photo of a disembodied eye, or Brett Murray's cauldron sculptures of *Guilt, Guilty, Guiltiest*) *must count for something*' (own emphasis).

But, **what does it count for?** I will investigate a few aspects in the next paragraphs. It is firstly a pay-off from *Trinity's* network-strategy, a phone call from 'two enterpreneuring publicity babes', known as Glam Slam. Both The Trinity Session and Glam Slam were involved[26] with the Topsy Foundation, a charity organization and sanctuary that cares for children affected by HIV and AIDS. The Topsy Foundation was one of the beneficiaries of the first *Big Brother* South Africa, and there was a possibility of being involved in the second. According to The Trinity Session, the phone call was brief, but it went something like… 'How would you like to curate art for the *Big Brother II* house? We've scheduled a meeting with the producers for next week' (in Smith 2002:

5). As we know now, the answer to this question was positive, and the meeting took place. Here it was established that the core production team amongst other concerns, 'saw an opportunity to add value to *BBII* by introducing contemporary art into the house, and using this to provoke relevant discussion in the house, along with lending the show an air of acculturation and stimulating the larger media machine' (ibid.). For The Trinity Session, it was an opportunity to stage creativity on 'one of the most public contemporary art experiments undertaken in South Africa' (ibid.). This is a risky step onto untried grounds and the words of Siopis spring to mind (2003: 56):

> Creativity is a high-risk activity, social edification an ambitious objective, and art a complicated creature. Trinity takes the risk, follows the ambition and rides the beast.

What a creature it was to ride, not only for the curators on their way to and from this public art endeavour, but also for art hitching a ride on the media/business beast! Kathryn Smith comments in *Broadcasting Quality* (2002: 15) that 'projects of this nature can be easily subsumed by the industry on which they "hitch a ride" so to speak. If anything, we hope that it will function more like a "benevolent virus", extending the possibilities of what the media can carry, and mutually benefiting both industries'. This mutual benefiting or 'value finding' of two communication media (visual art and reality television), exists in each other, albeit, on a simplistic level. I think that it needs a shift in perspective from both the greater public, as well as the art world. It is more of a *spectacle* if you want, where the initial, momentary engagement is of importance ('meaning' on the side for a while). It is not that the work is leeched of meaning, but in the context of *Big Brother*, if it just makes people stop in their tracks, or in this case, look twice and contemplate… it is fine. To me, the intention of this project was to be an advertisement for Contemporary Art and The Trinity Session, an opportunity to curate

for cameras and a step closer (however small it might be) to shifting the perceptions around art practices to some level of acceptance.

To tackle my first point in case, Stephen Hobbs confirmed my perspective of this exchange as an advertising opportunity. He explains the group's connection with *Big Brother* as a 'mutual trading deal', where 'they needed art in the Big Brother house and we were prepared to curate the house' (2004). At a price, of course… nobody does anything for FREE. This is where The Trinity Session's shrewd business sense comes into play. What they wanted in return was a platform that exposed the artists' work (by being in the house and being shown on TV all the time); advertising for Contemporary Art and the group. I would not exactly call the *Big Brother*-concept brilliant, but this is a truly brilliant business strategy on the part of *Trinity*. They got their 'million dollar'-media time on the opening night of *Big Brother*, when a small insert was done on The Trinity Session, where they explained 'what the art was and why they were doing it, *bladibladibla*…' (Hobbs 2004) This 'bladibladibla' is closer to the comments by the housemates than it is to the intelligence of the group, who were watched by about ten million viewers (a quarter of the population), a truly 'public platform' as Hobbs asserts (2004). I questioned the relevance of this exercise *for* the general 'language of art' and Hobbs (with a throat-clean) restated his satisfaction with this transaction. For where else would you get 10 million people to pay attention to an art exercise in this country that easily?

It is about getting people to accept the fact that art not always belongs in galleries and that art is not terrifying. That you do not necessarily have to have an art history understanding or a degree in art to appreciate it. And, 'you don't', as Hobbs asserts

(ibid.). It is about catching the viewer off-guard, launching them into moments of unpredictable insight, wonder and pleasure. This is digesting the words of Rugoff (1999) who, as mentioned earlier, states that 'the most thrilling moments in any exhibition are when the art catches us off-guard, takes us by surprise and launches us into moments of unpredictable insight, wonder and pleasure'. This is a quite dramatic notion and I doubt it if television-viewers ever felt that they were launched into moments of 'unpredictable insight, wonder and pleasure' (it's *Big Brother*, do not forget!). Nonetheless, the art was noticed. Smith tells (2004) of a number of phone calls which they received during the course of *Big Brother'*s broadcast. This cannot necessarily be put forward as evidence of audience participation or acceptance, but it does count for something. It assumes an active **'shift' of attention by the public**, and that was partially the reason for placing the art in the house. Smith suggests in a Radio 702 interview with Barry Ronge that the responsibility lies on the viewers 'to shift their focus to look at the environment that the action is taking place in' (in Smith 2002: 66). The art was put in the house and 'particular kinds of art were chosen, to try and draw attention to the environment and start making people think quite consciously about the space' (ibid.). It is thus, however romantic it may sound, in that moment of recognition and some kind of acceptance/questioning, that the success of this project lies. As Smith asserts with regard to the contemporary work shown on *Isidingo*[27], 'with recognition comes a certain kind of ownership. And ownership is what we need if our cultural production is going to perform its function, and be taken seriously. Even if it were initially "As seen on TV"' (2002: 11). The art in *Big Brother II* was one of those introductory moments of contemporary art to a wider audience, one of those tiny steps in the direction of recognition and acceptance for contemporary art practices (and that is what we want, is it not?)

Taking into consideration the nature of this 'game,' the central concern for the producers, is whether the housemates' actions would be interesting enough to get the numbers (referring to the amount of viewers). The art was thus introduced into the house not only to serve as decoration (as apposed to the 'cosmos-pictures' in many of our houses), but to prompt some meaningful conversation, and later to serve as reference in the art task during week seven. The onus was on the housemates. This is exactly the reason why Michelle Constant suggested in *Good Art, Your Sofa* that the *artists* should be placed in the house the next time around (see Smith 2002: 41). She nonchalantly adds that 'this would be an entertaining house; this would be an outrageous house; this would be a house that is permeated with thought, tension, debate and undoubtedly passion. And no doubt, there would be plenty of long lunches' (ibid.). However, not much intellectual debate took place in the *Big Brother* house, and no artists (in the flesh) were found in the house. Just exciting art objects. The artworks on set were at the mercy of a contingent, evolving narrative. They could not be 'given' meaning, as would be the case if curating a gallery or museum exhibition. Rather, their significance was reliant on what was happening in front of them, to them, if they were being discussed, and if they became emblematic of attitudes, events or personalities. These contingencies also made for interesting curating. As The Trinity Session suggests in *Broadcast Quality* (in Smith 2002: 6), 'the *BBII* house became a site for an experiment in the language and seductive power of a selection of South African contemporary art'. They go on to say that 'it was also a massive learning curve as curatorial mores had to give way to the technical features and requirements of television, as well as its mediation of appearances and its language. Televisual language is seldom interrogated by those who watch it. It's not supposed to be critiqued, just enjoyed' (ibid.) (I must just ask, 'have

you watched SABC lately?' I surely hand out a lot of critique!) The responsibility of the housemates to further contextualise the work for the viewer at home, failed desperately. *Even though* the contestants received an art handbook[28] when entering the house, their 'views of the art are uniformly asinine' (De Waal 2002: 65). Herewith not assuming that artists are necessarily more clever than the 'inmates', but it failed publicly, as many of the conversations by the contestants were not considered as valuable entertainment – television time, except the **one** occasion (that everybody mentions) where Groschaan used Isolde Krams' *Populating Couple* to talk about 'separation anxiety' (see Smith 2002: 10). Thus, it is not the 'stuff' that you would publicly see. 'It was the kind of private moments that were happening in the house that absolutely did have an effect' (Smith 2004). This however only contributes to the 'contemporary art knowledge' of the housemates, who had never before had such exposure to this kind of art. Nevertheless, there are eight people (or nine, if you really wish to consider Michelle's unborn baby) who know something more about the dynamics of what art can be. The art task[29] places emphasis on 'art as therapy' or 'art as expression' and seemingly reveals 'aspects of thoughtful, creative personalities repressed for the sake of the game' (Smith 2002: 60). On this, Richard had the final word, saying, 'make of them what you will. We have had a good laugh at them, but I am sure you will find in every single portrait and expression of self, and a lot of hard work and effort that has gone into them. And that's the story' (ibid.).

That is the story of the art in the *Big Brother II* house. It is about making 'minor celebrities' of artworks that only guarantee a superficial understanding of their intention, content and form. It's about providing artworks with a new audience. It's about artwork that 'becomes part of a larger system of signification', which throws interesting light on

the relationship between visual art and popular media. We might feel like singing: 'We don't need another hero, we don't wanna know the way home' (Tina Turner in Godfrey 1998: 301), but maybe Television is the *hero*, or rather one of the heroes, art needs and the *Big Brother* house, an efficient platform for its practice… Frankly, I am a bit sceptical, but 'if this is what it takes to make art accessible to the masses, I say, like Alex Dodd in *Broadcast Quality*, "a luta continua" – onwards and upwards! ***Let art be seen "by any means possible"*** (own emphasis) (in Smith 2002: 27).

Placing the art in *Big Brother*, made art a topic of conversation. It also 'merged' art with entertainment. This is a business tactic that collates 'high art' with popular culture and in a way popularizes the notion of 'high art' to fit not only in museums/galleries, but also in *houses* and other public spaces. Hobbs makes the statement that 'the whole point about living in South Africa is about public identification, it is about perpetually being in a state of communication and openness. Whether the government does that successfully or not, is not our concern.' Their concern is about accessing new audiences, getting more people involved in the 'business of art'. Accordingly, one could infer that the whole '**art and business method**' is used to engage a different audience. It is a 'survival tactic'.

In an interview with Hobbs, I casually referred to 'business' and he quickly corrected me that 'we are not talking about impacting on the mining industry or the pharmaceutical industry', except if one wishes to look at the impact of company collections such as Sasol, Absa, Nedcor and other companies. The Trinity Session has done some consultation work on this level, but they have also managed to break into the realm of 'branding'. They have worked 'somewhere between marketing companies and

advertising companies and the brands that are represented or handled by those agencies' (Hobbs 2004). They have done some consulting for Baits 141 in Stellenbosch (the advertising agency) and two projects for Red Bull, who actually approached them 'on the basis of [their] *guerrilla marketing tactics*' (ibid.). With this, they take art into public spheres (including the business realm). Subsequently, when they talk about art and business, they are also talking about the **business of communication**, talking about the **business of dealing and trading ideas**. And, that is all very potent 'material' when you are working in a society that has very little time for the appreciation of any creative practice, because everybody is trying to get by.

Another type of 'business-deal' that interests me is one between an artwork and its viewer.

Link 3: **In No Particular Order (selected works**). Playtime (video and multimedia festival), Newtown Cultural Precinct, Johannesburg. Festival Internacional de Video/Arte/Electronica, Lima, Peru (2003). Mini festival of South African Video Art, Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, Oudtshoorn (2003).

In No Particular Order: A selection of South African Video Art is an episode in an ongoing project to define a history of video in South Africa. This collection of South African videos could be more accurately described 'as some experimental work in the moving image, as South Africa as yet does not have a consolidated and critical history of video art practice' (Smith, http://www.onair.co.za/savideoart). The popularity of video art, at least among artists, coincided with South Africa's newfound democracy and increasing internationalism. As Smith asserts, 'it was something new, sexy and international' (ibid.). After years of cultural isolation, our late arrival 'at the Video Art Party', made for a very diverse and disparate practice, with no sustained and consistent

discourse. Even though individuals practicing in these fields have done a lot of research in the universities, Hobbs informs us that 'no one has bothered to phone all the artists up and get the tapes, digitize them and put them onto a DVD format, which is what we have done' (2004). This may sound like a bit of *blowing one's own horn*, but maybe they deserve being all 'holy' about their work, because this is a work **well done** – neither medium, nor rare. However, what I wish to dub 'rare,' is the Klein Karoo National Festival. 'Rare,' not in the sense of being infrequent, but as the Afrikaans word would say, 'rou' translated to *crude*, translated to *rough and ready*. 'Rough' in the sense that most of its 'public' is on a booze cruise, and 'ready' considering the fact that it does, despite often unprecedented partying (which most of us have been part of), offer a platform for contemporary art. I will be focussing on the context of the Klein Karoo Festival, to tell the story of *In No Particular Order* (showcased at the 2003 event), however exciting and valuable it is in its own right (see Smith, http://www.onair.co.za/savideoart). In 1997, the first of the Klein Karoo Arts Festivals was launched in Oudsthoorn. The aim was to celebrate Afrikaans culture, but also to show how this culture had declared itself to be open, and free to assimilate other cultural influences. Not being present at the first of these festivals, I have to rely on Sue Williams' information, regarding this initial meeting (http://www.artthrob.co.za/00feb/news):

> The first of these festivals will be remembered mainly for the fact that singer Miriam Makeba was assaulted vociferously with the k-word, and pelted with beer cans as she sang on the stage. 'We regret,' said Ton Vosloo of Nasionale Pers, main sponsors of the event, 'that a minority tried to spoil a beautiful attempt to keep Afrikaans as broad as possible.'

From those first days, however, the festival has come a long way and over the past four years, has emerged as one of the premier events for contemporary art in the country. As

I am writing this, this year's Klein Karoo festival (2004) is in *full swing*. Due to academic pressure and responsibility (or is it lack of financial resources?), I could not make it this time around and will have to wait to get the reports from those who safely made their way there and back. Nonetheless, we can look back on 2003's visual programme at the festival. Lucia Burger took over from artist and lecturer Clive van den Berg, under whose supreme hand this programme has 'become an acclaimed showcase for fresh, invigorating work' (Temkin 2003: 10). Like most artists (including myself), Burger stated that one of her main goals was to attract more interest in the visual arts. 'I want more people walking through the door – people who wouldn't usually visit art galleries', she explains (in Temkin 2003: 10). To this end, she tried to keep venues accessible and visible with conspicuous banners and posters. The catalogue was less 'academic' than the previous year, with a magazine-style format printed in a larger edition and distributed free with the official festival guide, thus reaching a wider audience. For the record, this magazine, **Knap!** was done by *Trinity*, also doing it for this year's event. This, yet again, illustrates the elasticity of the *Trinity*'s functions. But, to get back to the festival and the idea of a 'business-transaction' taking place between an artwork and its viewer, I turn to the view of Stephen Hobbs. He says that 'festivals are supermarkets by definition', where one has to be conscious of the fact that 'in a supermarket-situation you're never going to get every single person moving through the space, doing a deal with the work of art or doing a deal with the artist' (2004). He continues, stating that 'the right people always come and if they couldn't make it to that gig, they will hear about it or follow up by phone or by e-mail'. So, festivals[30], fairs, all these big platform events, despite their often hedonistic character, create a focal point that puts the spotlight on the cultural industry, and it has a knock-on effect… 'People, who really want to do business, will follow up' (ibid.). Concurring with a statement

made by Cobus van Bosch in *Decent Exposure* (2002: 7) that 'in absence of other national endeavours, the important thing festivals have to offer visual artists, is exposure – and that is really what is needed'. Here, as point in case, we can use *In No Particular Order*, which, as I have stated, has been showcased at the 2003 Klein Karoo National Festival. As a result of showing it on this occasion, *Trinity* has up to now had some fairly significant interest in this compilation. And Hobbs' words are telling, when he says, 'I can't even remember all the places that we've shown it' (2004), continuing, 'we've shown it in France, we've shown it in Peru and I did a screening of it in a venue in Zurich about two weeks ago, which was very well received' (2004). What is also positive is that they have formatted it onto DVD, which is a fairly stable format, dealing with the whole corruptibility of it. This makes for a lot of international interest, including a recent one from Tel Aviv, where curators work with 'compact packages', where they can get the *thing* and immediately screen it. What also makes this particular video, *In No Particular Order,* even more applicable for international showing, is the fact that only works that are intended for a single screen projector or monitor are included to minimize the possibility of compromising work that should be viewed as an installation (see Smith, http://www.onair.co.za/savideoart).

I would like to move on to another kind of platform, the Biennale. The Johannesburg Biennale? No, while Biennales in our country have their own history of some failed and fantastic moments and the last one held before The Trinity Session was 'born', I refer here, to the Biennale for Young Art, Turin, Italy.

Link 4: **Safe Food at Big Torino**, Biennale for Young Art, Turin, Italy LINKED to **Safe Food II: Mr Delivery installation for 'New Strategies',** World Summit on Sustainable Development exhibition programme, Johannesburg Art Gallery.

The structure of the *Safe Food* project was originally defined by an invitation from CALC for BIG TORINO[31] to produce a **small website** in response to Biennale director Michelangelo Pistoletto's brief of the BIG Social Game. (IMAGES 32, 33) The idea of a BIG Social Game reminds of the **1968** '*Third International Exhibition of Figurative Art* in Italy'. Pistoletto was part of this occasion where, despite the shadow of the Vietnam War, 'the **Italian artists played the English and Dutch at football in the exhibition hall'** (Godfrey 1998: 198). This was seen as 'a new sort of carnival that would embody pleasure, communication and political upheaval' (Gilardi in Godfrey 1998: 198). The commonplace has entered the sphere of art, quite literally, in the form of a 'big social game'. These notions are reiterated in the brief for the 2002 Big Social Game, being something that 'is not about orthodox definitions of artistic practice. It mixes with the everyday facts; it interacts with the scientific, economic and political undertakings of our time. It is not about ***applied*** art; it is about ***implicated*** art.' Pistoletto's brief is a desire to see 'change through play' and *Trinity's* answer to this brief, is a playful approach gyrating around the serious issue of homelessness – a true act of art intertwining with the ordinary things of life.



IMAGE 32



IMAGE 33

In the South African culture of 'making-do,' the group were yet again challenged to perform 'alchemy' with their very modest project budget of $500. The notion of *self-*

induced homelessness mirrors the position of the artists, always having to 'maak 'n vokken plan' (Smith 2004):

> A person sells tobacco, sweets, and some fruit from a box on a downtown sidewalk. The money he or she has made for the day is enough to buy something to eat and drink and perhaps a little to save. Instead of paying for transport to return each night to the township, (s)he finds a quiet retreat and sleeps the night inside the box. The following morning the box is used for fuel, (s)he finds a new box and the cycle of trading begins again.

Like these urban dwellers, *Trinity* came up with a survival tactic. They chose to respond to the invitation and brief by setting up a basic workshop[32] programme that would ensure some transference of the content of **their website** to the local landscape and vice versa. Hobbs writes that 'very quickly we could see the "social game" in our context suggested social awareness and the broad subject of homelessness emerged as a defining framework within which to demonstrate a very fragmented society in South Africa' (http://www.onair.co.za/safefood/concept/introduction). In all of this, *Trinity* also questions the value of creative or artistic practice in a socially, politically and culturally challenged society.

Their involvement with the homeless and other aspects of the urban, social structure, could easily be discarded and criticized as 'social work.' *Trinity*, very much at the forefront of working in social space, seeks to contest notions of public art as 'social work.' 'Yes', as Siopis writes, 'the need for social transformation might drive its engine, but its pulse is fuelled by ideas of aesthetics and critical practice' (2003: 55). The public realm is recognized as a rich opportunity to engage with histories of the present, as the culture and character of South Africa's cities, particularly Johannesburg's, transform daily. Due to 'public notions' of restriction and control, as David Koloane has proposed in *Walking The Tightrope* (1997: 32), the notion of 'public space' could not exist in

South Africa pre-1994. Also bringing to mind the fact that Johannesburg developed and was designed along racial lines (Chipkin 1993: 197). The constantly amended and extended, rigorously enforced, laws of Apartheid were created to maintain governable cities that 'privileged the political and economic position of the white population' (Christopher 1994: 3). Now, post apartheid contemporary Johannesburg (that is Johannesburg 2004) is in a state of flux, as its 'planned transparency has, quite rapidly, become opaque' (Dunlop 2000: 3) and working publicly at present, as Smith suggests, 'is about reclamation, both of a collective sense of community, but also a personal space of agency' (2003: no pg. number). It is about engaging and connecting with different, contending needs and audience/participants. It is about '**playing together**' in a changing society, this through the production of 'implicated' art.

The invitation from Italy together with the social circumstances in South Africa, lends *Trinity* the opportunity for **creative invention**. Using the environs of central Johannesburg, the collective approached a crime-prevention unit in Hillbrow and through it formed an alliance with SAPS officer Sgt Nicholas Ncube, who ran a shelter in Soweto for Hillbrow street children. Penny Siopis summarize that 'through a complex process of expression and documentation, the homeless became agents in and for the project. Called *Safe Food*, the project also engaged in "real-life" events on the streets of Johannesburg and at the collective's downtown gallery, The Premises' (2003: 55). All these project-related elements informed *Trinity*'s website for BIG Torino. *Safe Food* was presented as an interactive website comprising part of the online programme of Guestland, curated by CALC – http://www.onair.co.za/safefood. It went live with the opening of the Turin Biennale on April 19, 2002. Even though Hobbs (from whom a lot of the initiative for this project comes) was alone in Italy for this opening, his experience

was shared with a group of people in South Africa when they phoned him from The Premises. (IMAGE 34)

He was on speakerphone.

Everyone in the gallery was talking to him in Italy whilst he was standing at the *Safe Food* opening.



IMAGE 34

From here, I would like to look at two necessary facets of this project/process, namely the relations formed with partners and the conversation with 'publics'. The interesting path to *Safe Food*, the successful launch of this website and the ongoing process in Johannesburg, were and are only possible through the partnerships that were formed during the development of this project. Through the interest expressed by these partners, *Trinity* managed to turn the $500 into a considerably larger sum, both symbolically and in reality. The opportunity to bring *Safe Food* back to Johannesburg also came as a result of the contribution of the various partners, collaborators and supporters of this project. *Safe Food II: Mr Delivery* is a reconfiguration of *Safe Food*, presented in Turin. It was presented in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. (IMAGES 35, 36) At this exhibition, the importance of these partners was affirmed. A commemorative inscription was made

to acknowledge their preciousness and incalculable contributions. The second point that I would like to highlight, is their awareness of multiple 'publics'. Take for example, the public car boot sale where invited artists and guests arranged their vehicles in Joubert Park to participate in a car boot sale by displaying and selling their second hand clothing, household goods and appliances from the boots of their own cars. (IMAGES 37) It was an opportunity, as *Trinity* states (http://www.onair.co.za/safefood/concept/release), 'to invest in an otherwise unexpected piece of artistic memorabilia and contribute towards a creative endeavour that seeks to redefine approaches to social responsibility with a group of committed partners'. This was only one instance of 'introductory exchange,' involving the park community into an 'artistic process'.



IMAGE 35



IMAGE 36

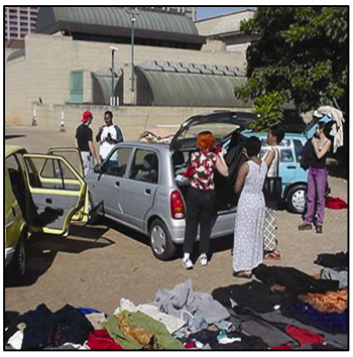


IMAGE 37

Communication and interaction however, occurs through various mediums. *Trinity* consciously explored the use of these mediums through the course of *Safe Food*. The components of *Safe Food* have occurred by telephone, the internet, hard copy documents, videos and photography, a gallery space and various populated public, outdoor and domestic realms. Each of these components is significant in terms of their specific characteristics, offering interesting opportunities for investigating their aesthetic and artistic values, without forcing the 'art' issue. What is more, each of these components has a receiver or audience of contrasting numbers and socio-economic and

cultural backgrounds. The challenge in this project was 'to acknowledge the fragmented connections between these various audiences and acknowledge that for the moment, some components would target certain audiences more effectively than others' (http://www.onair.co.za/mrdelivery/info).

Trinity states that 'it is their intention to "implicate" the viewer in a documentary process-installation that defines its display methods through forms of reconfiguration. This project is about ways of seeing and looking, *providing "prompts" to visitors to question the role that art, aesthetics, and artists as agents of social transformation, can play in interpreting the city'* (own emphasis) (ibid.). This intention of a 'process-installation' takes form in *Safe Food II: Mr Delivery* that also, because of its presentation in a museum environment, calls into question methods of display. This 'act', however, was at once about community conversations brought back into the museum, as it was a 'delivering' of an international conversation to local audiences. Aware of the current surge of local artists exporting to international markets, this initiative of *Trinity* to 'bring this project back from Italy', was a necessary step, explained by the group (ibid.):

> A major issue facing contemporary South African art is the issue of exportation – many artists travel abroad to show, yet few of these exhibitions travel back to South Africa. The World Summit exhibition programme at the Johannesburg Art Gallery offered us the opportunity to bring the project back to Johannesburg, so to speak, to the communities that provided the initial impetus to formulate Safe Food. We decided to call this version Mr Delivery, a tongue-in-cheek reference to a franchised delivery service that delivers food from a number of restaurants/fast food outlets to your door.'

This exhibition draws attention to the relationship between events, audience and artefact, as the installation serves to summarise many aspects of *Safe Food* that have already taken place.

This endeavour consists of so many layers that one could never give enough attention to each thought through detail. This intense involvement in the matrix of urban phenomenologies, is a continuation and implementation of *Trinity's* interest in 'educating' on various levels, here specifically on the grass-root level. I recall here a journalist course that Neustetter initiated through the Creative Inner City Initiative (CICI). It has now materialized into a magazine, *Regeneration* that is partly funded by the CICI and designed in-house with the help of Johan Kritzinger, one of *Trinity's* assistants. At the same time, no contributors to the magazine have ever done journalism in their life before. Hobbs explains that 'they have been introduced to writing processes and researching processes through the creative work that came out of the Creative Inner City Initiative' and are now managing that process with the guidance of Marcus and the team (2004). The point is, 'they are doing it, they have been exposed', and some were even identified for bursaries (ibid.). That, as Hobbs declares, 'is genuine impact stuff'. I agree and it is on this level that *Trinity's* impact on 'art practice' is visible, as Hobbs confirms (2004):

> We could not stake any claim to any changes that are recurring in terms of an actual shift in aesthetic, but definitely in terms of the training programmes, we have set up. There is definite evidence that certain trainees now have skill and are functioning.

He also states (ibid):

> Whatever the kind of artistic practice we practice as The Trinity Session, it is a very, very elite model. So, the kinds of people who are benefiting from the work that we're doing, are at a training level and you would have to see that in

> the context of learnership, the context of craft and creative industries base outcomes.

I would like to end with this idea of *Trinity* as 'public educator,' where they are 'looked to as a model, taught in schools and requested to consult at an educational level, whether it is devote method grass-root training or at secondary and tertiary level' (Hobbs 2004). They are taught, because their methods are demonstrative of something of a success, yet constantly under revision. Simultaneously they are 'educating' those who work with them to continue with their kind of artistic production. What's more, they are in the process of 'educating', or rather in the process of 'making conscious' through introducing contemporary art practice in its different forms, and in different contexts to different audiences. They do this to eliminate that which does not work, to define and theorize current art practices, but even more – through each instance of artistic conversation (some more successful than others), to make art public, to make art known, to make art accessible.

The **links** to all their projects are too many to visit in the short, linear, span of this chapter. But, I hope that this chapter has made you conscious of that which can be done through the creative spirit of contemporary art. **In this process, art and artist have agency.** Through this process of 'introducing', 'conscious-making', and 'educating', contemporary art can make a difference, it can move the beholder, relate to and be a useful and necessary part of many people's lives, irrespective of their social or economic circumstances. It plays a role in the survival of culture and the human spirit even in the most devastating of situations; and art is not a luxury just for those who have leisure time or can afford the acquisition of art objects. Most of all, this process posits that art is not less important if it can be appreciated by a diverse or un-art-educated audience. May art be shown (and seen) by any means possible.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

‘COMPARING NOTES’

Once again, I sat down in front of my PC, fingers on the keys. The words in my own head seemed far away, leaving this page – at first – white and wordless. I went on a ravenous search to gulp up any words that I could find – a quote, an old saying, a word. Any word, as long as it is not mine. Any word, as long as it summarizes this research project.

Why do we continuously search for someone else’s words? Why do I continuously search for someone else’s paths, models, ways? Is it easier to look at that which is already ‘tried and tested?’ It also seems as if another’s words and actions have more agency; more power than my own. Or maybe it is the world of advertising. Whether it be billboards that flash as we past, TV commercials that interrupt and frustrate or web-banners that keep on flashing as you search one website after another, that make us belief that there is always something ‘other’, something different, even something better than that what we say or are.

But, these written words are my own, fuelled by the mesmerizing monologues around me. These questions that surge to know the ways of others, have led me to *this* research report, *this* chapter. It has led me to look at the models, the dialogue of other artists – the individual, the group. It has led me to explore and expose ‘the other’, to define the self. Yet, over time, this devouring act has become one of writing a piece of theory, a small part of art history in South Africa. I am theorizing the work of the present, made in an atmosphere of mass production, delirium, noise. Made amidst an

economics of trade, where everything is for sale. As Salman Rushdie wrote in *Fury* (2001: 33-34):

> Now everyone – eminent writers, great painters, architects, politicians – wanted to be in on the act. Reformed alcoholics plugged booze. Everybody, as well as everything was for sale. Advertisements had become colossi chambering like Kong up the walls of buildings. What was more, they were loved.

I love *ads*, because they seemingly make things better. Sometimes these images, as Barbara Kruger suggests in *Looking at Others* (in Godfrey 1998: 337), 'emerge as "semblances of beauty," as confluences of desirous points. They seem to locate themselves in free zone, offering dispensations from the mundane particularities of everyday life; tickets to a sort of unrelenting terrain of gorgeousness and glamour expenditure.' I love the popular ideology of advertising, because it promises fast cars and soft skin…

Soft skin The work of Terry Kurgan reminds one of soft skin. The surface is beautiful to look at; the message however, is potent. Through this research, I have zoomed in on her public work, as the camera zooms in on the blemish-free skins of the models of Elizabeth Arden, Clinique, Garnier. In these kinds of commercials, the various layers of skin are often 'revealed' and the believed action of the 'magical cream' is simulated. When zooming in on Kurgan's work, when revealing the layers of 'her skin', one realizes that the outward attraction of her work runs deeper. In fact, this visible surface is trace of her process that penetrates into the substance of our daily existence, where she peels away to scrutinize the hidden layers of identity. She, as I have mentioned in the second chapter, critically interrogates the construction of a narrative of identity through photographic images. Kurgan says (in Smith 2003: no pg. number):

> [B]y reading through and around the surface of a photograph, layers of meaning can be peeled away, revealing not truth (of course), but rather, for the moment anyway, a certain sort of self-knowledge and narrative of identity.

The photograph crosses, even confuses, the boundaries between her gallery-based work and her public practice. She leaves the studio/gallery and enters real space or rather, 'social space'. In this space, each photograph is a social transaction, where she uses photography as the conveyer of complex messages. The medium is one that 'is easily "read" and understood according to a visual language system that is associated with the realm of the "real" (Smith 2003: no pg. number). It acts as agent, as active visual communicator, linking the private and the public.

Fast cars Just as the one commercial follows another without announcement or warning, I wish to switch to the next desired item, fast cars. Trinity Session's production reminds me of fast cars. They are riding the wave of big capitalism. It is big time, flashy business (or getting there) – action to be noticed despite the odds (for example, lack of resources). Their actions remind of the action of Malik Solanka on a jumping castle, trying to get the attention of his son (Rushdie 2001: 259):

> [S]tanding high above the fairground on the wibbly-wobbly ledge, he began to jump and shout with all his might. The noise that emerged from him was awful and immense, a roar from the Inferno, the cry of the tormented and the lost. But grand and high was his bouncing; and he was damned if he was going to stop leaping or desist from yelling until that little boy looked around, until he made Asmaan Solanka hear him in spite of the enormous women and the gathering crowd and the mouthing mother and the man holding the boy's hand…

Trinity wants that 'little boy' to look around and be surprised by the potential of contemporary art. They combine the language of strategic business planning, with 'high' art, with popular culture. They create a jargon, employing a range of strategies to cope with the demands of the 'cultural industry'. With their *Coca Cola*-strategy, they cover ground, both locally and globally – Linz, Cape Town, Grahamstown, Johannesburg. They are in the process of setting up a multitude of beacons for people to see, and 'some would want to know more and ask about the work, some would be researchers that would want to go into it a bit more' (Smith 2004). It is a discourse in the making and artists are making it up as they go along. Some interesting documents are being written and in the future 'things are going to look fucking interesting' (ibid.).

And the practices of both *Trinity* and Kurgan are part of the building process of this interesting future. The 'Soft Skin' of Terry Kurgan and 'Fast Cars' of The Trinity Session form two sides of the same coin. They are two different approaches, two *similar* methods, selling the same product – **Contemporary Art**. However, before I come back to methodologies of my 'subject matter', I wish to return to my own thoughts around contemporary art. *After* Linda Hutcheon's in *A Poetics of Postmodernism,* my personal interests have coincided with what Frank Lentricchia has called a crisis in literary studies today, caught between the urge to essentialize literature and its language into a unique, vast, closed textual preserve and the contrasting urge to make literature 'relevant' by locating it in large discursive contexts (1980; xiii). 'Postmodern art and theory both incarnate this very crisis, not by choosing sides, but by living out the contradiction of giving in to both urges' (Hutcheon 1988: x). In the processes of both Kurgan and *Trinity*, this postmodern penchant is noticeable. In Kurgan's practice, it is reverberated in the shifting between her gallery-based work and her public practices, where her public

endeavours are the materialization of a desire to 'engage with the function and meaning of public spaces' (Kurgan 2004a). Hobbs, Smith and Neustetter move between their individual work and their work under the banner of one name. Their work as The Trinity Session is an almost direct manifestation of Lentricchia's words, where they make contemporary art 'relevant' by locating it in large discursive contexts, working 'in the gaps between contemporary art, fashion and culture', wishing to 'make contemporary art a professionally run business' (Neustetter in Siopis 2003: 56). I have focussed on the public practices of both Kurgan and *Trinity*, driven by my concern with art practices that are multi-referential, playful and open; art that has a purpose, an audience. Art that is 'relevant' to the extent that it takes an audience and its surrounds into consideration, maybe even art that is 'relevant' in terms of its ability to 'generate' not only symbolic capital, but also material resources.

To make their art practices 'relevant', these artists, as individuals and as a group, have situated themselves in the 'space between'. This shift has taken them into the public arena, where they employ strategies that lie between contemporary art and social uplifting, contemporary art and social communications. This has taken them into the realm of advertising, marketing and architecture, invading spaces varying from the World Wide Web, television to museum-site and city parks. Furthermore, the chosen group of artists implement language systems grounded in both 'popular culture' and 'high art', inhabiting a very powerful space to speak from, drawing from the already 'mediatised' life that we live and through which these individuals are informed or indeed, formed. Formative experiences influence the way meaning is constructed and communicated in an artwork. It influences the definition of 'meaning' and determines the length/speed at which artistic conversation evolves. Born in 1958, Kurgan's

formative experiences differ from those of The Trinity Session's threesome who theoretically belong to the so-called 'Visual Generation' (Platteel 1999: no pg. number). 'Visual Generation', according to André Platteel in *The Mix* (ibid.), is the name given to Generation X: born between '63 and '73, plus Generation Next: born between '74 and '84. It refers to a global phenomenon, where a heavily mediatised life serves as formative experience for young people. Platteel states (ibid.):

> VG never considers life without the mediatised universe. It's the very air they breathe – though they can criticise its quality, that won't stop them from inhaling it. VG's critical position towards the mediatised universe they live in manifests itself primarily in questions such as: ***How do we manage to zap the funniest and sexiest parts of it together as quickly as possible*?** How do we manage to put our own particular stamp on this inexorable landscape we're living in? (own emphasis)

Trinity's work fits the agile, witty 'pick and mix' nature of the Visual Generation. Theirs are a production that appears at once beautifully constructed and multi-disruptive. 'Their method', as suggested by David Brodie in *Serious Play: the trinity session at work* (http://www.artthrob.co.za/03june/reviews/stdbank), 'is an anarchic pointer to the reality of contingency: both in meaning and environmental locatedness. Working with adaptable aesthetics and content that is derived through rupture, the undeniable seriousness with which The Trinity Session plays should be seen as a potent new model of communication in a creative community that at times seems desperately in need of such new input.'

Although Kurgan is not a kid anymore and already has two of here own, she can, together with the collective (Hobbs, Smith and Neustetter) be dubbed 'post-apartheid kids'. This is a phrase coined by Stephen Hobbs to describe those artists who only started on their careers as artists after that day in February 1990 which marked the

beginning of the end of apartheid (Williams, http://www.artthrob.co.za/00feb/news). Kurgan only started her fine art career after the completion of her postgraduate Fine Art studies at the University of Cape Town in 1992. Before that, she had a career in Graphic Design while living in America from where she returned in 1988. Kurgan's formal production is inevitably influenced by her familiarity with the graphic arena and by the postmodern visualised and mediatised culture, but the content of her work is instinctively and intensely driven by her emotional and physical experiences as a human being. It is as if her production is a slower, more attentive and articulate one than that of The Trinity Session. Her work carries layers of meanings that ask for a responsive audience, an audience that does not only notice the work, but contemplates the complex notions that it holds. Kurgan contemplates and communicates public issues through her work, echoing her interest in the culture and economies of the physical realm, 'where we survive, we live, we understand ourselves' (Hobbs 2004). When I speak of 'work', I speak of the work that spans the time from 1998 to 2004, mostly referring to the examples contemplated in this text. During this time, her focus turned more on the public sphere, or rather the 'space between', moving away from her traditional art as a printmaker. Her intent, as individual, as artist, was to find ways to work beyond the limits of the space of the gallery and the museum and those audiences. Even though she works as individual artist and not like *Trinity*, as a threesome, she sought opportunities in this line of public projects, to work in collaboration with 'like-minded partners'. Kurgan's processes unfold like a sequential narrative written between two lines, 'the public' and 'the private'.

Trinity's intention is that of a group, a collective that sets out to work on all possible platforms, both *on-line* and *off-line*. They juggle about two dozen projects at a time, and

when one looks at their output, it seems as if everything happens at once. Their production arrangement reminds of the structure and possibilities of the infinite space of the computer 'with its formal preference for lateral leaps and its relative uninterest in linear progression' (Rushdie 2001: 186). Links are electronic, not narrative. Everything exists at once. Not only does the structure of their production replicate the mind-map links of the World Wide Web, but The Trinity Session also employs the vast space of computerized technology as a platform for contemporary art. The web is an affordable platform to publish, and *Trinity* as intelligent researchers in the field, are interrogating the possibilities this electronic world offers. South Africa, however, is a very 'tactile society, it is a world of very tangible outcomes, very physical exchanges between people, history and violence' (Hobbs 2004) and there is a perpetual tension between work that is seen in physical space and work that simultaneously exists on-line. 'The point is, never to lose sight of the physical realm. That is where we survive, we live, we understand ourselves. I mean, there are lots of different ways of understanding your subjectivity in the virtual realm as well as in the physical and it is always about keeping those two in check' (ibid.). *Trinity's* projects will *always* be about both.

At this point I would like to posit that the two different methodologies/positions of Kurgan and *Trinity* as theorized in chapters two and three, are in conversation. This is a conversation between an **individual** artist, who often collaborates with other professionals and has interest in *public exchange*, **and** a **group** who 'networks' with other professionals and has interest in *publicizing* contemporary art practices. The presumed conversation starts in the second chapter where a few concerns came to the fore. I will now focus on how these issues are processed by the individual, as well as or in relation to, the threesome – Hobbs, Smith and Neustetter. It is as if the public

narrative that Kurgan starts, is continued or sprouting through the spreading **links** of *Trinity* in chapter three. Where Kurgan uses mainly photographs as medium, *Trinity Session* uses whatever medium, whatever platform available, although with discretion. Applicable to art practices in general and in the case of both Kurgan and *Trinity*, 'medium', as Karen Raney suggests, 'is an idea which itself has undergone a change.' In view of that, Richard Wentworth's response to the question 'what is your medium?' asked by Raney, is telling (2003: 4):

> I think my medium probably is the ability to think about things. It's thoughtfulness. If I want to do something about that thoughtfulness, if I want to put it into the world or want to de-privatize it, then there are various mechanical methods or procedures which are to my taste, and pass a kind of philosophical muster. I can argue for why they are done that way. But that isn't to say they couldn't be done another way.

In both instances of production, 'the artist is someone who thinks well' (Viola 1995: 64) and uses the medium as conveyer of thought and meaning. Kurgan's work is thought provoking, often dealing with complex notions of human behaviour. Her work can be understood as being informative as well as questioning. For example with *Maternal Exposure* or *Moving Pictures, Moving People*, the artist brought the 'hidden' stories around pregnancy and AIDS respectively into the open. In these instances, the work is informative to the point that it shifts people's expectations of pregnancy or HIV/AIDS. It does not offer answers, but stands in conversation with the viewers, making them aware, making them question the stigmas or myths that surround these topics. Here, Kurgan uses her visual language and the context in which it manifests, to convey a message, as well as a way to encourage questioning. In the case of The Trinity Session, the 'intervention', in whatever medium or bodily presence, is mostly used as a 'tag' or a 'nameplate' for Contemporary Art. It is used in order to ***publicize***, even popularize art and artists, ***educating*** an audience to recognize contemporary art in whatever guise and

space. It is a process of 'educating' by leading the viewer to question, whether it is the content of what is shown or the *vehicle* used to show it. *Trinity*, like Kurgan – like all Conceptual artists – lead us to question, and they lead 'us to question in the real, everyday world' (Godfrey 1998: 424). On this point, Tony Godfrey continues (ibid.):

> The legacy of Conceptual art is not a historical style, but an ingrained habit of interrogation. It is in the act of questioning that the subject, reader or viewer becomes himself or herself. Then, perhaps, we can determine whether our answer is 'yes' or 'no'. Or, perhaps, […] it is 'NI' – neither.

Here I touch on the idea of educating through questioning, through medium, but another point of education was raised in chapter two. I made the statement that 'viewers are often *captured* in a prescribed system of viewing art' and that I believe that the South African education system has a role to play in the growth and understanding of academic art practices. Kurgan not only agreed with this notion, but also stated that she was actively involved with her daughter's school, trying to get art to be put on the curriculum. This, as I infer, will both introduce art as a career opportunity, as much as it will 'breed' an audience, or rather 'grow' a basis from which art could be understood and/or theorized. As a **group**, *Trinity Session's* tentacles seem to go further, or seemingly stretch wider. Like Kurgan, Smith also agreed on the necessity of introducing art at an early age. She goes on to say that, it is important to introduce young people to art as a career, and states that an introduction to art at a school age, will 'absolutely makes you think differently' and will possibly make the very close circuit of the world of art look less daunting to penetrate (2004). Art should thus be educated on an early level of development to augment knowledge and understanding of art practices, but education should also evolve on a higher level and, indeed, outside the institutional framework. On the same topic, in an interview with Hobbs, it came to the surface that

The Trinity Session's impact has been strong in the sense that they are looked to as a model, they are taught in schools and they are requested to consult at an educational level (2004). This is indeed what the members of *Trinity* have been doing, contributing to teaching programmes at institutions across South Africa, including Wits University, and Vega School of Brand Communications. At this level of education, to divert for a moment and tie it to another point made in chapter two, new application strategies and methodologies of current 'visual trends' are taught to students taking part in fine art and/or multimedia courses. This is necessary, and I would like to see it as a good step in the right direction, a start to my credo, as mentioned on page 43, that it would be advantageous if institutions introduce students to business prospects which include the specialization/professionalization and practical application of their own practices. This would, I believe, give artistic practices agency in a wider field of production.

Other than this ratified way of educating (as a teacher talking to a class), the group also focuses on other levels of education. Theirs is a continuous educations process on a number of levels, building audiences and building markets. They have continuously taken the onus onto themselves (as stated in chapter three), 'looking at how people interact with art and culture, looking at what is being validated and what is being ignored and trying to find ways of accessing new audiences' (Smith 2004). They intentionally also set up a relationship between art 'inside' the gallery and art 'outside' the gallery. They do this because 'in order for people to kind of validate art's function in the public realm, there has to be some kind of interaction between where art should happen and what that actually means' (ibid.). The idea, as I understand it, is to create a 'semi-permeable membrane' between the kind of art that happens in a gallery and the art you would find in the public arena. In other words, art from the gallery or questions around

that art, spills into the public spheres and then people who encounter art in public spaces might be so much more eager to go into gallery spaces. As Smith proclaims, 'you build new markets like that all the time' (ibid.). Another educational process is embodied by the relationship between the artists (*Trinity*) and their assistants. Smith explained (2004) that the assistant process is a very valuable mentoring process, because after they have worked for the group, they will go on and start their own thing.

The difference between how Kurgan responds to certain issues and how *Trinity* reacts to the same questions, is a difference that partly arises from the fact that Kurgan works as an individual and Hobbs, Smith and Neustetter work as a collective. The difference between their methodologies can be seen when comparing Kurgan's mobile photographic studio and *Trinity's Mobile Office*. The concepts around Kurgan's mobile studio is examined and explained in the chapter on her practices. What is however of importance, is the fact that she collaborated with other practitioners and professionals. She was interested in the culture of Joubert Park, situated next to the Johannesburg Art Gallery and joined forces with the Joubert Park Freelance Photographers Association that worked in the park, often seen carrying their sandwich boards promoting their particular style. On the other hand, she secured financial assistance from Investec and First National Bank for this socially based project. In short, this project is the endeavour of an artist with interest in the politics of the photograph and photographic practices that in collaboration with others, moved out of her studio into the social realm or rather *moved* her studio out of her house and into the public realm. This shift opened up an opportunity to make work that has a strong relationship with the economy and social culture of the park precinct. With this shift, she purposely takes her 'business' as artist, into the social realm and makes the *public(s)* her 'business'. In a process like this, the

artist is in conversation with photographers, professionals, viewers and participants who in turn, also feed her private practices and thought, where on a quite literal level, the public conversation is always communicated to a gallery audience. In this case, it is the audience of *Skip* at the Bell Roberts in Cape Town. This has been her model in a few projects over the past few years, where her intention is that of an artist who wants to make art and initiate cultural interventions in the space between two worlds.

Trinity, in its business guise, takes the **office out of the office** and **takes residence at various locations**. The practice that is revealed is not that of an artist, not even three artists, but that of a 'business'. As seen in chapter three, the intention with the *Mobile Office*, is to reveal the inner mechanisms of the workings of their daily practice. They reveal the process of their process-based practice with the added intention of sharing resources wherever possible. What is on offer, are 'mind maps, organograms, budgets, and "to do" lists of current projects and relationships' (Smith, http://www.artthrob.co.za). These are displayed and refined in the public arena, with input and engagement from passers-by. As Smith writes, through this process 'the relationships between artistic practice and the social realm are displayed, and strategic survival tactics in communities financially unsympathetic to arts and culture are shared' (ibid). The interaction with the public(s) is important, but what I wish to highlight, is the fact that because they work as a collaboration, sharing each other's networks and resources, they are capable to set themselves up as a business as well as working as individual artists. The above-mentioned photographic studio is Kurgan's work for that specific moment, but because *Trinity* is a group; the organic relationship between them **and** the other network neighbours with whom they work, allows them to do so much more at one time. Their production capability is so much larger and faster. They work

with the resources and networks of four different people, who include *Trinity* that has by now, as a fourth partner, built up numerous networks and resources of its own. The group has become more than the sum of its three collaborates which allows for a very flexible and productive way of working. *Trinity's* production focuses on fast output, collaboration and educating people who can go on with some of the processes. Their 'just do it' working method 'gives them wings,' therefore not a surprise that **Red Bull** summoned their help as a result of their 'guerrilla marketing tactics' (Hobbs 2004). Their intent is different to Kurgan's process. She focuses on qualitative time spent in the social realm, where a 'good, long conversation' with the public is a necessity for her **site-specific work**.

Their intentions might be different, the interactions with the claimed audiences might be of different lengths, purpose and quality, but both these projects – the mobile photographic studio, and the **mobile** office – remind of the modern-day nomad. Technology is already catering for an increasingly mobile workforce: the world is becoming unwired; iPods allow us to carry an entire CD collection on one pocket-sized gadget and mobile phones are now doing so much more than making calls, that we are going to have to rename them. Even though the studios of Kurgan and *Trinity* do not focus on high-tech mobility, they surely take part in our everyday *fast lane-lifestyle* and future developments, as stated in *House & Leisure* Magazine's 'Design Directions' (2004: 192):

> The focus of design futurists will be concentrated on possessions geared to a nomadic lifestyle: lightweight clothing in intelligent materials, objects, home textiles and clothing merged with technology and electronics, easily transportable furniture and *homes that, with minimal effort, can be gone in 60 seconds* (own emphasis).

New technologies are continuously invading all of our homes and despite the artists' focus in the mentioned projects on low-tech mobility, they are personally armed with a home/office computer (PC or Mac) or a laptop with internet and e-mail. These new technologies allow for faster and easier local and global communication. Ironically, 'all of this electronic energy saving', as Sue Williamson suggests (http:www.artthrob.co.za/00feb/news), does not give the artists more time to work in the studio as one might imagine. Now each day brings a fresh crop of emails, phone calls and faxes, all to be dealt with, A.S.A.P. Nevertheless, the image of the artist is no longer bound to the studio and rather remind of international curator and writer, Gerardo Mosquera's nomadic agent. He writes that the figure of the artist is actually 'an allegory of the processes of globalisation', representing 'a key rupture with the figure of the artist-craftsman linked to a studio in which the work of art is produced. Now the artists export themselves. Their work is closer to that of the manager or engineer who is constantly travelling to attend to specific projects and businesses. The studio, the ancestral, vulcanian site linked with the artist, becomes rather a laboratory for projects and design, than for production' (2001: 29).

Another important point to be made with regard to the works of both Kurgan and The Trinity Session is the collaborative aspect of their work. As mentioned, Terry Kurgan works as an artist in collaboration with 'partners' and *Trinity* works as a collaborative, continuously networking with other like-minded colleagues. This corresponds with Tony Godfrey's reasoning in *Conceptual Art* (1998: 416-17), where he states that 'artists might well argue that what is key, in fact, is the plethora of small alternative spaces, small magazines and, ***above all else, the notion of artists working together. The key aspect of a conceptual art today, would thus lie not in objects or spaces, but in***

communality, and an emphasis on communication and the behaviour of people' (own emphasis). Communication/collaboration indeed seems to be the everyday norm, whether it is between artists, artists and viewers or artists and other businesses/corporations/institutions. It is a model that is visible in the art world as well as in the corporate world. Take for example the current trend in the commercial property arena. It is according to Jan de Beer in *The Star* (2004), 'a swing away from large, single-purpose developments towards integrated 'lifestyle centres' that accommodate both commercial and lifestyle needs'. This is a case of mixing 'business with pleasure' as the heading of the article proclaimed. A few informally structured collaborative enterprises can be mentioned in the art world. They have different strategies and structures, but all have the same intention and that is to combine forces, making them more forceful in their tactics to access a greater (or a ***different***) audience. For *Trinity* it is a mixing of artistic or cultural practices with *business strategies*. Another similar partnership is that of Peet Pienaar and Heidi Chrisholm, known as artists, but also creative directors of *Daddy Buy Me A Pony*[33]. Then there is *Flash* – Ed Young (who denies being part of *Flash*), Vuyisa Nyamende and Cameron Platter – who have a very 'tongue-in-cheek', 'flashy' approach. Theirs is a humour that has to be taken with a pinch of salt and a lot of booze. Andrew Lamprecht, the official theorist to the group, explains their intentions and *make-up* in *Flash, aha!* (2004: 48):

> Fast cars, women, cash and cocktails: in Cape Town, where a sense of humour can be a seriously rare commodity, a small group of artists is doggedly working at bringing a light touch to the process of art production. Loosely grouped around the name 'Flash', they seek to embrace a hedonistic lifestyle while still being primarily committed to making art. Celebrity, media manipulation and a well-developed sense of their own importance, all combine in a heady cocktail of work, pleasure, violence and an irreverent view of life.

Their work lures a party crowd (and gets a lot of media attention) and like it or not, it is an audience not usually pulled by the conservative gallery art of the commercial art establishment, which unsurprisingly, gets no respect from these young artists (See Lamprecht 2004: 48-53). Apart from these kinds of loosely structured collaborations (which are increasingly springing up in the art field and which surface I have barely scraped), one would find individual artists like Terry Kurgan and Clive van den Berg, teaming up with architects, graphic designers, writers and fashion designers. From this, one can infer that ***communication and interaction*** is crucial in the fast and demanding postmodern condition, where we are the players.

Unlike mathematical calculations, in postmodern art practices, **there are never conclusions**. The answer is never the sum of its parts, it multiplies and mutates over time and in its combination with other disciplines. It is more like a conversation that spreads and changes as topics overlap. It is more like a narrative with as many endings as there are people. And I, as 0317536K (2004) at the University of the Witwatersrand, previously 13153315 at the University of Stellenbosch, choose to end by concurring that these artists, Terry Kurgan and The Trinity Session, are considering the **public(s)**, albeit in various ways and with different intent, but meeting *the people* in public spaces; outside the gallery or inside the WWWeb. I cannot generalize and say that all that happens under the conspicuous and contentious banner of **public art** sets out to do the same. On the contrary, I could possibly argue that what has happened up to now in South Africa, although there are always exceptions, is rather 'gallery art' placed in public spaces with very little thought given to the public(s). It is however a process, and the steps are small and the projects are ongoing. If conceptual art, seen one way as an 'aesthetic orthodoxy permeating almost all contemporary art practices' (Richards 2002:

34), is an unfinished project as Godfrey claims and I believe, then it is inappropriate at this time – indeed impossible – to 'sum up'. Far better, and more in keeping with the logic of postmodernism, it is to say that artists partake in its logic, ***playing*** with ***purpose*** and continuously in the ***process*** of making the ***product***.

The current processes of artists are often historicized before they really even happen or before there has been a substantial period for it to 'be'. I mean, the notion of 'public space', as mentioned before, could not exist in South Africa prior to 1994, and public practices are still tested in our country. Where this kind of practice and discourse is already established in overseas countries, it is currently part of South Africa's preoccupation with public transformation and growth. Kathryn Smith gives insight when saying that 'we are in this desperate attempt in South Africa to critique and historicize the stuff that is literally happening under our noses'. She does however state her suspicion about this theorizing process and says (and with this I agree), that 'people are making too much of it,' while it is still in *pro[cess/gress]*[34]. It relates to Ashraf Jamal's view on William Kentridge's *retrospective* that toured the United States and ended at the South African National Gallery, 2003. In *Kentridge under erasure* (2002: 20-25), his argument corresponds with the tendency of curators and audiences to, in his words, 'reify and memorialise the value of a work in perpetuity'. ***PM*** is full of contradictions and more important however, is the spirit of healthy inquiry and genuine engagement with the work. As Sophie Perryer, the editor of *Art South Africa* (2002: 4) says, 'this spirit of inquiry has to be one of the most constructive things that *Art South Africa* can offer the local art community' or indeed, that anyone can offer the local art community. 'There has been to strong a tendency to deplore criticism in favour of building up a unified front – a historical necessity, perhaps, considering the outsider

status of both the cultural community within the country, and South Africa in relation to the world' (ibid.). It is necessary that things are being written up and *theorized* (like in *Artthrob*, like in Art *South Africa*, even work that is not published), because of the ephemeral nature of a lot of today's practices, whether they be interviews or visual experimentation. I prefer visual research, but all research is a necessary ingredient in the establishing discourse of South African art practices. Even though research/theorizing is an important postmodern process, *sifting* of these theories is another indispensable **process**.

As Researcher, I am partaking in the process when writing this report. It is also the process in which both Terry Kurgan and The Trinity Session play a crucial part. A bigger task for me would be to investigate all events that proposed to be 'public art', but as key players in the art game, these investigated artists, have already taken a big task on their shoulders as the South African art world, I believe, has many pitfalls, not to mention the contingencies in the public arena. Despite this, Kurgan and *Trinity* are ***doing.*** The personality of Terry Kurgan contributes to an indisputable factor of humanity in her work. Kurgan's public work has, up to now, concentrated on forms of exchange, which are primarily social and personal. In her public projects (mostly done for clients), she respects the given brief, but always responds creatively considering the assumed audience. In all her public endeavours the artist constructs her work to stand in conversation with the mores and the individuals of the specific environment, whether it is the park (mobile photographic studio), conference, or hospital (*Maternal Exposures*). Projects have been selected with the desire to promote art of a socially engaged nature without setting preconditions of large-scale inclusivity or overt moral, political or social relevance in the work. While these aspects are not discounted in her work, it is hoped

that projects will first engage viewers and participants in their own personal reality in a way, which is insightful and challenging for artists and participants/spectators. The *slowness* and thoroughness with which she executes these projects, are telling of her awareness of the value of human encounters and the natural pace of life. It also sets her apart from the behaviour of The Trinity Session. *Trinity* works with speed. Their ***fast car-strategies*** are a response to the demands of both local and global commitments. Apart from the times spent on local ventures, they fit neatly into the contemporary globalised art scene, which finds artists travelling the world, at the call of international curators on such a regular basis, that little time is left for the creation of new work and ideas, or a more meaningful engagement with a place. The *pace* with which they execute all their projects – ranging from artistic experimentation to applying similar skills to research-based or commercial projects – are undeniably impressive. Their intent is different. With great networking strategies and taking new audiences into consideration, their focus is less on a meaningful conversation with the audience, than on the engaging attributes of the 'spectacle'. Thus, the question by Tony Godfrey is (1998: 382), 'has what was once a critique of spectacle become merely spectacle?' For South African audiences, this concept was a difficult one as there was so much to deal with during apartheid and thereafter. Times have changed and even though meaning is still very important to people, the ideas around the 'spectacle' are used by *Trinity* to make people stop and think, to introduce people to contemporary art (in whatever guise) and to *surprise* the viewer in unexpected places. The group's tasks are diverse and *Trinity* has projects that engage more meaningfully with place, like their collaboration with the Joubert Park Project. They joined forces with JPP and other constituencies to form a visual arts training consortium for the Creative Inner City Initiative (CICI), a Department of Arts and Culture-funded project for urban regeneration. Their association

with the Joubert Park Public Art Project, as Neustetter suggests (in Stern, http://onair.co.za/mn/rhizome_interview), 'focuses on the Visual Arts. For example, one of our workshops teaches traditional painting and drawing, then indicates ways to turn that into a profitable skill, like sign making. There are a lot of places in downtown Jo-burg that have beautiful, hand-painted signs, so this is a real world commercial application of skills, where people can start to use their creativity to make money.' *Trinity* recently withdrew from this project, only continuing with *Regeneration*. Nevertheless, this is a good example of the kind of 'real impact stuff' with which they are involved, but even here their strategy is to teach skills that do not need their continuous involvement. At this point of the research report, I do not wish to go into more specifics about projects or reiterate what has already been said, but wish to show that both the different approaches of Kurgan and *Trinity* are indispensable in the conversation of contemporary art. ***And***, that these 'in-between practices,' these 'pavement conversations' go 'in different directions' and speak to different audiences. It brings to mind a poem written by an anonymous writer who came out of the CICI workshops (2004: no pg. number):

> Pavement you are a wonderful life
> Everyone wants to be on you
> When we step on you with our feet
> We get crazy
> We push each other
> We step on you with different types of shoes
> With different weight
> With different pace
> Others feel your comfort and stand and talk
> Whilst blocking others from continuing testing
> You with their feet
> Whey do you make people fight for you?

There are others who claim they own you
Others do their business on you
Pavement you are so lovely that we meet
Our friends and lovers along you.
Pavement you accommodate different tribes
And cultures
Pavement you break different languages
Pavement why do you accommodate crime?
People are losing their lives on you
Others are being pick pocketed
I hate those who spit on you
I hate those who litter on you
Pavement you are a river
A river flowing in different directions.

It is on this pavement, this proverbial 'public space' that both the '**Soft Skin'** of Terry Kurgan and the '**Fast Cars'** of The Trinity Session are indispensable amidst the ***hype*** of the art world, the city, the country, the world.

These artists have chosen to constantly rework opposing categories, to find ways of inhabiting the space between them. It is a matter of 'to-ing and fro-ing' between zones which are themselves unfixed, in order to find a more mobile, complex understanding, a different ground from which to speak. From this place, they speak purposefully, critically questioning the notion of audience. They continuously revise their language to suit their social interventions or conversations. The shift toward an **audience-centralised** methodology is visible in these artists works, but audiences are still reluctant to shift their expectations of contemporary art. In *Trinity's* 'supposed-to-not-know-about-still-confidential' project with Woolworths, I find the answer to this reluctance. They have just put forward (in 2004) 'some artists' names for their advertising campaigns […] using the individual people and not necessarily using the

art' (Neustetter 2004). To my mind, this kind of project partakes not only in the atmosphere of mass media, but surges to enhance the visibility of the artists. Why can't artists be celebrities? Maybe then, people would take time to look at their work. The ranting and raving about Charlize Theron were too much for me, but succeeded in getting a huge crowd to see *Monster*, the film that won her a globe and an ***Oscar*** in 2004. A similar principle is necessary for contemporary art. Where, as with the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, the commercial enterprises are employed to attract audiences to the more 'edgy stuff' (Smith 2004). Thus, as insane as this might sound (like Thomas Edison's idea about the light bulb), let contemporary art and artists **be seen, may their presence explode into a wider field,** like Malik Solanka's website, Galileo-1 in *Fury* (Rushdie 2001: 224-25):

> The Galileo launch, an unprecedented interdisciplinary business enterprise, had gone *intergalactic* from day one. It turned out to be that happy accident: a necessary myth. LET THE FITTEST SURVIVE T-shirts covered some of the finest chests in the city, becoming a triumphalist slogan for the gym generation that acquired mass public currency overnight. It was proudly worn too, over some of the flabbiest bellies around, as proof of the wearers' sense of irony and fun. Demand for the Playstation video game accelerated past all predictions, leaving Lara Croft floundering in its wake. At the height of Star Wars phenomenon, spin-off merchandising had accounted for a quarter of the toy industry's worldwide turnover…

So, maybe this 'brouhaha,' as Barry Ronge writes in *When Art And Life Collide* (2004: 6), is what contemporary art practices need to make people ask: 'was there any real art hiding behind that brouhaha?' Maybe this 'brouhaha' is what contemporary art practices need to make people take a step closer to be challenged or interested by a work or exhibition, as they have never been before. Thus, as proclaimed in chapter three, if this is what it takes to make art accessible to the masses, I say – **again –** '" a

luta continua" – onwards and upwards! ***Let art be seen by any means possible'*** (Dodd in Smith 2002: 27).

May there be **balance** in this *survival* **act**.

CHAPTER 5: SHIFT

POSTMODERN 'PLAY WITH PURPOSE'

> Since the 1960's, art practice has taken a markedly theatrical turn. Action painting, body art and performance art all use the actions of the human body in real time; installation stages something in three-dimensional space, absorbing the consciousness of the viewer into its logic. Art history, theory and criticism have tried as well to adopt a more 'performative' model. The conceiving of interpretation as performance, renders it an active, open affair – "a process rather than an act with a final goal". Instead of seeing an artwork as a self-contained object of which the meaning can be uncovered by the right kind of analysis, a performative approach attends to the space between object and viewer where meanings are created by clashes, quotations and cross-references. Meaning is open, fluid, unstable, ambiguous and constantly being made and remade. Meaning comes from a dialogue between the subjectivity of the viewer and what is being confronted. As a result of the dialogue, both viewer and object are defined and gain identity. Meaning is not created or found; it *takes place*. A conceptual shift of this kind may have something to do with the growing interest of visual historians like Kemp and Pollock in the exhibition as a form of research. (Rainey 2003: 29 – 30).

This excerpt from *Art in Question* summarizes the crux of my interest and practical intention. It emphasises the importance of the dialogue *per se*, including dialogue between viewer and work/space and furthermore implies the exhibition as *a form of research.* The work that I have produced for my Masters exhibition is a continuation of my enquiry into the question of artistic agency, *raison d'être* and the exploration of the 'space between'. The attention and intention of enquiry shifts from the work of both

Kurgan and *Trinity* to my own, where my own work is not exposed but used to explore questions around art practice *per se*.

Making and theorizing

A coin always has two sides, and with this chapter; I *flick* to the practical aspect of my work. Just as theory and practice can never be separated or understood in singularity, the relationship between 'word and image' cannot be denied. The two sides find meaning in each other. With this figurative ***flick*** to the more practical aspect of my work, I am confronted with this relationship between 'word and image' or indeed the question of how much of the visual language/sensory experience can be described within the structural and explanatory limitation of the written word. Another question lingers: 'How much needs to be said before it is too much?' Too much can often 'take away' from the work on display. As Andrew Lamprecht confirms, concerning explanations given with regard to the work of Willem Boshoff, in *Art South Africa* (2003: 63):

> I found the deep explication of what I was looking at tended to trivialise many of the works, limiting complex readings and providing a unitary approach to the appreciation of the work.

The visual language allows for multiple reference and non-linear thought, it allows for chance and change. To me, the visual language cannot be directly translated into, nor substituted by the linear structure of word, sentence, and paragraph. The words in this chapter are thus offered as guidance, supplementing the visual and should be seen, neither as the only possible interpretation/framework of the work, nor interpreted as substitute for the optical and tangible experience that I believe a work of art, more specifically my work, can offer. At this point, I have to remind myself (and thus, the reader) of a concern raised in the first chapter, where I stated the following expression of J.W.T Mitchell in *Word and Image* (1996: 56):

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

It is appropriate to infer that my practical work is a *critical rummaging* of this 'space between' word and image, because as much as the word cannot fully describe the sensory experience of the work, 'the work' often needs some kind of interpretation. The challenge of this chapter as it also was with the practical project, is to find the **balance between** word and image, sidetracking both 'linguistic imperialism and defensive reflexes of the visual' (Mitchell 1996: 56).

As introduction to the public exhibition, ***shift***, as it was presented at Upstairs@Bamboo[35], 25 June – 1 July 2004, consider the following:

> What is in a glass of red wine?
>
> *Fermented grape juice served as an alcoholic drink.*
> Sounds rather appalling and many would agree that this is not their favourite drink (ironically though, that people are *usually* more interested in the wine at the opening of an exhibition, than the artwork).
> Shift
> I prefer to think of it (the glass of red wine) as a matured cultural artefact, a conversation stir, a *quality atmosphere*, a great stain. This deliberate shift has not only served me with an appreciation for a delectable glass of red wine, but some fabulous conversations. I believe that current art practices are like red wine – an acquired *taste (with the conversation, with the headaches.)* I dared a simple shift and venture to believe that a similar shift in people's expectations of art will lead them to be surprised by the many layers of conversation it has to offer. The conversation of art is dynamic. It is informal and flexible. It follows no one path, offering no answer, giving the potential at each moment for surprises and transformation. Even so, I surely did not

> acquire my taste for red wine in one day, neither did I acquire my appreciation for, understanding of, or insight into art in such a short time. It needs a deliberate step closer and I am interested in the hovering of artist and audience as they (tentatively, if at all) take a step into each other's worlds, meeting in a space of conversation where the opening evening of most exhibition usually conjures a physical 'space of conversation'.

I actually came to articulate these thoughts after a splendid evening on the **outside**-deck of *The Premises* (the gallery-space managed by The Trinity Session at Johannesburg Civic Centre). It included a glass of red wine in the hand, company and very little looking or contemplating of the art on the **inside**! The events of this evening prodded my continuous questioning of the *position* or in fact, *importance* of *art* on *art* exhibitions (in relation to the cash bar/wine desk). Moreover, this reasoning formed the central structure around which I started to create and 'emancipate' an art exhibition. It also perpetuates an important question around contemporary art practices, i.e., 'who is contemporary art for?' As seen through the research report, this is an issue of artistic agency, purpose, as well as audience perception. At this moment, the overlap between my practical endeavours and the theoretical aspect thereof, becomes even more apparent. Through most of my practical projects, the question of *agency* and *accessibility* of the visual language is central. This sense of inquisition is stimulated by personal uncertainties of future endeavours and the sustainability of a direction in fine arts, thus contemplating and counter weighing symbolic and material capital. And, reiterating what I stated in chapter one, is the fact that I have turned (in the space of the research report) to the practices of other artists – Terry Kurgan (chapter two) and The Trinity Session (chapter three) – to question my own uncertainty of the agency of today's artists. Through my practical work, I try to deal with this question by continuously assessing artist-audience conversation; perpetually

scrutinizing the production/reception trope. Idealistically, reconstruction lies at the centre of the intentional conversations of my practical development. A conversation that is not only self-reflexive, but also one that will manifest in a space filled with the possibilities of **community, resistance, and change**. With this I do not instigate a Utopian social or political change, but a shift in thought, a shift in expectation that some art could indeed stimulate a conversation relevant to a wider sphere than the apparently 'holy-few' of the 'art world'. Or, a conversation that will shift people's expectations of what art is *supposed* to be. Simplified, it is about shifting the generalized perception (even only for a while) that 'art = paintings on a wall'. The question remains: 'Are audiences prepared to make the shift to active participation?' Moreover, 'what does this comprise?'

To give further perception as to where these thoughts come from and how they relate to a continuous string of thoughts that I have always tried to incorporate into my work, I will sidetrack to give my *practical perspective* before translation into *process*. The aim of my practical work is to formulate a better understanding of the field in which I have come to work and express myself. This is as much an inquisition into the agency of the creative individual as it is an (limited) examination of the position of contemporary art practice in South Africa. Thus, questioning the place of installation/new media work in relation to the perception of the *public*. I am interested in art that is multi-referential, playful and open. It needs a purpose, an audience. By using recognizable objects, I wish to establish a link between the artwork and the audience and as such leave space for interpretation and communication. I enjoy the material presence and/or residue of an artwork. My objects are always exhibited as

installation where the surrounding space is very much a part of the actual work. A previous lecturer, Alan Alborough summarized my work-ways quite fittingly (2002):

> Of particular note is her ability and propensity to think and engage directly with sophisticated ideas through the manipulation of material – this approach involves trawling of the infinite webs of interconnection between objects, form, colour, content and ideas within our contemporary environment and their re-presentation as articulate interactive zones for diverse viewer engagement. This relationship between visual production and the dynamics of reception has always been central to her work.

Each decision is thus made to investigate the place of art practices in society, even if on a small scale. Each decision is made with the intention of interaction, where the interaction could be minimal, yet even this would be an outcome, a manipulation of sorts. The meaning lies in the process…

It is however far easier to explain one's intentions than to apply them in practice. *My process* gyrates around two poles – the artist's intention/visual production and, as stated by Alborough, the 'dynamics of reception'. To me, the preferred outcome is for the artist (through the work) to be in conversation with the/an audience (through participation with the work). However, response can never be forced or predetermined. Through the years at 'varsity,' it was a road of trial and error to find ways to engage viewers on different levels. This trial continues, but by now, I have learnt to keep optimism at bay, because it is in the surprise moments or in the least expected 'places' that the most interesting conversations/interactions lie. As Kathryn Smith suggests (2004):

> I think, often when you plan something, you would say that 'I would like it to be interactive' or whatever, it is often in the most unlikely situations that people find something to react to, then that explodes, and it is not really anything that you can manufacture.

Even so, one should not underestimate the power of aesthetic pleasure and the manifold manipulation-tactics that the artist can apply or play with. With this, I wish to move to a more detailed or rather, specific, assessment of the actual exhibition, **shift**. The whole exhibition is of importance as each object finds meaning in the other, and in turn, they find meaning in the surrounding space. In order to set up a dialogue, one has to ponder the indispensable factors constituting this notion: space, grammar, medium, audience and criticism.

Reception – considering space and audience

I would like to consider the process *in reverse* by firstly looking at the 'dynamics of reception'. In other words, looking at the viewers' responses with regard to the exhibition environment (consisting of various objects) with which they were confronted. Here, the response of one viewer (in the form of a hand-written letter), Dot Gomersall, is of incalculable value. I quote (2004) **and intersect at times with the bold script:**

> Arriving at Bamboo Upstairs for the opening of your exhibition, I imagined I was going to be looking at paintings, sketches, sculptured work and maybe some type of needlework. (The needlework Riaan had mentioned a while back!)
>
> You can imagine my surprise when I arrived that Friday evening! Everything looked great but I must admit to being puzzled. You introduced me to your mom and while she and I were chatting, she explained the meaning of your book of stars and peoples names – people who had influenced your life. This explanation started my mind ticking over and so I made a couple of notes and left for home realizing there was far more to your work than first met the eye. **At this point, she took that 'deliberate step closer' and shifted her expectations or views around what art in a gallery should be.**

What follows is my interpretation; I hope that it doesn't offend you or all the work that you've put into your articles. Here goes:

(IMAGE 38) The sandals left at the door are a sign of respect. I am entering a very personal; I might even venture to say 'sacred' tribute to Deirdre. On the outside of the door is your name, your title. It is clinical, to the point and giving nothing away of you the person, only the title earned through your studies. Is this what you were expected to study instead of your fine arts?

This is a 'safe' description of the door, but it is rather the entering into a 'sacred[36]' space *per se*, than a space credited to the artist only. However, with her interpretation, she noticed the sense of *ownership*[37] I wished to convey. The title, 'dr watson al.ch.emist (wits)', is a play on the amount of years I spent in art school (seven years) and the amount of time that doctors spend studying. It does also reveal a dream that I cherish… maybe one day it will be dr. with a capital D.

The sandals could also infer that a transaction is about to take place. In early Old Testament times, whenever two Israelites finalized a real estate transaction, one of the men would take off his sandal and give it to the other to seal the deal (Ruth 4: 7). The sandals used are also a sign of femininity and the *oriental*, but I will discuss these subjects at a later stage.

(IMAGE 39) On the inside of the door I get to see a little of the real you. The bag has transparent pouches, which contain what I imagine to be your personal likes and interests outside your studies. They are on view for everyone to see, maybe the parts of your life that you are comfortable to reveal. The fact that the door is hanging above the floor gives me the impression that your are happy for people to view the contents of the house and don't feel the need to have to close it off. The door is not set into the frame of the house to ensure that visitors feel welcome.

It is important to note that part of the personal belongings that were displayed on the outside of the bag, as well as the dress/apron on the inside of the bag was part of a work that I exhibited in my fourth-year finals, dealing with transition and *deceiving appearances*. By

transforming and adding it to a new body of work, it takes form as a *symbol* of the continuing string of thoughts that run through my work. In a way, it also functions as a continuation of my body through the material presence of my work. Another reason why the door is not set in a frame, is the suggestion of openness toward criticism and different views.



IMAGE 38



IMAGE 39

The fire extinguisher has me confused! I am not sure if it is there for safety purposes or in case anyone gets hot under the collar!

(IMAGES 40, 41, 42) The red carpet ensures that your visitors feel wanted. They are treated like royalty. You are happy to accept each person equally, no matter whom. Everyone has an equal chance at entering your life. I love the red and white sweet royal crown. I imagine these sweets are the good, positive aspects your visitors are bringing with them into our life. Because positives can be fragile, you protected them by securing them in the bubble wrap. I have the feeling that you are reinforcing the fact that all visitors are

equal with the first, second and third place rostrum. Although there is a position for good, better and best. I think that you treat this competitive issue by awarding each person with an equal part of yourself, hence all the medals are attached to one single ribbon and all are of equal importance.

The equality and 'honouring' or 'celebration' of the viewer is of importance, but it is not a given. It is a choice. For instance, Dot made the choice of being alert to all the symbols with which she was confronted. Here, the choice for the visitor/viewer/participant was not between a wrong or a right interpretation, but a choice of participation or not; visual or intellectual understanding; active participation (standing on the podium) or 'passivity' (knowing that it is a possibility, but choosing not to take part). The 'level' of participation was a choice. I will later explain more about further levels of 'interactivity' in the work, but will now return to Dot's words.



IMAGE 40



IMAGE 41

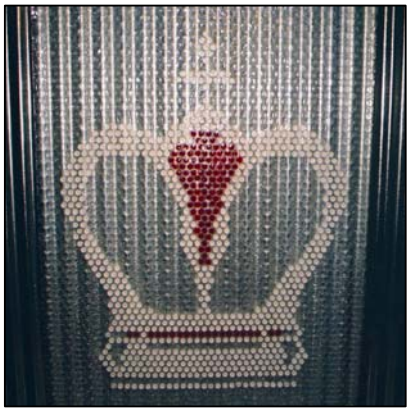


IMAGE 42



IMAGE 43

(IMAGE 43) The paisley board is a ‘map’ of yourself – past, present and future. The suspended graduation cap is waiting to be worn… The stitching portrays the delicate and often repetitive work that you have had to ‘persevere’ with leading up to the end of this phase of your life. The different sizes and patterns of the paisley show how life is not as predictable and uniform as one would wish.

My life is fused with my work and Dot’s is an apt assumption of what the paisley symbolizes. On the other hand, it is also *just* a fragile piece of art, where people were invited to take a closer look. With this choice comes the aesthetic enjoyment (optimistically speaking) of the handwork and a moment where the viewer is symbolically being capped! Again, it is a play on the importance of the viewer. It is also a test to see how viewers react. Above that, it is, as most of the symbolic aspects of the work suggests, *playfully tongue-in-the-cheek, always questioning on deeper level, probing by the artist.* Likewise, always open for multiple interpretations.

(IMAGES 44, 45) The ‘bed’ on the right hand side has a pillow full of experiences. Your mom explained the meaning of the book and the stars. This was my clue to the bed of the future.

This bed on the left hand side with its television screen shows all your visitors. This includes old and new acquaintances entering this new phase.

The blank book is waiting on the names of those who may influence your future. The empty pillow is also waiting to be filled with new experiences. Both may come from the steady stream of visitors on the screen. So too may someone's name appear as a new star on a stud on the quilted bed cover.

Through the camera, each visitor becomes part of the work. This might seem like a predetermined choice of participation, but the viewer already made the choice to become part of the work when he/she decided to come to or enter the gallery. Secondarily, these panels are also a celebration of artist and audience with its playful reference to the white icing and red rim of traditional wedding cakes…



IMAGE 44



IMAGE 45

(IMAGE 46) The carpet inside the house has me rather confused. The inners are made up of many pieces – all of the same material and size, folded in the same way, positioned symmetrically but differently. The transparent cover is again present. Is this to show that there is nothing concealed, or is it as protection for the delicate material folded inside (both materially and

spiritually). This carpet is a stunning piece and obviously took many hours of work. Does it represent the many aspects of your life set out for all to see, but protected so as not to be trampled on or disturbed?

I did not think of the carpet in this way, but I like the idea that it can be seen as a representation of my life, protected by the plastic layer. The carpet can also represent a chessboard and the choices one needs to make when playing the game. When standing on it, it can imply that life is all about choices. Make the right move, and checkmate!

In my mind, the carpet, like all the other objects (especially the house itself) suggests a nomadic lifestyle. These 'things' serve as 'in-between objects' used only for the moment, 'waiting' to be *shifted* to the next location. This is suggestive of the movement in my own life and the yearning for stability – physical, spiritual and material. Then again, it suggests easy mobility, thus adaptability in a life where changes occur hourly, daily, monthly. Like Kurgan's photographic studio, like *Trinity's Mobile Office*, my project reminds of the modern-day nomad, explained in chapter four (page 100). This emphasises or rather restates the point made in the fourth chapter that even though *shift* does not focus on high-tech mobility, it surely takes part in our everyday *fast lane-lifestyle* and future developments, as stated in *House & Leisure* Magazine's, 'Design Directions' (2004: 192):

> **The focus of design futurists will be concentrated on possessions geared to a nomadic lifestyle: lightweight clothing in intelligent materials, objects, home textiles and clothing merged with technology and electronics, easily transportable furniture and *homes that with minimal effort, ca be gone in 60 seconds* (own emphasis).**

This links up with the image of the 'nomadic' artist who is no longer bound to the studio and rather reminds of international curator and writer, Gerardo Mosquera's nomadic agent (see chapter four, page 101). To me, the carpet also has value on a more personal level where it refers to a kind of 'prayer-blanket', 'psychological buffer' or place of rest.

(IMAGE 47, 48) The cords set out symmetrically on the ground outside the house may be a reminder of how fragile life is if you stray from the defined

path. (The clumsy feet that constantly disturbed their layout were proof of this!)

The 'wine-desk' set in the middle of these symmetrically placed cords, is also part of the installation. Some wine and a speech usually accompany the opening of an exhibition, but to me it was a necessity that this action becomes part of the installation. It was presented as an invite to the sensory experience of the artwork; that the enjoyment of the wine needs not be separated from the viewing or entering of the artwork. It invites the visitor to *interfere* with the fragile, clinical and symmetrical *'art space'*. This sensory experience of wine sipping continues in the smell of the sweets and bag behind the door (you had to get quite close to both these objects), the sight of the visual detail and the 'feel' of textures and surfaces by either hand or foot. The artwork is presented or rather offered as intellectual, sensory, and aesthetic experience.



IMAGE 46



IMAGE 47

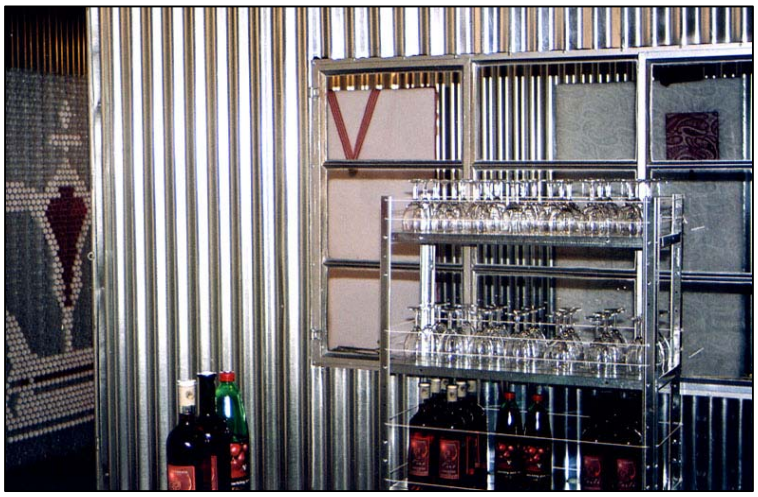


IMAGE 48

(IMAGE 49) The red carpet that leads to the back of the house brings you to the chair and binoculars. This section infers that something that is nothing can be worked hard at to become something special. Maybe a 'monument' to your work? The cushioning and transparent covering repeat the element of protection.

This part of the work comprised of a chair, cushion, binoculars and a label: 'Monument', on the window. In addition, also an object stood across the street from the gallery, visible through the window. This object (IMAGES 50, 51) was presented as some kind of 'monument', some kind of shift to the *outside* (or maybe to the *inside*) of the gallery? It plays with dichotomies and works on different levels. Firstly, let us view it from the *outside:*

It questions the inaccessibility/accessibility of art objects. This work is *accessible* to a greater audience by way of being visible to a wider group of people. Even though passers-by do not have insight into the supposed purpose or meaning of this piece, their understanding lies in the visual analysing of an object such as this. Apart from the visual presence of this object, various interaction strategies were tested. During the first day a woman, Cukie, was hired to sit at this 'monument'. The interaction was at a communicative level where streetwalkers initiated a conversation. I chose not to explain the work to her and, according to her frame of

reference, it did not mean much (except that she liked the way the cushions were stitched). She was the boss of the *empire* for a while and I left her to handle it in the way she thought best. The initiated conversations were more about her embarrassment (I think) to sit at this 'thing', than around the meaning of such an object. Interesting though, was an occasional wave in the direction of the gallery window after a conversation had ended.

The second time round, I placed bowls of sweets next to the house-like structure. The interaction was on a 'candy-level' and the bowls were soon empty. The actions with which the sweets were taken, were quick and suspicious, but it was soon realised that no harm awaits you if you take some candy…! For the next few days, there was no person, no candy, only the object. The interaction was minimal, except for the occasional glimpse from passing *public(s)*.

On the fourth day, some unplanned interaction took place. The box was hidden. The jokers however forgot to plan their interaction. The bulky and awkwardly shaped object forced them to retire from their mission in its early stages. The object was soon recovered.

No frame of reference is available to those who view the work from 'ground-level'. From the *outside*, in its given form, it has no artistic value or purpose. For the artist it is an artwork, a *monument*. Set up for those who trade on the street; who make a living by selling *all sorts* on the side of the road. But, who am I to make such a decision, and are those who are supposedly honoured by this thing, informed?
These questions can be redirected as inquisitions into the *rationale* of art practices (both gallery based and public practices): Who is it made for – artist or viewer?

The notion, as pointed out by Dot, that 'something that is nothing can be worked hard at to become something special', is indeed true of the *monument* that in fact is a fridge box. From the *inside*, the viewer has

insight into the proposed 'monumental' nature of this object, but only if he/she chooses to look through the window; only if he/she chooses to see it as such.

At various times during Dot's explanation, there was reference made to the implicated notion of protection. This is an important aspect of the work, implied on various levels. The space created by the hut, the bubble wrap, the softness of the materials used in the panels and the 'protective' cushions on the outside of the *box*. This concept was juxtaposed with harsh, rigid shapes, such as, the hut itself, the wine-shelf and the symmetrical placing of the cord. On a certain level, I see this contrast as a play-off between femininity and masculinity, though not with overt intent.



IMAGE 49



IMAGE 50



IMAGE 51

On Friday evening the red bean-bag chair was in the corner, way from everything else. I imagined this to be somewhere peaceful to be able to retire to, to relax, away from your hectic schedule, to watch the world go by. The

bowls of sweets are your simple gifts to your visitors, without all the frills and wrappings.

The chair was part of the monument and certainly suitable as a pleasant retreat… It is a pity that nobody saw it as place of rest, but just as that object seemed intimidating to passers-by, art is often seen (and experienced) as daunting terrain to enter.

I hope that this will make some sense to you, if not, then my apologies, it was fun letting my imagination fly!

From Dot

After reading the letter, it struck me that she did not perceive or specifically state the hut as being part of the installation. It is as if the ready-made hut (even though it took hours to clean and cover the blue edges) was disregarded as part of the aesthetic experience offered by the objects in and around the rented hut. To me, the hut forms an essential part of the complete artistic 'ritual or experience' that I wished to offer the viewer. (IMAGE 52) Although the hand-made door carried a kind of authorial sign, the 'Hut Rentals' sign on the door of the hut (corrugated iron) implies that neither artist nor viewer can ever fully own this/a installation work. It is a sign of temporality and a reference to the ever changing, *fleeting-floating* world we live in. It is a mark, as suggested earlier, of the travelling/moving in my own life and the need for stability. As object, the hut was used to manipulate the space of the gallery. It changed the *dynamics* of the room and the way people would usually interact with a certain *gallery space* (looking at objects on the wall or on stands). It forced people to *shift* in perception (about art and art exhibitions), but also invited them to take the necessary *shift* into the hut where they had to look at or interact with the work. Once inside the hut, the visitors were placed in the *spotlight* and I realised that people either wanted to look at the work, felt too bad to just walk out or away from the work without looking, or they were forced to take a better look, because too many people inside the house made it difficult to get out. Inside a small space like that, it is almost inevitable that one hears other people's

comments, which can *contaminate/stimulate* your own thoughts. This is different from the often quiet environment of the art gallery.

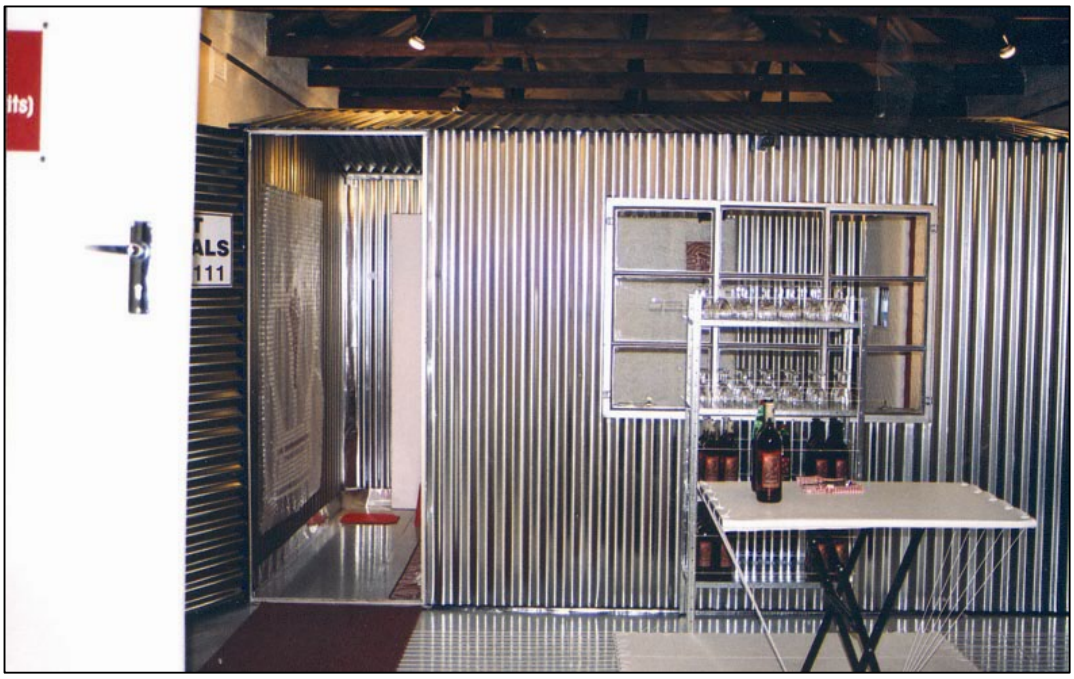


IMAGE 52

In the above piece, the monologue of artist and viewer merged as dialogue. Here, production overlaps with perception and factual description is interspersed with personal interpretation. Here, presumably, the balance between 'word and image' is found and in this, the work comes alive…

Conversely, not all the visitors approached the work with an open mind and people often found it difficult to interact or understand the work. On entering the gallery, the clinical layout and structure of the HUT struck visitors as being a rather intimidating sight, not knowing what they were ***expected*** to do (if anything). It is however important for me to mention that this is exactly the point of 'art' that I question. For

whom is the academic art that we make when inside the walls of the art-school? *Academic art* or rather installation art is not easy to comprehend, even appreciate, and in a way visitors were expected to step out of their comfort zone; to take the plunge from presupposed ideas, to be surprised… To assess whether this happened, I placed paper and pens on a table away from the actual installation (thinking that it would maybe be less daunting). People however often just used it as a kind of personal graffiti space. Nonetheless, people tend to turn to each other and interact in that way, but one can only guess what they are thinking (unless they turn to you for answers).

Visual production – considering grammar and medium

The process of visual production is a fusion of academic and personal factors. Some of these factors became evident in the 'conversation' between Dot and me; others need some closer inspection. To me, visual production is about being stimulated by intellectual, personal and spiritual information and the translation of this stimulus into material manipulation. Each work comes with a concept and it is this concept that I think about and get involved with while I am actually making a work. Even though it is very physical, to me it is thought provoking. It gives me space to think about the reason why I am making the work… It holds the concept. It is not simply decorative. *The process* is a plan without parameters. The work continuously changes. It is like a metamorphic creature that takes on the shape of my mind, of my body, of my movement. It does not stop evolving in meaning. Even after it has been constructed for display/interaction, it changes with each person's interpretation. Parts of the work are sprouting towards me, around me, *inward*, and some parts sprout to break out of the frame in which they are placed.

> Philosophy is the peculiarly stubborn attempt to think clearly. (William James, http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/philosophy)

I see my process as one of *artistic philosophizing*. The word 'philosophy' is derived from the ancient Greek *Philosophia*, which roughly means 'love of wisdom'. It suggests 'a vocation for questioning, learning, and spreading knowledge' (ibid.). Many philosophers are curious about the world, humanity, existence, values, understanding, and the *nature of things.* As several major works of post-medieval philosophy begin by asking what philosophy itself should or does mean, the understanding and nature of artistic practices are at the centre of my enquiry/artistic practice. This links with the idea, stated in chapter four (page 96), that the aim of all Conceptual artists is to lead the viewer to 'question in the real, everyday world' (Godfrey 1998: 424).

My thinking shapes through the material manipulation and into the material existence of a work. Here, w*ork* is used as a general term to refer to both the objects made as well as the planning and use of space (*spatial manipulation*); creating an artistic environment for experience rather than display. This process is a *knit* between craft and conceptualism and is concurring with a point made by Colin Richards in *The Thought is the Thing* (2002: 38-39). He writes:

> My contention would be that in South Africa the political and material circumstances which conditioned art production have produced a kind of dialectic between craft and conceptualism, the manual and the mental, where the hand (and by implication the body and materiality) was not simply rejected; where passion for conventional art media and the value of the hand and work interlace with a strong relationship of materiality, embodiment, language, consciousness of insurrection and dissent, and open attitude to found objects, and a preoccupation with documentation as a species of historical witnessing of ephemeral and traumatic events.

It is important for me to engage in a practical process such as this where conceptual stimulus feeds the materialization of a tactile, often fragile *art*. Thoughts are coloured, shaped, formed; a text is an image, ideas are things. 'Perhaps', hanging on to the words of Richards, 'it is the anarchic virtue of conceptualism that it restates this, makes us edgy and reminds us of what it is to be human, and humanely incoherent, in this over-administered post-human world. There are things we should not understand – an endangered idea in our information saturated, pseudo-transparent times' (ibid.).

In keeping with the idea of craft and concept, I would like to consider some of the conceptual work of Alan Alborough, Willem Boshoff, Bridget Baker, Kim Lieberman, and Doreen Southwood, where there is a marked sense of labour, materiality, and embodiment. Although my work does not necessarily overlap with these artists' works on a conceptual level, it never fails to serve as visual stimulation and reference. And, in accordance to the 'pick and mix' nature of the Visual Generation[38], I hold the right to choose the works or aspects thereof that intrigue and interest me the most, both on an aesthetic level (if I dare to say) and/or as methodology.

When thinking about the work of these artists, examples such as *Blind Alphabet ABC* (1991-3, Boshoff), 'untitled' (2000, Alborough's Standard Bank Young Artist exhibition), Bridget Baker's mixed media installation for *Graft* (1997) and *An Official BB Project* (2001), as well as *Black Hole* (2002), *Staircase* (2001), *Shock Absorbers* (2001) (all by Doreen Southwood) and *Every Interaction Interrupts the Future* (2003), (Kim Lieberman) comes to mind. Each is different in intention and aesthetic. The *male* influence of Boshoff and Alborough lies in their immaculate level of conceptual sophistication and thoroughness. Stimulating is the intricate conceptual articulation of

their projects, allied to a sensual physicality and highly polished craftsmanship. What greatly interests and affects my thoughts and practices are Alborough's choice of material and the meticulous, calculated way in which he uses them, defying established assumptions regarding the nature of material and the meanings *we* ascribe to them. A concern that is linked to both my work and that of Alborough, is the issue of *audience*. His installations 'have repeatedly confused, intrigued and frustrated audiences, *challenging them at once to confront the limits of their own willingness, to engage and understand the seemingly incomprehensible, and to bridge the creative gap between the production and consumption of art*' (own emphasis) (Klopper, http://alanalborough.co.za/bio).

Floating Trophies (2002), *Shock Absorbers* (2001), *White Light* (2002), *Black Hole* (2002), *Staircase* (2001), *The Swimmer* (2003) – Doreen Southwood's work is not only intriguing and beautifully constructed (with an almost industrial approach), but I found that there are many points of similarity between her work and mine. What is revealing through her work is *the way in which one's context or lifestyle determines how work is produced*. She takes care to point out that hers is an identity as a white, middle-class, Afrikaans-speaking woman with a tendency towards emotional insecurity and instability. Even though I am also a white, middle-class, Afrikaans-speaking woman (with the mentioned *tendencies*), my work does not necessarily deal with this issue as such (although it surfaces through my choice of material). What I wish to confirm or rather state is that one's work is continuously fuelled by **this fact** that carries in its wake the discomforts, tensions, and paradoxical desires that *its* environment holds. My circumstances and by implication, my resources have inevitably shaped the way in which I produce, working with what is available and finding ways to get or access that

which is not available. It has led me to question the nature and implication of my chosen profession, ***art.*** As much as *identity*, this field of production holds many paradoxes and to describe this in a work such as **shift**, a number of opposites are played off against each other – interior/exterior; private/public; surface/depth; comfort/discomfort and vertical/horizontal. As in the work of Southwood, I find that all seems motivated by an obsessive ideal, not of perfection *per se*, but rather perfectionism.

In Bridget Baker's, *An Official BB Project*, the (inter)*action* of the viewer was imperative. The amount of visitors and the level of their participation determined the 'outcome' of the *exhibition.* In various other works, different to this installation, she often references her family and her search for identity through embroidery. Embroidery usually carries many feminist issues, given the fact that sewing is usually a gender specific activity. To me, not sure of the artist's intention, the visual outcome is *fresh*, evoking *process*, *materiality* and *significance*. In work such as *Uninterrupted Chaos* (2002), *The incredible Chain of Events* (2002), *Thread Postbox (Jerusalem Postbox)* (2002) and *Every Interaction Interrupts the Future* (2002), Kim Lieberman uses silk threaded through the perforated holes in the 'stamp sheets.' Her experimentation with silk as Rory Doepel asserts in *Kim Lieberman: Every Interaction Interrupts the Future*, 'was the consequence of a "chance meeting" of a reel of thread placed on a perforated sheet of paper, while she was replacing a button on a coat' (2003: 19). Doepel continues (ibid.):

> For the artist, the act of threading is a 'meditative' act, engendering a quiet contemplative state… In Kim's case, medium (thread) and process(sewing/threading) also of course affirm values associated with being female, and raise social and political issues connected with being a female artist, but this was not originally the primary intention.

The reason for this extract is to convey part of the reason why I often choose to use *threading* and *sewing* in my work. Another attraction to her work is her interest in and reference to 'interconnectedness' and her use of different media. This, the use of different media, is a distinctly 'non-modernist' feature, in so far as internal consistency of media and technique may be associated with the kind of French aestheticism sometimes linked to modernism. In her work, as in my own, a visual element, a colour, for example, apart from its **decorative or aesthetic value**, may function descriptively, expressively and/or symbolically, thus carrying different kinds of meaning simultaneously. Her dominant use of the colour red only struck me after I had decided to make use of the same colour. Lieberman's association with this colour is both similar, yet very different from my own. To me, it firstly serves as a practical way to link the various elements in my work. This strengthens the notion that the separate parts are incisively connected and have meaning in each other, contributing to the *creation* of a 'sacred' or unitary space/body. Moreover, I used it to refer to the notion of life, celebration and belief; orient/eastern philosophy, spice, flavour, fashion and ritual. There lies paradox in these references and to the viewer these intentions might not be visible. To me, these underlying notions serve as *material* in the search for a personal visual language where the (*re)search* is continuous, just like the boy, Santiago, searched for his treasure in *The Alchemist* (Coelho 1992: 175-176). He was taken on many paths, meeting many people, seeing things he would ordinarily not have seen (ibid.):

> "You old sorcerer," the boy shouted up to the sky. "You knew the whole story. You even left a bit of gold at the monastery so I could get back to this church. The monk laughed when he saw me come back in tatters. Couldn't you have saved me from that?"
>
> **"No," he heard a voice on the wind say. "If I had told you, you wouldn't have seen the Pyramids. They're beautiful, aren't they?"**

> The boy smiled, and continued digging. Half an hour later, his shovel hit something solid. An hour later, he had before him a chest of Spanish gold coins. There were also precious stones, **gold masks adorned with red and white feathers**, and stone statues embedded with jewels. These were the spoils of a conquest that the country had long ago forgotten, and that some conquistador had failed to tell his children about.

To me, as artist, the practical research serves as a way of finding unexpected paths and new visual languages. To the viewer, the artwork could (by choice) ***shift*** perspectives and bring new/different insights. My aim was to create a 'space of conversation[39],' where (to openly duplicate words from page 16), based on the premise that contemporary artists and the public have something to say to each other, the viewer's position takes shape as a participant. To simplify, the 'power' shifts from artists to audience. The structural base of 'the work' shifts from language of theatricality and display – exhibition, shown, opening – to the ongoing evolution of the discursive experience – dialogue, conversation. To move towards the act of conversation, is to move away from the notion that reality and value lie in a 'confrontation' with a given object or reality that contains, within itself, a privileged 'truth' about its nature and being. Conversation moves away from the temptations of transcendence and teleology towards a notion that cultural value, or the 'truth' of art, lies in the contingent relations that come to be constructed through the working out of a particular practice, or in the performative act by which the work at once encounters its audience and constructs its community of interpretation. I wish further to believe that the installation, **shift,** was art *made for others*, offering a 'conversation space' where the (im)perfections of each tried/untested interpretation, confronted and brought to the fore the (im)perfections of the self, what we do, and all that informs who we are.

---

[1] This is a term used by J.W.T Mitchell in 'Word and Image' (1996: 53) to describe the word/image relation. The issue of "word and image" focuses attention on the relation of visual representation to language.

[2] This refers to the two forms of capital that are, according to Bourdieu, particularly important in the field of cultural production. *Symbolic capital* refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration, or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*). *Cultural capital* concerns forms of cultural knowledge, competence, or disposition. (See Bourdieu 1993: 7).

[3] *M.O: Trinity Session Artministration* is the name of The Trinity Session's solo exhibition in the Standard Bank Gallery, 2003. This show represents almost two years' worth of Trinity Session projects, ranging from artistic experimentation to applying similar skills to research-based or commercial projects. It is essentially, to quote David Brodie, 'a installed "process review" of the approximately 50 projects the trio have engaged with' (http://www.artthrob.co.za). It, quite literally, 'opens up' the process of their administration, their action. The M.O. of the title refers to both modus operandi and mobile office, described by them as 'two requirements developed in response to common needs expressed by a growing network of artists and colleagues'.

[4] Here, referring to galleries such as Gallery Momo (Monna wa Mokoena), Michael Stevenson Contemporary and Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary Art.

[5] The definition of public art is as flexuous as the continuous renewal of the many kinds of public art that are described under this heading. Understandable then, Chris Roper's apt response after attending Public Eye's symposium on public art in 2002:

> Did the symposium teach us what public art is? Of course not. We learned that there are many kinds of public art, that it is always a contested arena, and that the very act of that contestation sometimes informs the aesthetics and meanings of the artworks.

I am therefore not aiming to define public art but to look at the current issues and actions of this contentious category. In recent years, public art in South Africa has become increasingly dynamic, evolving far beyond the dusty colonial statue in the town square. The new face(s) of public art address issues of trauma and memory, reclaiming urban spaces, highlighting environmental issues, drawing entire communities into creative exchanges – through performances, through interventions, through technological interaction.

[6] In *Art in Question*, Karen Raney pursues the category of art. She questions, stating that (2003: 31) 'given the rise of visual culture as a broad-based area of study, and the changing field in which art and its study takes place, is "art" itself a category which needs to be put aside? In spite of the difficulties, there is a reluctance to dispense altogether with the concept of art. Why?' In the book she interviews many

practitioners and theorists of diverse visual art practices and I wish to reiterate the voice of J.W.T. Mitchell on changing 'art' to 'visual culture' (Raney 2003: 62-63):

> I'm against letting go of a notion of art as something really significant and distinct. The topic of the 'high-low' division between visual art and mass culture seems to me one of the unavoidable topics you would want to discuss in any course called visual culture, but that doesn't mean the end of any distinctive function for art. It means a re-examination and perhaps even a changed function for that distinction.

[7] In Tony Godfrey's book, *Conceptual Art* (1998), he calls public practices, *intervention*, in which some image, text or thing is placed in an unexpected context. He mentions the billboard project by the American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torez, as an example of *intervention* where a photograph of an empty double bed with crumpled bedclothes was displayed on twenty-four billboards at various sites throughout New York. It had no words or legend attached. To the passer-by, it could mean many things, depending on his or her circumstances.

[8] This arguable term is contested in *Art in Question*, where it acts as a trigger phrase in some of the interviews. It suggests 'an affinity between the acts of looking and reading. It suggests that if one can learn the right alphabets, syntax and grammar, one can successfully read images and the visual world at large' (Raney 2003: 13-14). Yet, if visual art and the visual world at large is seen as a text to be deciphered, what is distinctive about objects and images may disappear under a screen of codes and classifications. As Sadie Plant says (in Raney 2003: 246-247):

> Your clothes are clothes, they're not a text. I think you can lose what is special about clothes, for example, by superimposing the concept of text onto them… What excites me about a city like Birmingham is that it's a convergence of different kinds of flows of material – the traffic, the pollution, the sewage system, the power supplies, the waste disposal, and all the images and the culture and the people. I think you need different approaches to each of those material processes, and that they are processes that are above and beyond, or below and beyond, our human perspective on them. Sure, you can 'read' the sewage system but I don't think it's going to get you very far in understanding how it works or, more importantly, how it fits in with the composition of a city.

[9] Joubert Park is the working ground of over 30 freelance photographers, including John Makua, Varrie Hluzani, Jimmy Moyo, Nkosi Ndlovu, S'phiwe Shandu and Isaac Phakati, who constitute an important aspect of both the economy and the social culture of the park precinct.

[10] I use the work (re)present, because even though Kurgan is representing a past project, she is also articulating it in a new way, articulating it as a 'new work'. The Joubert Park photo studio project only ever existed in the public realm. Kurgan says that 'I wanted to make a version of it for the gallery, but I didn't want to show it as a document, it needed to be a new work' (2004).

[11] The Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) initiated Constitution Hill. This project involves the reconstruction of a site that sits right between Braamfontein and Hillbrow, described in the accompanying catalogue (2002):

> The new precinct will house not only the [Constitutional] Court, but also statutory bodies such as the Commission of Gender Equality, and a thriving complex of heritage sites and museums,

> exhibitions and performance spaces, offices, shops, restaurants and other tourist facilities. It will be an engine of growth and transformation for downtown Johannesburg, a place where visitors can feel, safely, the beat of the vibrant but often inaccessible city. Constitution Hill celebrates our country's ability to talk itself out of a bloody racial conflict and into democracy. It will be a lekgotla – a place of gathering – where South Africans and international visitors alike will come together for stimulating dialogue and debate. The precinct will also be the home of one of South Africa's major public art collections.

The inauguration of the court was celebrated, together with South Africa's 10th year of democracy, on March 21 2004. Words of hope were part of this day's happenings:

> May it be a shining beacon of hope for the protection of human rights and the advancement of human liberty and dignity. President Thabo Mbeki (in Ellis & Ancer 2004: 1)

> No matter how unpleasant it might be to think about this past, we cannot erase it from our memories; we cannot pretend it never was.
> Understanding the past makes it possible for us to appreciate what has been achieved since April 27 1994. Gauteng Premier (2004) Mbhazima Shilowa (in Ellis & Ancer 2004: 1)

> It is the ultimate guarantor of the rights entrenched in the constitution. This beautiful building, which is now its home, stands where once a bastion of white power and oppression stood. Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson (in Ellis & Ancer 2004: 1)

Art has been a part of this process on various levels. Jo Ratcliff is one of the artists whose work is part of the collection in the building. Her work is a powerful, visually spectacular, and positive work. It is, as she said (in Ancer 2004: 5) 'about confronting stereotypes of the inner city'. Adding,

> I remember when I was an angry artist in the 1980s I tried to give Albie Sachs a piece of work, which was very bleak, and he refused to accept it. He told me that artists need to celebrate beauty.

[12] This initiative is (2004) conceptualised by Johnnic Communications' Heritage, Education and Tourism (HET) team. The hugely multi-disciplinary HET team is (in 2002) made up of some of South Africa's most inspired and formidable creative thinkers: from educational consultants (Dhianaraj Chetty and Emilla Potenza), to architects (Nina Cohen who designed the international exhibition 'blank_architecture, apartheid and after'), to writers (acclaimed journalists and authors Mark Gevisser and Johen Matshikiza), to television producers (Lauren Segal and Krisen Pather who created *Get Real, Take 5, Sesame Street* and *Gazlam*), to artists, academics, archivists, oral historians, tourism specialists, financial planners and more. Ralph Applebaum, who designed the Holocaust Museum in Washington amongst his many museum projects around the world, is an international consultant. (See Kurgan 2002).

[13] Over the last few years, many of Kurgan's projects have been conceptualized in collaboration with Nina Cohen of the innovative architecture and cultural exhibit design practice, Cohen & Judin.

[14] These silk screens refer to Kurgan's award-winning piece, *Lost and Found*. This installation won her the prestigious Vita Art Prize in the year 2000. It was a photographic installation of large-scale digital prints onto silk organza. Kurgan's interest in memory and desire, and the relationship between visual records and absence is aptly registered in the diaphanous sheets that both hold and dissolve the images.

[15] 10 years into democracy (2004), we still face a housing problem. People are so desperate for somewhere to stay, that they have resorted to 'house-jacking' in order to get a roof over their heads. Since 1994, the Department of Housing has built about 1, 5-million RDP houses. But the lack of accommodation persists.

[16] This situation has changed for the better. Anti-Aids drugs will be rolled out on 1 April 2004 when five hospitals in Gauteng will begin administering the drugs. (See *The Star*, March 16, 2004: 3).

[17] Kurgan was raped by intruders at her home while living in America, fell pregnant as a result, and had an abortion. (Baleta 1998: 8) She had a miscarriage, gave birth and now (2004) raises her two children, Jessie (7) and Jonah (11) in Johannesburg. 'All of these experiences have been definitive in shaping my life and have led me to a shifting and questioning of my sense of identity and gender' (Kugan 1998: 1).

[18] Unlike public collections – such as Sasol or MTN – of which her work is a part, she observes that 'those collections are collections of objects that are only seen when you go into those buildings'. They are 'decorative collections – beautiful, valuable collections,' but do not always relate coherently concerning any one issue. It is a wide range of work that has potency as collection, as a way of preserving the story and nature of South Africa's history and art culture.

[19] This is part of her project to 'professionalize' her own practices in order to make a living from this, apart from her public *business* projects.

[20] A hyperlink, or simply a link, is a reference in a hypertext document to another document or other resource. It is similar to a citation in literature.

[21] 'Hypermedia' is a term used for hypertext, which is not constrained to be text: it can include graphics, video, and sound, for example (See http://www.w³.org/WhatIs.html).

[22] The cultural boycott was instigated against South Africa during apartheid and restricted South African artists from showing overseas, and overseas artist from showing here.

[23] Among Surrealist techniques, exploiting the mystique of accident was a kind of collective collage of words or images called the *cadaver exquis* (exquisite corpse). Based on an old parlour game, several people, each of whom would write a phrase on a sheet of paper, played it, folded the paper to conceal part of it, and passed it on to the next player for his contribution. (See http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition.html).

[24] Haiku is a poetic form and a type of poetry form the Japanese culture. The most common form for Haiku is three short lines. The first line usually contains five syllables, the second line seven syllables, and the third line contains five syllables. A Haiku must 'paint' a mental image in the reader's mind. This is

the challenge of Haiku – to put the poem's meaning and imagery in the reader's mind in only 17 syllables over just three lines of poetry. (http://volweb.utk.edu/schools/bedford/harrisms/haiku.htm).

[25] In 1966, Mel Bochner was living in a small flat, where he spent his time reading and drawing in notebooks. Tony Godfrey explains (1998: 115):

> The activity for drawing was for Bochner, as for others, the most immediate connection between thinking and making. Drawing here was also closest to writing. As he began planning geometric models or sculptures, his drawings became more like diagrams, often executed on graph paper. Eventually he began to see that, as the simple mathematical forms he was using could be conceived easily in the head, the act of drawing or diagramming was itself the fabrication. Therefore, was it really necessary to make the object?

[26] Glam Slam were working on developing the arts and culture portfolio for the charity, and The Trinity Session had introduced several working proposals for site-specific and 'functional sculpture' projects at the Topsy Sanctuary in Mapumalanga. (See Smith 2002: 5).

[27] Anyone keeping up with *Isidingo* or Generations may have noticed a fair amount of contemporary art gracing the sets of these two local soapie-dramas. In *Isidingo*, the recent introduction of the Haines family, headed up by industrial magnate and contemporary art collector Barker Haines, has meant a fair quota of the viewing population is fed with images of work by some of South Africa's hottest young and more established artists, including Marco Ciafanelli, Daniel Mosako, Antoinette Murdoch and Jan van der Merwe. Not only do characters interact with the work, they have discussions about it, the artists and the value of art, in terms of pleasure, social status and investment. The work goes beyond simple production design and is carefully 'framed,' that is, identified for what it is. When arch-bitch (and previously art illiterate) Cherel de Villiers, initiated into the Haines household as Barker's new wife mistakes a Jan van der Merwe for a Wayne Barker, stepdaughter Leonie Haines is quick to correct her (Smith 2002: 9).

[28] The art handbook stated clearly that art is not made in a vacuum. It was important that the artworks in the house were 'activated' and made accessible as far as possible to the people who were going to be living with them. 'To encourage an active audience in the house', according to Smith in *Broadcast Quality* (2002: 58), 'it was stressed that a viewer's response to an artwork is as important as the intentions of the artists, and that very little contemporary art is made in response to the modernist notion of "art for art's sake". Housemates were provided with biographies on each artist, a statement from each artist about his work, and additional information that tried to communicate the important social role art can play, as well as the fact that ones social, cultural, economic and historical positions and interests are all brought to bear on what an artist produces and how a viewer interprets the work.'

[29] The art task was developed in conjunction with the *BBII* taskmaster, Josh Lindberg. During week 7, the seven remaining housemates were tasked to produce a life-size self-portrait (not a physical likeness), four mosaics of 'Proudly South African' icons, and a sculpture dubbed *Big Brother* Frank. They had three days to pull it off. Smith notes in *Art Attack* (2002: 58):

> [W]hile some jumped with relish, others were more reluctant to the point of downright terrified. But all had their moments of relative inspiration, pop philosophizing and 'deep' aesthetic

> decision-making, and surprisingly little of the usual banter about artists and their models. While we can't be convinced that there's any real artistic talent amongst this bunch, it must be noted that the task seemed to allow their visual communication skills a bit more leeway where their verbal articulation skills left much to be desired.

[30] There are three main festivals in our country. It is the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees in Oudtshoorn and the Aardklop festival in Potchefstroom. (See Van Bosch 2002:7; Temkin 2003: 10).

[31] Turin's Biennale Internazionale Arte Giovane is a multidisciplinary event aimed at the promotion of international young creativity and gives prominence to emerging artists. Three hundred artists from Europe were invited to participate, and invited artists from guest countries were hosted on big-guest.net a.k.a Guestland.
For the second Turin Biennale of Young Art, The Trinity Session, were selected to represent guest country South Africa. In response to the theme of BIG Social Game, participants were invited on the basis that previous work had been informed by specific modes of social transformation strategies.

[32] The proposed workshops were held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. It offered street youth from a shelter in Protea Glen (Soweto) the opportunity to express their experience of street life, survivalism and attitude towards definitions of home and homelessness. During these workshops, the children had to use drawing, painting and clay modelling in response to objects in the JAG permanent collection. These results were exhibited on the Safe Food Website as well as at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and The Premises at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre in Braamfontein.

[33] Peet Piennar and Heidi Chrisholm are advertising creatives, new South Africans and ironic design pioneers. Pienaar, Chrisholm and Charl Nel started their company, an ad agency, called *The 9 November Union.* It is made up of small, associated businesses that operate under one roof, both independently and together. They offer the same expertise as larger agencies, but at a fraction of the cost. All the satellite businesses in the Union have a vested interest in maintaining a high standard of creativity and professionalism – and the set-up also allows them to use the right people for a particular job. ***Daddy Buy Me A Pony*** is the creative unit (See House & Leisure 2004: 36)

[34] A word taken from the title of Alan Alborough's exhibition at the Sasol Museum, Stellenbosch, with the title: *work[ing/in] pro[cess/gress]*, 2003.

[35] This gallery is situated in Melville, on the corner of 9th Street and Rustenburg Road as part of the 'rather chi-chi "lifestyle emporium," Bamboo,' a phrase coined by Kathryn Smith in *Daphne Prevoo* (2003: 68). The entanglement of art with the commonplace partly instigated my decision to use this space. Above that, it was the potential and practicality of the space, lending itself to be manipulated and invaded by my *ideas* (thinking here, specifically of the hut and the outside sculpture that could be viewed through the window).

[36] To me, the room has reference to a kind of prayer-room of sorts, a temporary space of rest or treasure. Later in the script, I will return to this point.

[37] This 'label' to the rest of the work functions as a playful reference to the modernist notion of the signature on the painting. It is sign of ownership, not only of the work, but also of the space, even if it is just for a moment.

[38] 'Visual Generation,' according to André Platteel in *The Mix* (1999 no pg. number), is the name given to Generation X: born between '63 and '73, plus Generation Next: born between '74 and '84. It refers to a global phenomenon, where a heavily mediatised life serves as formative experience.

[39] 'Conversation' took place in various forms and shapes. Some chose to interact with or comment in the booklets inside the hut, while others wrote on the paper laid out on the tables away from the work. Some did not speak, but their faces had plenty to *say*, while some **dared** to ask.