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South African digital art practice: an exploration of the altermodern

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Appendix 2:

Interview Marcus Neustetter

Main Street Life, Johannesburg, 7 February 2012

Work: Mount Teide Google Earth Trace(2009) - digital print from Google earth trace *relation IV* (detail) Digital light drawing (2010) – digital print from light sensitive software, line drawing based on performances

Carly Whitaker: This is just to state that Marcus Neustetter has signed the confidentiality form stating that anything I write about him he can read and anything he doesn't like I will retract.

Marcus Neustetter: Agreed.

CW: This questionnaire is in fulfilment of my (Carly Whitaker) Masters paper titled *"South African Digital Art Practice: An exploration of the Altermodern"*. The Altermodern is a critical theory developed by Nicolas Bourriaud which he has established through curatorial methods. The theory seeks to develop a new frame work for a new modernism which he has observed developing in a global manner. The way in which we inhabit the world and the way in which artist navigate this reflects this. My thesis aims to explore this new theory in relation to South African digital art in hope that in can provide an adequate framework for critical engagement and future development of the field.

This questionnaire aims to explore the artist's level of engagement conceptually within a global context and in relation to the digital medium by looking at their practice, process and work.

SECTION 1: GENERAL

This section is focused towards a general understanding of how the artist perceives their own global context in relation to a South African one and in relation to the medium.

1. **CW:** Having been based in South Africa, you have been identified by yourself and the press as a South African artist concerned with digital media, how do you understand your practice and how it is received in a global context?

MN: Well maybe I should start with how it was received in the local context in relation to the global. Round about 1998 – 2000, I was producing a lot of digital work and the local art audience didn't really know what I was doing, that was really the main concern. So what I did was shift my focus on the international scene and making my connection there. So the research I landed up doing in different countries, well mainly in Europe actually, was about trying to figure out what is the art technology relationship and how are people using it and playing with it, and then seeing how I could use it tie it into South Africa and think about it critically in South Africa. So not just going 'cool there are interactive installation in the rest of the world, let's build interactive installations here' because if there's no audience or practitioners then why do it. So I as an artist changed the way I make art based on the context that I was in. So then the audience internationally started to ask questions about how do I define myself as an African, how do I find myself redefining digital

art from an African perspective, what does it mean to live in the digital divide and at the time it was even more radical than now, in the sense that there was so little coming from the African continent, sub Saharan African continent in terms of digital art, that they immediately identified the key people, one or two people who actually stood out to immediately become the certain networkers to develop the networks. So Ars Electronica Zed came and a few other organisations started to ask critical questions about how to access that through the continent and not really pay that much attention to individual work, but rather think about how to spread network and draw influence out of the continent into other platforms because Africa as a continent was always overlooked, even India was way, way ahead in terms of international platforms. So people were interested in my work, not purely because of the work, but more importantly because of the context that I come from and the access I gave them access into and a context which they have no information about which is quite complex thing as an artist because you are always being very critical of your own work, why is not good enough? 'why do you just judge based on where I'm from?' But at the same time you also play the game. So that's why I started the Southern Africa New Media Art Network (SANMAN), which was about connecting, realising this was an opportunity and that I was a portal for many into the international media arts circuit because of my networks and that's why I created that to try and connect them to different organisations, partners, curators, other artists, technology, people whatever and to try an link up, to close the gap between those that are connected and those that aren't.

CW: Is that still running?

MN: No, that ended shortly after the Trinity Session started, simply because the objectives of the Trinity Session and SANMAN were similar, even though they didn't define themselves as the same thing. I let it run for a few more years, just did a few small more

curated projects, activities and things and then I just let it die simply because it requires me to keep it alive and I was then focusing on the Trinity session as a platform. And then what happened was through UNESCO Digit Arts portal and other kinds of networks, SANMAN became, I wouldn't say irrelevant but it lived its life for two or three years, it was fine. Those who needed to be connected were connected.

CW: So how has your shift changed now, your focus now?

MN: So now not only am I producing less digitally focused work, because I do realise in the international media art circuit very often the engagement with technology loses its relation to context. So even locative media, funnily enough has very little to do with the context that it's in, in terms of where it draws its inspiration, how people respond to it etc. It literally deals with location as a geographical point, a longitude and latitude. I was much more interested in how context influences the art making process. So as an artist, I also shifted my focus from what I could've done on my cell phone using a drawing system which responds to movement etc in my "In Motion" drawings, you know I physically sat down and did my hand with a pen on a piece of paper, as opposed to using the [gyroscope], instead of using that, because that was one of the ideas, to use my hand held unit and allow it to draw based on the bouncing of the car and create these kind of strange drawings as a digital thing. Instead of doing that, while it was interesting and I was talking to some developers about it, it could have been possible; I realised at the end of the day when I travelled, I often travel like in Dakar, I was travelling through places that didn't have, wouldn't have 3G reception for example for me to track it online as a virtual tracking system or anything like that. So I ended up using just my pen and paper. So while I'm interested in where the idea comes from in the digital platform, it's no longer that its now becoming more physical, installation-based. Again the global audience has responded both to Stephen [Hobbs] and

my work and my individual work something that they realise that we are coming we are coming to the media arts scene with a much more alternative focus. So why was Transmediale [2003] happy to have us on the Transmediale [2003] where we basically presented spray diagrams as oppose to interactive installations we will never know but there's obviously something (well we do know) but there's obviously something there that's important about talking about locality, inspiration, drawing your intension back to the way in which you engage with the technology without having an actual instrument in front of you. Does that make sense?

CW: Yup.

MN: Cool.

2. **CW:** Do you perceive yourself as a global artist? How and Why?

MN: Yes I do, but if you asked me if I perceived myself as a local artist I would say yes I do too; because at the end of the day we draw our inspiration from our local context, but also from the global debate. The one is not separated from the other anymore especially when one looks at platforms like the Internet, Facebook blah blah blah, that start to connect you more and more to people who are in totally remote, different places and have nothing to do with you anymore. That very notion of being connected to those places defines you as a global citizen in some form or another and I guess the reality of travel. The fact that we travel so much and do projects all over the place and that our voice moves beyond local issues to international issues. I say our, I mean it broadly as an artist working in a context.

3. **CW:** Do conceptually situate your work in a South African context?

MN: Yes I do, I actually very often define my work based on the context in which I live or work. But if I for example, do a work in another context, I will refer back to myself coming from here and trying to explain how my work comes from a context that's influenced me in certain ways. I do believe that artists cannot necessarily separate that which influences them and that which they produce. I think there's a strong link.

4. **CW:** Does the use of the digital as a medium or a tool for your artworks influence your understanding of a global context?

MN: Yes, well of course it does because the platform itself that exists in the digital is about connectivity and interaction. But I would say that looking at the question quite critically if I was disconnected, I was producing work that was globally relevant, but it was disconnected from it having access to the global audience or I wouldn't have access to the global context, I would argue that in its location it's still relevant in me understanding the global environment. Essentially using a microcosm to understand a larger thing. Just like surveys or biological experiments are done on a microcosm to try and make sense of a larger phenomenon or something like that, I think it goes the same for an artistic process, where you're thinking about something which seems to be so close to home but if you started to apply it in different contexts and different parts of the world, you'd get a better understanding, or you'd realise the connections are there. So it's a bit open ended as to how you define the digital medium, but yes, I think I answered the question.

5. **CW:** Does the medium enable you to participate in a global dialogue or context? (email)

MN: Yes, the very nature of the connected digital medium via networks and media platforms allows me to both access and contribute to the dialogue. the interesting part however is that often I am not inclined or interested in doing this, but rather dealing with the context I am in. Virtual spaces that seem to enable and connect often feel to me like they alienate and disempower. Slactivism, tokenism and mundane social media exchanges often shows the lack of engagement in an interesting global dialogue that challenges me as an artist.

6. **CW:** Do you perceive South Africa as being part of a networked global culture? How?

MN: Yes, it is, aside from our address being so important and the fact the people know who Mandela is and you kinda get an idea that South Africa is an important context for a myriad of reasons. It features in media, it features in debates, online etc etc there are always interesting, well interested people how come and engage with South Africa so therefore I think we are definitely part of that global, networked culture or networked global culture which I suppose are two different things. The most important part is that we as South Africans don't always perceive ourselves as being part of it. So while we know we have a presence online or we are doing activities which are linking us to trade fairs and all the rest of it, we are way further than we ever were if you think about the cultural boycott during the Apartheid time we were so disconnected and then suddenly there was the boom of connectivity where suddenly artist were spread throughout the world; representing and speaking about South Africa in various ways. Now we have gone into a different state where we are trying to fight for ourselves in that global market, not only in the art market but also in the international context of the discourse. So while I totally think we are part of it, I think at the moment we are playing a certain role in it, so when I go to a conference and we talk

about South Africa or you talk about anything and you state that you are South African, immediately the audience comes with a certain understanding of what that means, preconceived notions. Just like when you say 'oh I'm from Chile' you'll have certain few ideas of why Chile is important to me and what it could mean, how it influences what I am saying or how it contextualises what I am saying. I do think that there is so much media out there about South Africa that already frames the context. So in terms of the 'how?' part, I think that very often we have no control over how we really are part of this global culture. So giving a presentation or showing a work what one present and how one speak is already tainted by where one comes from if the audiences is engaged in that way. I think that is a common issue regardless of where you are from. It just that South Africa has had such strange representation in the media, everything from Joburg being the most dangerous place in the world to our Apartheid history to Zuma etc etc.

SECTION 2: WORK DESCRIPTION

This section addresses specifically the engagement with the digital and the work being discussed. It explores the technical process and engagement with the work.

In **Mount Teide Google Earth Trace** (One Moment) and ***relation IV* (detail) Digital light drawing** (In Motion) mapping a moving body over a space, transferring this movement and motion into a single visual through a digital process establishes a dialogue between the two. This network of information creates a journey for the viewer and for you as an artist in both your works.

7. **CW:** Can you tell me a bit about **Mount Teide Google Earth Trace (One Moment)** and your process behind it?

MN: The work itself is influenced by my interest in going out and trying to find or re-enact that moment of inspiration when I was in Kilimanjaro. It was that kind of searching for something, why else would I climb another volcano? It was the question of if I found so much inspiration for the first body of work, maybe if I climb another body of work I'll find another body of work. That's why it was also part of the show called "One Moment". So while I was working with Stephen on our project in the Canary Islands, which was very political, very activist the story of the "Black Out Project", on the ground hard core activist project; climbing a volcano and removing myself from that to reflect on my own artistic process was quite an interesting juxtaposition and then finding the black rock of the volcano, seeing moments of inspiration, trying to connect to previous moments of inspiration where I was escaping the realities of everyday life. I started to make a connection between the Google Earth trace that at the end of the day I was producing and my ability to zoom out and move away from realities of what I was facing. The climb itself up the mountain, is not that strenuous or anything, but if one looks at it as a Google Earth trace and removes oneself out it's literally like a few lines on a piece of paper, it embodies movement through space from the Google point of view because you zooming, you looking at a root we could have taken to get up the mountain; but at the end of the day you as a viewer won't be able to read that. All you'll read is a white line on a black background, which is an invert of the Kilimanjaro trace where Kilimanjaro was about how I was discovering snow; I was finding a different kind of environment. I was doing a black drawing on white background and now here I was climbing a volcano that was black. I was playing with these ideas of the inversion of the colour, but more importantly for me it was about

the sense of perspective of moving out. The process behind it from a technical point of view was to once I came back from Mount Tiede, I went into Google and I compared the Google image with my drawings and my perception of the space which is what happened in the studio. I was thinking about this spatial relationship and a geographical relationship and then I literally did a vector trace of the Google image that I shot, deleted all the colour and then started to delete all the superfluous information that I found in the vector line drawing that I didn't want to see. So I really just focused on the stuff that I as a person that experienced that journey remember. So there are parts which are large empty spaces which aren't actually large empty spaces in the volcano, they've got the same texture and rock that's there; but I just felt that I'd explored certain things, and I was just playing around with deleting certain things that I thought were too much information and I'm left with the bare basic minimum of what I would want to represent in my Mount Tiede experience.

8. **CW:** Can you define the role of Google Earth in this work?

MN: I think I've briefly touched on it, but basically for me this idea of perspective is one of the most important elements. So flying in an aeroplane and looking down on the landscape is just as important as Google Earth, its just that I can't capture it that easily, but the thousands of photographs of me taking pictures out of the aeroplane or drawings. The beauty of Google Earth is the technological interface that we've got that we making use of someone else's system and we are manipulating to suit ourselves, however we can never look deep enough, it always pixilates, it's never crisp enough to go deeper and deeper to look at the things that you really want to see which is beyond this earth's surface. So my fascination with the vertical gaze is about looking back in time by looking at the stars and about looking back in time by looking at the earth's surface in archaeological terms. Now

Google Earth gives us the opportunity to look at the surface, but very often you kinda what to know what's beneath it, what's its history, what's it's context, what's are the people, what have they done over the years which you can really only do when you start scratching at the surface. So I am hoping with my traces that I try to in my own way go beyond pixilated 2 dimensional surfaces to go deeper down. Now I'm working quite a lot with Sun Space which is the company that launched the two satellites into orbit around and from South Africa, they're from Cape Town, and these two satellites are obviously feeding them images and I've now got access to these images so I can continue doing my Google Earth traces so to speak just with a different type of resource. So that becomes interesting, so where does Google, as a medium or as a tool or a vehicle get replaced by something that is now local. Are the images going to be different? Are the way that I engage with those images different? So these are some critical questions I am asking right now, so that's the process I'm going through right now.

9. **CW:** Can you tell me a bit about ***relation IV*** **(detail) Digital light drawing** (In Motion) and your process behind it?

MN: The technical process behind it. Using processing Tegan Bristow helped me prepare a program so that my laptop camera could track light in a room and draw a line from the one bright light to the next, so basically looking for the brightest spot in the room and then drawing a line to connect those dots. I actually developed this project in relation to a series of experiments I wanted to do with the launch of a new cell phone where basically I could use the cell phone light to draw in space. Then as I was exploring it I was realising more and more that I was drawing the space around myself, I was drawing the space around things because the light bounces off us. The light source, itself, is the only thing that

connects to us. If you've got a nice strong light source and something reflective in your hand, at one point that reflective thing, is not as bright as the light source but has enough light for the line to be drawn by the software. So I started to become fascinated by this way of capturing time and space by looking at the negative space around. I don't know if you remember in arts school you were taught to draw the space around the object itself. Then I started to look at the relationship between people and the space between people and how the light bounces between them and that started becoming symbolic for connections, relations, sound travelling, light travelling and I started to a lot of experiments where I would literally draw the outline of one person and then the other person and somehow see how they relate to each other, or in a semi performative way have two people with light sources drawing their own outlines and as they turn more or less towards the camera the line bounces between the bodies. That's what the **"Relation Series"** is really about, so the relation series really looks at aspects to two things in a space that allow movement between them. While some of the other works look at me placing three or four lights in a room and turning the software on and seeing how it bounces around and creates the geometry of the room or plays with those three dimensional spaces. In the work **In Motion** which is the [three figured one], figure moving through space. I literally trace an actor of moving through a space, very slowly by using two lights on either side of his body that turn on and off, therefore trying to fill out his body creating this movement. Inverting the idea of how the body captures light and how it reflects light. So I'm playing with these ideas of 'a body in space'. You mentioned briefly the relationship between the two, the **Mount Tiede trace** and **the light drawing** which is quite interesting as both of them use line as a way of defining it, I'm fascinated by drawing in any form. But more importantly it plays with a kind of capturing, a trace of something which is intangible; me searching for something that is

intangible, be it light, be it geographical shifts in colour from Google Earth whatever it is. So there are various sources that influence the drawing of the space around. So **Mount Tiede** isn't the mountain, it's the colour shifts, so it could have been a cloud that moved over at that point and the Google camera took the satellite photo and the shadow of the cloud would cast a strange shadow on the mountain and I would have taken that photograph and traced that. Then suddenly you would have weird chunk or a strange line in the trace and that's quite interesting that there are influences that we aren't in control of.

10. **CW:** Can you define the role of the software in this work?

MN: I have covered that, but I think it's important to say that much like using the gyroscope in the cell phone and in relation to my using pen and paper I could have just as well drawn or asked a model to stand and sketched that light bouncing off the person, look at the light and draw lines myself physically, it would have been a very different thing. But in this case the software allowed me to things in a very short space of time. It was very focused set up. So the whole idea is that the software allows me to prepare the scene, turn it on and let something happen; as opposed to me sitting as an artist and drawing something, so the process had shifted. I think what is so important about developing software for the purposes of something, is that your process changes based on the software and you use the software to change the process. The moment you change your process, not only does your end product change obviously, but your whole concept around the work changes. So if I'd done this in pen and paper, I would never have explored certain things like light for example, the fact that I'm doing this on laptop screen and printing it is one thing. The fact that it's on a laptop screen and it's got an internal light is meaningful in how I read the image and how I engage with the image and that changes my understanding of the work

at the end of the day. The notion of software is quite an important thing, or the role of software is quite an important one beyond just it just being a tool. It influences who you are and how you operate in that moment of the art work.

11. **CW:** How does the exhibiting of the work alter the way in which it's manifested and received?

MN: Especially with this work, with **Relational**, a lot of people have said to me that I should set up a more performative setting, which I might still do, although I guess I have done it, with a small number of visitors where I've been in a dark room and I've set up some lights. I've had people watching and I've literally created a drawing with it. Not as an illustration of how I do it, but of a performance because it is quite a fun things moving around with light suddenly this image forms and you project this image up and you place the camera in such a way that it captures the projection so there's kind of evolution of the work. So I've done some semi performative work like that, that is meant for a small audience. But unfortunately the moment you illustrate it and I did it for the show where I exhibited these works at AOP [Art on Paper, Johannesburg] and people go 'Oh I get it'. There's a real destructive moment when people look at a work that's is hanging on the wall and go 'I know how you made that' as a focus of their conversation as opposed to 'Oh wait a minute, I see a figurative form there, I see a light there, what does it mean? There's a sense of perspective. What is that figure doing? How do you read that figure in relation to it'. If I'd drawn those things, no one would ask about how I did it. They would all look at it and go 'This is what it means'. So very often with technology we lose the very values of why we are doing these things, the concept behind it. So, doing it as a performance works, doing it as a

print that hangs on the wall works, combining the two is deadly for me, I've noticed because it over emphasises the process, the meaning behind it.

SECTION 3: CONCEPTS and CONTEXT

This section explores the conceptual development of the work and the outcome of it in relation to the digital medium. It also looks at the global nature of the form in relation to the work and practice.

In **both works** concept such as **mapping, displacement, network, dynamic narratives, journeys and translation** are dealt with and emerge.

12. **CW:** Do you think that these concepts

Mapping

Displacement

Network

Dynamic

Narratives

Journeys

Translation

which emerge are linked to your being a South African artist, the medium, your global positioning or all of them?

MN: All of them relate to me being a South African, but I wouldn't say that if I was from anywhere else that I wouldn't find these terms interesting or I wouldn't engage with them in some way. I think it's also a trend that's been happening over the last years, where issues like mapping, displacement and networks are obvious because of the global issues of

forced migration and the influence of foreigners in different contexts, its part of being a global citizen nowadays. In every city you'll have a neighbourhood that's got a group of foreigners, so the moment you have that situation you engage in that, you will look at all of those terms and try and make sense of it in terms of the context. So artistically one could ignore that and not deal with it. I find it interesting because it defines who I am and where I position myself. Funnily enough even though I've been working in these ways in the last fifteen years, it was only post myself conscious moment where I was sitting between the city lights and the stars. And I was saying 'Where do I exist between these two spaces and how do I define myself as a human being in this context?' that I then started to think critically of these terms and really write about them in my own work and bring them into my won work, before hand they were just natural. I dealt with translation in 1994 in some of the works I was doing. It's only now that I look back at it that I can make sense of these things, it's because globally there's a shift towards, a merging of all of these terms, to say that it is part of who we are as citizens of the world. We deal with it on a daily basis whether we like it or not and whether we can move across borders or not we still deal with it. The fact that we turn on our television deals with each one of these things. There's an understanding that I have now of how I am influenced my every day experience of these terms and how my work changes.

13. **CW:** Does the use of the digital as a medium or a tool for your artworks affect your concept? How and why?

MN: I would like to think that I have an idea and then I find the medium or the tools to suite the idea, that's always what I preach; 'Oh this is how I make art.' But very often we know, you have an idea 'well I can't fly' even though my idea is to fly through the air and

sprinkle fairy dust on everyone, I can't fly and I don't have fairy dust. How do I find an alternative solution to do that and then you start looking at the medium. But I could film myself in front of a green screen and then have myself fly and have Tinker Bell to give me some dust from the Disney movie and super impose that. This is a really bad example, please don't quote it. So then you use a tool to translate the thing. The moment you do that you step into the space of and the context of the digital, I would call it. I always talk about being influenced by my context; Hilbrow, Johannesburg, South Africa etc zooming out. I'm influenced by what's around me and how it affects me, the moment you step into the digital context and you hold a camera in your hand, or you hold a camera in your hand, or you in front of a green screen or whatever it is you're doing, you immediately immerse yourself in that. So you are influenced by the little recorder that you are holding your hand that's busy recording your voice just simply by the form that it is, the fact that there's a screen on it, you have a million ideas around that. If you didn't have this object, I believe that the work would shift in the way that it does. So I would say that it affects the outcome of the work and essentially it does affect the concept, because it influences you one way or another, like everything else.

14. **CW:** Does this relate to the global nature and characteristic of the medium? If so why, if not why?

MN: It does, I'm going to go back to turning on a television or the internet, typing in 'www anything.com' you suddenly realise that you are going to get bombarded by imagery, stories, narratives, by translations, by maps, by dynamic narratives, by displacements that are going to shift the way that you think about the subject. It is very interesting that nowadays we are so obsessed with plagiarism; especially at university level because the

medium is available and you're suppose to have original thought. The whole point is that the more we are connected, the more we tap into other people's thinking and the more we engage in the digital medium. The more we do that the more we realise, the more we specialise more and more and more and more we only deal with our own personal opinion of something. We no longer talk about a generalised notion of stuff because information will always contradict what we are saying. So I often find that when I make a generalised I go online and I search and I go 'Oh shit!' So I'm back in that world. I always have to preface something with 'my opinion is that...' It becomes interesting because it always comes back to the 'self', so while I think that for a long time online, a lot of the publications (not academic journals, I'm talking about the publishing of street journals or information websites), very often the debate on some of those sites were about a more generalised question about who we are globally etc, because that's what the net was about, especially in the nineties. What's shifted, through things like Facebook and Twitter, where it's all come back down to the personal and to the personal opinion of something. The way you sign your name, the avatar you choose etc etc, has shifted from the 1990s into the 2000s which I think is really great because what it's done is, is it's brought us back to the local context and so obviously it will affect how you think about it. You are constantly bombarded by information and getting other people's personal stories and not just the news that tells you, CNN tells you the following. You then go and read Aljazeera and you get onto BBC, you go onto some blog sites and you go 'oh shit, there's a whole other world out there'. Suddenly one subject gets 50 000 different perspectives and the only thing you can do is draw your own conclusion from that. There's no more of that mass brain washing, it exist obviously, but as a critical artist or a critical thinker there's no more of that mass brain washing. So religion

for example gets questioned in the same way simply because there are so many different perspectives on the same thing. Anyway I could into another thing, but I won't.

The digital as a medium is connected to the global dynamic, therefore working with this medium reflects this. I am interested in whether or not the artist makes this part of their process and intended outcomes.

15. **CW:** The medium is part of your process, for you does the work of art exist in the result and the outcome when you finally show your work (exhibiting) or does it exist in the process of creating, in the interaction that the medium allows for (Google Earth and the light sensitive software)?

MN: It exists regardless, it always exists. It's a complex one, how do you show processes and outcomes without the outcome being influenced by the process. So for example if you do a performance, at the end of the day a performance is a performance, to then show documentation is another type of outcome. So very often when you are making work and you are very self conscious of the fact that 'the making of the work', the process itself is an artistic thing then the translation of it becomes simply the end product. Now I personally would like people to know a little bit about the process to help them understand that the moment I'm sitting doing something is in itself is a therapeutic thing or is an aggressive thing or is a strange thing, you know? For example in Mount Tiede in contrast to Google earth traces I did rubbings where I took paper and just on the black rock and I took graphite and I rubbed these things and I got these very textured pieces of paper which were scratched and broken and all the rest of it. The very act of doing that influenced my drawing style when I came back to Johannesburg and I sat in my studio and I did drawings because I

ended up doing scratchy types of drawings. I would like to argue that being up on that mountain, in the heat of the day, doing a rubbing on the rock with this incredible view around me, questioning why I'm on this volcano, what it means; are all things that have influenced me. So an exhibition very often shows these different aspects, if you look at One Moment as an exhibition, it doesn't just have the Google Earth trace on it, it's got a myriad of different objects on it which all relate to the process which got me to all of the work. So Google Earth influenced the others, so what's difficult about looking at the medium and the process in relation to the end product, that's probably the biggest challenge we have as artists. How do you distil what you're going through in the creative process or a moment of inspiration to actually make the end product, if the medium can help you do that, through that step by step, routine for making work, if the work doesn't at the end of the day show something of that process, I personally am quite disappointed. Sometimes it's about allowing the medium to peep out on the side; it's a bit like doing a website and allowing bit of code at the bottom that's on the front end and then people think 'Oh God, they made a mistake there's some code on the foreground', but actually sometimes that is the thing that reveals a little bit about how it was made and sometimes that is more interesting than just a facade, the backend becomes more interesting. I saw a beautiful embroidery the other day and looking at the front it's amazing but when you turn that thing around, it's just totally, its like the zeros and ones behind the image. If you can understand the aesthetics of the zeros and ones then you can understand the process. It doesn't matter that you not seeing the final image, but then you have the opportunity to see both. To this day I am still looking for the artwork that allows you to see both the process and the end product. It's an impossible task, but more and more I'm working in the work that I make towards that. So Google Earth is that, its raw line, my drawing in a book when my pen's bouncing around while I'm driving,

in motion is that raw moment, that raw movement and whatever influences me to do these marks. So I'm trying and I don't necessarily think the audience understands it because a lot of people love the in motion drawings, some of them sold that's not necessarily an indication, a lot of people appreciated them, but hey struggled to take the next step and say 'this is a valuable artwork' as oppose to this a process drawing pr this is actually a drawing. I would say it takes a lot of education of your audience and a lot of education of yourself to make sense of that, so get to that end product which reflects both.

16. **CW:** The digital medium is a networked medium and global form does your process reflect this, or is simply about the medium and exploring its own potential?

MN: I think my process does reflect it, even though I'm not producing at the moment networked art in a sense of something that tangibly uses the network infrastructure that's there such as Gmail or Facebook or whatever. The fact that I'm not producing art that uses the networked culture, I do believe that one produces something and there is already a network around what you produce simply because other people are producing in the same way or around the same subject. So again you're not producing in isolation, you produce and embed in a context; that digital context or that technological context and in this case, it's the networked context. I could be more confident in answering this question in saying yes if I was making a work right now that connected my cell phone to a server somewhere that influenced 50 000 people doing something, like one does with twitter, but as artwork. I could then say that I'm doing something that engages myself and graphics that you could download, yes in 2002 or 2003 that was something I guess that was using the network as a platform for connectivity and interaction and I could then say yes to that question. So with my shift and in terms of looking more at how I produce and my personal process and not

thinking necessarily that it's important to publish it. For example I opened a Twitter account and I've got three followers and I don't actually publish anything because I don't actually care to announce to anybody what I'm doing the only reason why I opened it is because I get my news in the morning from Aljazeera and my Twitter account and then I can read it. As oppose to me publishing outwards, I don't see it necessarily, unless I want to use it as a strategic [device]. I don't know if people want to know that I'm having an interview with you and eating muesli at the same time. They might, but if I felt it was important as an artist as an artistic thing, then maybe I would be making networked culture. Until I've got something that I really want to transmit, that I think is important enough to transmit, that I would want everyone's pockets to be ringing with this is what's happening or this is how this artist is interacting with me. Until then I feel that just by feeling the global system of our digital art works or art practice in general, just by feeling it we are naturally networking in that way and we are part of the network medium. It's a roundabout answer, there's no yes or no, I think the definitions are blurry because I don't think we aren't ever not part of that network anymore.

17. **CW:** Do you think there is a need to classify or position your work within a global context? Why?

MN: If you plan to engage with a global audience, then yes; with people, who understand more than just the local context, then yes. Would it be important to land in remote little village and make work about a global environment? I don't know if that's necessary. But, if you then take what you make in that little village and you publish it outwards and you dealing with a global audience, surely you need to find a relational way in translating to these people that are outside of this village and not just talking about some

random thing that no one else will understand because it's so localised. So I think a lot of it has to do with why you produce work and who you producing for at the end of the day. Whether it's purely for yourself and global issues are part of what you're dealing with as an artist, then yes. I am working like that, because I do often ask very existential questions and not just 'why is it sunny in Johannesburg today?' as oppose to... well I guess that is existential question. Not to do with such localised things that one can't access in other places. I do think that one always has to question one's position in relation to a global audience.

CW: But does the medium not allow for that or require that?

MN: No, like with Twitter, I don't have to do it. Just because I use it incoming doesn't mean that I'm not using it, just means that I'm using it for my purposes only, which is a very localised purpose. I receive information to me. I'm not broadcasting outwards, so my position globally is for my own benefit. It's not for me to say to everyone else 'this is how I feel about the latest article that was published on the killings in Mali'. I could do that, in which case I'm using it to announce my localised perspective of a global debate that's going on. I guess the very fact that you're connected to the media means you're always relating to the global, but that doesn't mean that you are classifying or defining your position.

CW: or that of your work?

MN: or that of my work. So if I do some drawings that are only relevant to Johannesburg and I show them here in a room somewhere and I don't' ever decide to show them anywhere else, that is totally fine with me I don't have to constantly do that. But if part that work is something that can be announced and is relevant somewhere else then maybe I would want to position it somewhere else. Like the One Moment show, I've never actually gone back to the Canary Islands and asked them if they'd like the work because it

was a personal moment to me and I went through it, needed the exhibition to immerse myself in the end product of that journey and I shared it with those around me that I wanted to share it with and then the show was over and I packed it all away, some works disappeared to different people, it kind of dispersed. If I was truly concerned with my global position and my work at every step of the way, I would have taken it and packaged it so well. I guess it sits on the internet, but that's not where it is.

CW: but by classifying yourself as a global artist do you not automatically place all the work that you produce [in a global position]?

MN: No, because you're influenced globally, but you don't publish globally. You choose your audience. This comes back to the question of South Africa, we are so critical of how we position ourselves from the bottom tip of Africa, we always have to connect somewhere, which is a good thing because it means we also have to question why we sometimes jump over a whole continent just to get to Europe and that is such a bizarre thing that our connections are through so many borders to connect to some kind of remote art institute in some foreign country that we negate communication to the very people around us. If you look at the notion of art in this context and the critical questions about how art is being accepted in this context, you start asking whether you should be positioning yourself in a global context or whether you should just say 'Whoa slow down, let me start at home'. Public art in Johannesburg is an example; yes we can go and make the greatest, most grand, bizarre, crazy, Frank Gery sculpture, but at the end of the day, if it doesn't relate to anyone here, then why do it. Then you're positioning it in a global culture but the local culture [doesn't] really understanding what it's all about. That's kind of the two edged sword. I'm not sure. I wouldn't want my work to be misunderstood in a global culture because people don't understand the local context. So if I'm making a work about race in

this county it has a very different meaning to if I'm doing a work about race in the Canary Islands or if I'm doing work about race in the United States, just by doing it and then explaining why it's more relevant and positioning it within the States as if you were to do the following in the States as a way of explaining it. Maybe I should show it where it's relevant and not worry about how it's received in other places. I don't know, it's an interesting question. This is not an answer, more an open ramble of free thought; I'm trying to figure it out myself. The medium itself, in certain places is also imposed. So the work using Processing is meaningless to someone who doesn't know software exists. If I was using Paint on Windows, or the equivalent on Mac, they don't have an equivalent, but the sort of cheap nasty drawing program, like so many artists have don't Carmen Platter, Robert Hodgins did a whole animation with it etc, if I was using that and anyone could look and say 'Ah I've been on paint, I can relate to it', but there's a very different relationship, not everyone, but those who have the technology. There's a very different relationship when you start going to another level and you start bringing in some alternative things, like Processing. Processing has already started to become part of the everyday of the digitally aware programmer or student in the department or artists and then you bring in another programs or you write your own script or your own software that takes it another level; so you become more and more exclusive as you go in. I guess the more exclusive you go in, the more you are going to attract people who are in that same exclusivity in terms of how they work and how the medium operates; so it means that the network becomes tighter and tighter. That network, is most likely not a local one, that is most likely a global one. That act means that you are connecting yourself globally and then you have to explain your context in relation to someone else. So the fact that I am using, let's talk about Arduino, now you get them in South Africa but for a long time you didn't. The fact that you couldn't get them

meant if you had an installation artist living in the States that wanted to [work with you] and use Arduino you would have to ask if he or she could ship you one. Then you start explaining how that's relevant. So instead you don't make work with an Arduino anymore. You just take a piece of cardboard and you draw a little thing on it and you say 'this is my thing and you make it over there'. Or whatever. So that in itself is an interesting process and it influences the work. So yes, in that case the technological medium always has coming with it that connectivity to the global market or peer group that you are working with, especially in the digital arts scene in the local context where there is no strong scene that actually carries itself, you always have to tap into other places for it to carry you as an artist. Then yes, you always have to position yourself. I gave you two answers.

Thank you very much!