

SOUTH AFRICAN TAXI HAND SIGNS

DOCUMENTING THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TAXI HAND
SIGNS THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGY AND ART, INCLUDING THE
INVENTION OF A TACTILE SHAPE-LANGUAGE FOR BLIND PEOPLE

Susan Eve Woolf

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Susan Eve Woolf

December 2013

To my beloved husband Ronald who supports me with strength, love and kindness
and ensures that anything worth doing is possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABSTRACT

This study documents and analyses the first established record of taxi hand signs and their respective destinations in South Africa. It demonstrates how taxi hand signification developed into a useful language over time, out of a desperate need for transport amongst black, multi-cultural and multi-lingual people living in South Africa. Its central objective is to recognise taxi hand signs as metaphors for processes of history in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. This is a study that crosses disciplinary boundaries and marries fine art, anthropology and philosophy in exploring new meanings and understandings of taxi hand signs. In this way, it demonstrates the extent to which art informs other disciplines in extraordinary ways, adding to the value of inter-disciplinary research.

The research indicates that taxi signs are part of an evolving, well-functioning, gestural language for sighted commuters. It goes further to probe the question of how blind commuters might have access to the signs, thereby enhancing their independence and movement. The study responds to this question through the design of a new, tactile shape-language of taxi hand signs for blind people.

Qualitative research techniques were employed throughout the three phases of the research, namely: preliminary research, research design, and social and fine art responses. The methodologies utilised in the phases were sampling, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These were each employed at specific times to meet specific needs of different phases. I, along with some co-researchers, applied these in taxi ranks, taxi associations and on the streets of Gauteng. The methods used attest to the fact that when new knowledge was sought with key informants in the taxi industry, the different methodologies could be used to verify and corroborate the informants' information, which in turn become the keystones of knowledge distribution in the thesis. With limited documentation on the emergence of taxi hand signs in the industry, the informants furnished unexplored background information, which I have interpreted in my artworks, films, books, stamps, maps and the blind shape-language.

The anthropological research also probed the function of signification through literary criticism. This involved an investigation of the components of the process of signification into its constituent parts in order to conceptualise and contextualise taxi hand signing and its particular relations and narrative content within the greater field of gestural signification.

The response of art and artists to anthropological, historical and current approaches was also explored, again to provide context to my art that evolved out of the research. These involved conceptual and graphic art interpretations probing movement, time, space and signification, which led to an art exhibition at the Wits Art Museum (henceforth referred to as WAM) from 12 June to 14 July 2013.

Taxi hand signs are continually evolving as new destinations and narratives arise. Together with the art responses document, this thesis records and promotes the established body of the current taxi hand signs, destinations and narratives, for both sighted and blind people, by providing written, visual and sensory evidence of a cultural phenomenon that was previously uncharted.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND RATIONALE

The objective of this dissertation is to discover taxi hand signs previously not recorded and to augment and reinforce the information gathered and published over the past four years. The intention of this research is to explore taxi hand signification as a means of communicating destinations between commuters and taxi drivers and to examine their significance as silent, functional, historical and narrative-inspired gestures. The aim is to reflect the culture of ‘inventiveness’ that embodies the concept of taxi hand signs in Gauteng. This study will situate taxi hand signs in social spaces by analysing why and by whom the gestures were established and how they are used, communicated, learned and narrated for both sighted and blind commuters.

This thesis illustrates how creative artistic approaches bridge the gap between disciplines in a way that supports and deepens the theoretical and intellectual components and the artistic responses. The research further aims to determine

how taxi hand signs describe and define the social, spatial and historical dynamics in the overall symbolic landscape of Gauteng. A commuter uses a taxi hand sign to summon the taxis by coding where he/she wants to be transported to. The place or the destination that the commuter wants to go is the referent. The taxi hand gesture is the sign the commuter is using to indicate his/her intention to go to that place. The extent to which taxi hands describe or inform this symbolic landscape through the narratives that are embedded in them is a recurring object of my research. The hand signs are investigated in the context of a shifting field of urban cultural practices and understandings that has shaped the taxi industry as we know it today.

There appears to be no written information on actual taxi hand signs, either in South Africa or abroad, with little or no other research focused on the destinations that correspond to the direction indicated by the taxi hand signs. The interpretation of the taxi gestures as a distinct gestural language and the rich narrative content of the signs begs them to be studied more carefully. No other books on this subject had been published prior to my *Taxi hand signs* book in 2007. Nor has there been another graphic shape-language for blind people like *The Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* and the next *Taxi Hand Sign* booklet and taxi destination map published in 2010.

I have acknowledged and documented the signs' invention by individuals in the South African commuting public and provided insights into a 'language' that is well-known to millions of black South Africans but is a little-known phenomenon amongst non-users of minibus taxis, particularly the white South African population.

Taxi drivers, sighted commuters and blind commuters are included in the study. I argue that as an experiential object of enquiry contemporary art has epistemological potential and critical implications for anthropological representation (Becker 1982; Marcus and Myers 1995; Schneider and Wright 2006: 18). I amplify how the artistic and dynamic tensions between art and anthropology with their creative and valid research endeavours bring new ideas

and new information to the surface in a challenging and absorbing way. My experiences through active anthropological research with people in the streets of the city, in taxis and taxi ranks, at taxi associations and with blind commuters have altered and informed my understanding of taxi hand signification linguistically and from an artistic perspective. This study both adds to and deepens linguistic and artistic knowledge. It has further entrenched my commitment to uncover, through the accounts of commuters and taxi operators, the narratives of the taxi hand signs against the political and historical background of taxi transport in South Africa.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the socio-cultural background of taxi hand signs within the minibus public transport arena in Gauteng? How does this gestural language function as a semiotic code within the expressive and symbolic landscape of public culture?

1.4 TAXI SIGNIFICATION: THE STORY

An estimated 65% of the millions of commuters in South Africa use taxi hand signs daily, as a way of indicating their intended destination to the minibus taxi drivers (Fobosi 2013: 4). By the 1980s taxi hand signs were an integral part of the minibus taxi transport landscape in South Africa but few people stopped to wonder about this gestural language.

For eleven years until 2004, my art studio was in Braamfontein, Johannesburg on the top floor of a warehouse. My route home every afternoon was along Louis Botha Avenue, where hundreds of minibus taxis driving north and south weave in and out of traffic at will, hooting perpetually to attract commuters' attention. Taxi drivers stop at any place on the road, double park, ignore no-go areas and yellow lines or block the flow of traffic for as long as it takes to pick up passengers along the way. I became increasingly aware of the many people gesturing to taxi drivers with different hand signs during those many years traveling on that road. I became fascinated and curious about the existence of this obviously successful, intrinsically South African form of interaction. I wondered about how many signs there were, when and by whom these signs were learned and communicated. Had

the destinations and hand signs been documented? To what extent were taxi hand signs a curiosity for people who have their own means of transport? I wondered if taxi hand signs constituted a ‘language’ and how this form of communication compares to other established gestural languages, like sign language for deaf people.

My first objective was to document all the taxi hand signs and their associated destinations, while reserving the more opaque aspects of the phenomenon of taxi hand signs for a broader and deeper research strategy. Thus began a process of documentation that has taken several years.

In 2004 our family home was renovated and I finally acquired my own art studio. Every day the builders on the property would leave their worn shoes or boots and yellow plastic builders’ gloves, strategically placed on steel reinforcement poles, only to be worn again on subsequent workdays. The image of yellow gloves on poles shaped my ideas for representing the taxi hand signs with coloured gloves, and I photographed them.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There appeared to be no other documentation on taxi hand signs when in late 2004 I approached Phillip Jordaan at Blind SA² with some drawings of a shape-language for blind people to be able to know the taxi hand signs. Jordaan suggested that I continue working with my designs for taxi hand sign shape-language for blind people, and requested simplified graphic renditions of the shapes in a programme suitable for a tactile embossing process – that is a process used for textured illustrations, not braille text. Jordaan’s transfer of the shape-language graphics to a uniformly dotted form of embossing³ on computer made the tactile shapes on paper possible. Subsequently the basic shape-language for

² Known previously as SABWA, the South African Blind Workers Association. Also known as the South African Council for the Blind and SA Blind.

³ The tactile embossing for Woolf’s *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* was done by Philip Jordaan and Rudolph Lubbe at Blind S.A.

blind people was developed, tested and reshaped under the guidance of blind employers at Blind SA, Wellington Pike,⁴ Johannes Dube and some of their blind musician friends that I met with in Yeoville.⁵

I continued to gather information on taxi hand signs and their corresponding destinations. In February 2005 my first arranged interview with a taxi driver took place with Zeblon Simelane from the Taxi Association DORLJOTA.⁶ Pike introduced Simelane to me and we met on several occasions. I learned that drivers and commuters only know two or three taxi hand signs. Drivers may only know the one sign for the destination to which they are taking their passengers, while commuters would need to know only those that were needed to get them to their destinations. It became clear that the kind of comprehensive information on the taxi signs that I was looking for could not be gleaned from taxi drivers alone. Many drivers like Simelane were not comfortable introducing an '*umlungu*'⁷ like me to his superiors in the organisation. It seemed that an alternate way would have to be found to gather information on taxi hand signs. I decided to work from the 'top' down, by meeting with the directors of the taxi associations to gather their opinions and seek their guidance as to how, and with whom, to proceed in my research. In 2006 an appointment was set up with Simphiwe Ntuli from the Johannesburg City Council to show him the prototypes of what was at that time referred to as my *étaxi handbook* and *blind étaxi handbook*. No progress was

⁴ Pike had been the blind guide for Willem Boshoff's art library *Blind Alphabet*. As initiator and Project Manager (together with South African/Atlantan, Lesley Price) of the exhibition entitled *South African Art to Atlanta: Common and Uncommon Ground*, I obtained 80 of Boshoff's, 360 sculpted art works from the 'C' group, for the Atlanta Cultural Olympiad art exhibition in 1996. The curator was Steven Sack, who chose to exhibit forty South African artists' works at the enormous art gallery space within the *City Gallery East* building belonging to the Atlanta City Council. The art of Karel Nel, William Kentridge, Kim Berman, Zandile Zulu, Peter Mthombene, Makgabo Helen Sebidi and other South African artists, who today are well known and established in the local and international art scene, was shown on this exhibition.

⁵ South African Blind Musicians' Association. Address: 34 Frances Street Yeoville, Gauteng, South Africa. Available from: www.sadma.org.za/about.html

⁶ Zeblon Semilane was a member of DORLJOTA [Dobsonville, Roodepoort, Leratong, Johannesburg Taxi Association]. I had previously obtained the Draft Constitution of DORLJOTA, a confidential but interesting document that demonstrates the formalities and codes of conduct demanded by the association.

⁷ In isiXhosa and isiZulu, umuntu / *umlungu* means 'European' a white person (Ngcobo 2012: 24).

made with the City Council despite further meetings.⁸ However, I acquired a pamphlet that the Johannesburg City Council had produced on fourteen taxi hand sign destinations.

Most constructive was the reception and guidance from Eric Motshwane,⁹ the chairman of the GJRTC (Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council). He introduced me to Patrick Mphephu and Shirley Khunou¹⁰ who both in their separate capacities were able to guide me as to where to go and to whom to speak in terms of taxi hand sign information and corresponding destinations. Mphephu was the chairman of the Taxi Liaison Committee (TLC) and dispute manager for all the government taxi associations and Top Six Taxi Associations in Soweto (TOP 6). He met me on several occasions over a two-year period, allowing me to record his life history. Both Mphephu and Khunou became key informants in my research endeavours advising and accompanying me into various townships to meet people in the taxi industry.

⁸ The Johannesburg Development Agency had produced a pamphlet with fourteen photographs of taxi hand signs across a grid formation. I met Simphiwe Ntuli and Alfred Sam on 23 November 2006. Although Sam wanted to use my taxi hand signs for the sighted and blind, there was no response to my letter offering to make this a joint project. *Taxi Hand Signs*, the first ever book of taxi hand signs for sighted and blind people was published and given to the main libraries in South Africa in 2007. Months later I received a phone call from Eric Motshwane, chairman of the GJRTC (Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council) to go with him to meet two people from the City Council, Theodora Borman and Lindiwe Ndovela. They asked me directly if they could use my taxi hand signs from the book in their leaflet because my book was already in the public domain and they could obtain the information from the Library if they wanted it. I told them that they could not use the signs without my permission.

⁹ Once a taxi driver himself, Motshwane became chairman of the GJRTC (Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council). By 2008 he owned five vehicles, which operated between Soweto township and Johannesburg city centre. As a result of the taxi wars in Johannesburg in the late 1990s between the GJRTC and Top Six Taxi Associations in Soweto, Motshwane, who is married with two children, had to go into hiding. Since 2010 there have been issues relating to the introduction of the compulsory new government taxis, as well as the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit system). The South African government envisaged a bus operating system to be a viable instrument to formalise the minibus taxi industry. "It was a complex engagement where the stakes were high: a 12-year contract, offering a transformative shift from the informal minibus taxi industry into a corporate world of state-of-the-art bus operations" (McCaul and Ntuli 2010). There were nine taxi associations and over 500 association members bought into the first phase of Rea Vaya. The government financed their ownership stake in part through a taxi recapitalisation scheme, whereby taxi owners allowed their vehicles to be scrapped and handed in their operating licences" (Cityscope Global News). Available from: <http://citiscopes.org/website>. In 2007 there were 25 000 taxi drivers in the city, and about 100 taxi associations. Available from: <http://www.joburg.org.za>, accessed on 14/11/2013.

¹⁰ See APPENDIX B. Informants and research methods: Summary.

In 2006 I met Rams Morate, the chairman of the Witwatersrand African Taxi Association (WATA)¹¹ and a Mr Skosana, the chairman of the Faraday Taxi Association¹² on three occasions with eighteen of his taxi Squad car members, Queue marshalls and executives. I photographed each driver who showed me the hand sign and corresponding destination of his route. Few of these drivers spoke English. Khunou from the GJRTC accompanied me on the first meeting and explained my intentions in isiXhosa, isiSotho and isiZulu. Researchers who collectively speak several African languages have on occasions accompanied me to taxi associations, taxi ranks and on the streets where people are catching taxis.

By 2007 I had produced a taxi hand sign book for libraries with taxi hand signs and destinations for sighted and blind people. I had developed tactile shapes, the various combinations of which coded for the taxi hand signs and could easily be read by blind people. My research intensified in 2008 and when I enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009, I took the decision to research and write a thesis across the disciplines of art and anthropology. This period of investigation entailed reading, writing, painting and other creative research methods. Aspects of history, politics and literature related to signification and became critical in understanding taxi hand signs as a unique form of communication in South Africa. The *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* was published in 2009 and launched at Museum Africa at the opening of the exhibition *L'Afrique*. Signs for the blind and painted taxi gloves went public on the South African National Commemorative Stamp of 2010, and were exhibited at the Standard Bank Art Gallery in Johannesburg. The second *Taxi hand sign* booklet for sighted people was launched simultaneously.

¹¹ Members of Soweto Taxi Services broke away from STS and formed Ikwezi Taxi Association in 1972 with Bob Gumede was the chairperson. The first Chairperson of WATA was Dr. Jeffery Madi.

¹² Faraday Taxi Association has been known as an organisation often involved in disputes. From the *Mail and Guardian* in 2007 titled Jo'burg taxi operators blame registrar for violence: "Taxi operators on Wednesday blamed the registrar for public transport in Gauteng for violence that erupted between two taxi groups vying for the Clearwater Mall route west of Johannesburg. The Faraday Taxi Association and [DORLJOTA] the Dobsonville, Roodepoort, Leratong, Johannesburg Taxi Association said the registrar had failed to decide who could use the route". Available from: <http://mg.co.za/author/staff-reporter> , accessed on 10/06/2012

I have over a period of nine years approached commuters in the streets around the city centres and in taxi ranks and townships, engaged people and arranged interviews with taxi drivers to enquire about the signs. A deepening of my research on the landscape in which taxi hand signs emerged in South Africa occurred when I met and interviewed taxi drivers, operators and taxi owners, the self-appointed veterans of the taxi industry in the late sixties, seventies and eighties. Their personal oral histories and material documented on South African events, politics, society and history went far beyond anything that could be incorporated in this thesis. This contextual research is part of a landscape in which taxi hand signification may begin to be understood and narrated within the two disciplines of art and anthropology.

1.6 DIVERSE AREAS OF INVESTIGATION

I began with the story of how my research in taxi hand signs first started and discussed the interaction with the people who consider taxis, taxi hand signs and taxi transport their material domain. These may have been commuters who signal to use minibus taxis to commute across the city, or taxi drivers and taxi operators whose livelihoods are entwined in the transport industry. The previous section explained how this investigation into the phenomenon of taxi hand signs was set in motion. This thesis investigates taxi hand signs in Gauteng and also what they mean in the context of South African society and culture. It is the product of art, of creative, open and lateral thinking, applying the vertical and horizontal view that art and anthropological research demand, and the diverse literary component that likewise enrich the result.

It became important to me to theorise a specific formula as to how signification between the commuter and the taxi driver could be understood and described as a successful means of communication. I needed to investigate signification through semiotic theory and to show that mathematics and information technology were important in reinforcing the notions of hand gesture in general and the process of communication in taxi hand signs specifically.

Fine artists and literary theorists comment on social and political contexts through

their work and also deepen our understanding of gesture and signification. Taxi hand signs are a human invention, an anthropological phenomenon, which involves history and narrative and ongoing creation – a background essential to the signs themselves. Through fine art and anthropological means, the branches of knowledge that I chose to explore in this thesis have been documented and expanded, in order to comprehend and share with others the knowledge of the culture of taxi hand signs for sighted and blind people. These different disciplines enhanced my comprehension of the complexity and meanings of taxi hand signs. The diverse branches of knowledge requisite for me to research were philosophy, history, literature (including a tactile blind language), mathematics and computer information.

A specific style and writing strategy could not be applied to the entire document. It resulted in my style of writing altering to the extent appropriate to the subject matter in that chapter. For instance, when writing the introductory story of how I began researching the taxi hand signs, I use an informal narrative style in line with the way commuters who take taxis engage with each other to find out the taxi hand sign for their destination. When writing up the research methods in chapter 2, I need to be descriptive and to use terminology appropriate to anthropological methodologies. It would have been inappropriate, in this chapter, to use quotations. Chapter 3, which is the background to the taxi industry, includes many factual references but also requires quotes from the informants who gave me information when they were interviewed. Chapter 8, Blind language, was purely graphic, descriptive and factual. However, included in the technological and literature chapters, respectively chapter 5 and 6, are the theories necessary to support my argument, which extend to the critical analysis and interpretation in the art chapters (6, 7 and 10), that calls for a more personal approach. The common thread that holds the chapters together is the emphasis on logical and well-considered evidence.

There is no separate literature review for this thesis because my response to the theorists that affected my thinking is embedded in the related chapters. The diversity of the chapters illustrates all the elements that contributed towards my

own broader and deepened understanding and the creative response it provoked.

Chapter 2 describes the research methodology, using qualitative research methods, which are the overarching methodological approach that encourages a diverse view of taxi hand signs in the context of South African society and history for this thesis. The qualitative research design encourages a lateral thinking approach to the world and assumes that there are a multitude of relevant objects of analysis, both materially and socially constructed that are appropriate to the complexities of taxi signification. Preliminary research, the research design and the social and fine art responses, are the three phases of the research design for this chapter. In phase one, sampling methods used in the taxi ranks,¹³ taxi associations and streets of Gauteng were used to gather information on the signs and destinations. In phase two, the weight and purpose of semi-structured interviews, the second arm of the triangulation design, are underscored. For a subject that is so much a part of many people's lives, yet where so little has been documented, the informants' experiences and narratives gleaned from the interviews were an invaluable asset to the research, a veritable keystone of information. The core content revealed by each of the informants is pivotal to understanding the emergence of taxi signification and provides a deepened understanding of the taxi scenario. Participant observation in phase three illustrates the responses to the research and the research extended throughout all the phases, but especially in relation to a tactile shape-language, which was designed to enable blind people to read the taxi hand signs. The responses through the artworks, books, stamps and conceptual art are outlined in this chapter.

The background to the taxi industry is examined in Chapter 3. It focuses on the cab/taxi trade in the early twentieth century, the history, politics and the government's restrictive laws and regulations. Here I argue that the emergence of the taxis and hand signs per se, were entrenched in the colonial narratives as well as in the issues of class and material realities of the apartheid era. I show that as

¹³ A list of the main taxi ranks in Gauteng can be found on the official website of the Johannesburg Municipality (2013) http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&id=60

the exploration of taxi hand signs progresses, they continue to increase in numbers almost exponentially as the ‘twelfth language’ of South Africa functioning independently of the taxi industry. This is detailed in Chapter 5.

The narratives and signs that inform the formulation of taxi hand signs in Chapter 4 are the fascinating elements that differentiate taxi hand signs from other gestural languages and signification. Pictures are painted by these stories, whether they refer to the situation in a place, its history or politics. Some are descriptive of an event, a place, a place name or taxi name, a drama or a myth. They tell about the violence in the taxi industry and the demeanours of taxi drivers; how far, where to, what the place looks like, smells like, stands for, and sometimes even how little money the commuter has when asking for a ride in a taxi. The correlation that exists between taxi hand sign narratives, South African place names and naming of taxis is illustrated and discussed.

Chapter 5 tries to locate where taxi hand signs belong in the category of gesture by looking at other forms of gesture such as gesticulation, emblems and even beats. Gestures track or index the flow of the speaker’s syllables and serve as a kind of visual indicator of ongoing talk. Silent sign languages have developed amongst black teenagers in Soweto, which are significant both in the Gauteng cultural milieu and for taxi signs.

The thinking of particular semioticians, such as Saussure, Peirce and Levinas who have analysed and described signification is important. This research shows that taxi hand signs are unique in the context of their history and meaning in South Africa, both in their individual narrative content and in their intent. The semiotic theory on the process of signification and referencing to place, transferring, receiving and responding makes the conceptualisation of taxi hand sign messaging more valuable. This is because it provides the tools to analyse taxi signs and advances an understanding of how the various phases may occur in the taxi signification process towards successful communication.

Communication and message formula in mathematics, particularly in the work of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, relate to the system of signification and

gesture analysis by computer technologists that have turned their research attention to the environment and the study of communication through semiotics and linguistics. I argue particularly that through computerisation humans are themselves becoming sign vehicles in their technological environment and in an intuitive way. This chapter illustrates that there is a correlation, if not sometimes an incongruent one, between signification, as understood in aspects of mathematics and technology, and human gesturing. This encouraged my theory on the continuum of taxi hand gesturing, detailed in section 5.5 of Chapter 5. I explain the process of taxi signification from the person who provides the information on which taxi sign to use, to the signifier [the taxi hand sign], to the referent [the destination] to the addressee [the driver] who responds. I describe this in four different phases in the context of taxi gesturing technologically.

Issues of noise that play an inhibiting role in the taxi hand signification process are investigated in Chapter 5. Usually associated with loudness, noise may be a surprising and contradictory element to cite along with silent gesture. However, different kinds of noise in the environment may affect successful communication between taxi drivers and commuters. Noise in the form of echolocation for blind people is highlighted as a positive alternative method used by blind people to navigate their environment.

Chapter 6 opens a new perspective of the taxi hand signs as I examine aspects of deconstruction that, through the insights into textual matters, has encouraged a way of responding to taxi hand signification through conceptual art. A deconstructive, lateral thinking pattern may be seen in the diverse art renditions and the installations, drawings and films of my work and the four artists, William Kentridge (1955-), Willem Boshoff (1951-), Georgia Papageorge (1941-) and Nicholas Hlobo (1975-). I address taxi signification in the symbolic landscapes of public culture through the conceptual artwork SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* using techniques that create movement of the hand sign message by interfering with space in a material but spontaneous way. I examine aspects of deconstruction and art in Chapter 7 to argue that the observable and imagined presence of taxi hand signs alters our perception of the city, reaffirmed by Michel de Certeau's concepts

of ‘walking the city’ and notions of space experienced by blind and sighted people. De Certeau was French and lived and worked in a French context, however, he says that what he does can be applied to any city, where one can walk the streets and become aware of the context of that city through one’s individual collective experiences (De Certeau 1998: iv). In the context of this thesis and taxi hand signs in Johannesburg, further to being driven inside a taxi and experiencing the city this way, commuters experience the city by walking, sometimes from far, to access taxi transport and also walk again after having been dropped off.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to the language I designed for blind people to read the taxi hand signs and contribute to orientation and mobility in the city. I further explored how the use of the shape-language as shape recognition tools was addressed when I worked with the learners at Sibonile School.

All the artworks, films, books, art, sculpted works, the darkroom and installations are detailed in Chapter 10, with a comprehensive overview of the exhibition. On the first DVD there are seven films. The first three films show the art exhibition space, the walkabouts that were given to visitors in the gallery and also the public’s response to the works. The next three films on the DVD were part of the exhibition. Images including the blind shape-language, paintings, sculptures, installations and publications are catalogued on DVD 2. Chapter 10 provides the detailed information for each artwork or literary production for this thesis.

An original *DICTIONARY of Taxi hand signs* that I have created is inserted at the end of the thesis in Chapter 12. It includes all the painted and blind taxi hand signs and any event, narrative or meaning that may be associated with an individual sign.

I interviewed deaf people on three occasions to make a brief comparison with deaf sign language¹⁴. The corresponding artwork, a *Dictionary Grid*, is the pictorial composite of all the taxi hand signs and signs for the blind that was on exhibition at WAM. It is described in Chapter 10. The South African study on the blind shape-language resonates with international research on haptic experiences for the blind and was exhibited on the *Talk to Me* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. *Talk to Me* included two other exhibit submissions on communication with blind people.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The design, shape and form of the hand signs have been, and continue to be, decided upon by black commuters and taxi drivers in conversation with people in an area where taxis are deciding to operate. As silent gestures the hand signs are easily learned from other commuters or from the taxi drivers. They are accessible to everyone because language is not necessary for gestures, which are silent. As a white South African woman I am researching in the taxi transport industry, which is a predominantly black domain. Taxi hand signs have been the black person's essential means of access to the city in an urban landscape where they were otherwise historically regarded as unwanted and disposable aliens. I reflect on and address this critique directly throughout the research and in this thesis.

One objective is to challenge the racially-based prejudice of white people, (or

¹⁴ Deaf sign languages are far more established, sophisticated and complex than the taxi hand signs. Notably the dissimilarity to taxi hand signs may be evident in the historic or narrative content that has particular pertinence to South Africa and in this instance to Gauteng. A study comparing the two languages would have been too large an undertaking for this thesis. Dr Joseph Murray, as chairman of *The World Federation for the Deaf*, WFD, explains that there are 70 million deaf people who use sign language as their first language or mother tongue. A statement by the WFD further concludes that deaf language "is also the first language and mother tongue to many hearing people and some deaf blind people (tactile sign languages). Each country has one or sometimes two or more [deaf] sign languages, although different sign languages can share the same linguistic roots in the same way as spoken languages do. Sign language is not pantomime or a simple gestural code representing the surrounding spoken language. It is not an international language, but there are universal features in [deaf] sign languages. This helps to make it possible for users of different sign languages to understand one another far more quickly than users of unrelated spoken languages can". For this reason deaf sign language has been called 'International Sign' language. (Murray 2014. World Federation for the Deaf <http://wfdeaf.org/>).

specifically that of middle- and upper-class people from various racial categories who own their own vehicles), to be cognisant of the innovation and creativity of black taxi commuters and the taxi hand sign gestural language that has become so much part of the Gauteng landscape. The intention is to avoid engaging in an impossible task of decoding taxi hand signs solely for the purpose of providing awareness of the taxi hand sign language for a minority of people.

The second fundamental focus is on blind people many of whom are obliged, for lack of other transport, to use taxis. I addressed this issue by providing a tactile shape-language published in book form, which provides blind people access to the destinations and corresponding taxi signs. This provides the opportunity for a blind person to use the correct taxi gesture and to summon a taxi to his or her preferred destination. It is a way of dispelling the assumptions that sighted taxi commuters have about a blind person's ability to be independent and mobile. It challenges the presumption that limitations imposed by a disability cannot be overcome.

I recognise that the narratives, events and myths that are associated with the taxi hand signs spread by 'word of mouth' and that these have a transformative nature. There are ethical dilemmas around a certain level of subjectivity that is always present in research, in particular when creating art that intends to represent or say something about taxi hand signs in South Africa and writing about what those hand signs "do" or "mean" for others. This is especially the case when the subject matter at hand is not part of one's own daily or necessary first-hand experiences. These are concerns extended to the selection of the four artists in Chapter 6: Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo. I argue that these artists share similarities to my personal position with the taxi hand signs project, as they each investigate their selected topics from an outsider privileged position. Each of the artists shares, in aspects of their work discussed in this study, a consciousness in bringing discomfort to others in order to stimulate communication on questions of power, history and politics. Space, the trace and language are manipulated through various techniques to engage with ethical constructs of people's lives.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESPONSE

This thesis uses an overall qualitative design method to capture the extent and content of the black-innovated and utilised taxi hand sign phenomenon in Gauteng. This method is used in an endeavour to comprehend, analyse and describe the events and narratives told through research participants' perspectives as it is their knowledge and subjective experiences that comprise and populate the essence of the taxi hand sign landscape. This particular approach is reflected in phenomenological research, which falls within the qualitative design category. A socially based case study using the qualitative research approach presents 'social facts' only in so far as they are constructed through narrative. It is grounded in the assumption that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed. In this respect, it is opposed to a quantitative research approach that assumes the existence of measurable social facts that derive from a single objective reality (Maree 2012: 82).

Therefore, as opposed to quantitative research where frameworks are frequently pre-specified to expose relationships between the variables, qualitative studies may include aspects of phenomenology, ethnography, action research, case study and grounded theory. Grounded theory is an emergent methodological approach that fosters the use of theory and its development (Maree 2012: 42). As an inductive process, it focuses on creating a theory that is grounded in the data. Nothing is excluded from possible consideration as viable data. A theory may be developed around coding, constant comparison, memo writing and theoretical sampling¹⁵ (Maree 2012: 82). Grounded theory begins with the collection of data from a variety of sources from which concepts are developed. This process lends itself very much to taxi hand signification and its theoretical underpinnings within

¹⁵ 'Grounded theory' as a method of data analysis was termed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.

the context of the taxi industry.

In order to ensure the validity of the data interpretation the various yet specific sets of phenomena that taxi hand signs signify, this research uses the methodology of triangulation. Triangulation involves seeking convergence and corroboration of results from different methods and designs from the same phenomenon being studied to produce a more thorough research result (Burke and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 22).

Triangulation encompasses the use of different sources of information, which apply to a cross-section of people, attention to different times and settings, methods of observation, types of interviews, documents, researchers, theories and various types of data collection, which include recordings and transcriptions (Maree 2012: 141).¹⁶ Nevertheless it is still argued by some that public inspection may be necessary to evaluate the adequacy of standards that are applied (Burke and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 16). The use of triangulation in a lateral thinking conception leads one to unambiguous and sound conclusions.¹⁷ In the final analysis, certain common areas of information overlap. The cross-correlation of the information encourages the overall depth of understanding of taxi signs in the South African context.

There are narratives associated with many of the individual taxi hand signs that contribute to understanding the culture and context in which taxi signification has emerged. The narratives range from stories of actual events that have occurred in a place, or describe the condition of the physical place, its history or a set of facts or circumstances that surround a situation associated with the place. The taxi hand sign stories that are associated with Gauteng do not have the same meaning if

¹⁶ See, Green, Caracelli and Graham in Maree 2012: 141.

¹⁷ See, Campbell "[T]he firmness and relatively unequivocal of our knowledge of distal constructs comes through a triangulation from one or two or more operations, no one of which has priority as the criterion or the definition, and not one of which would be unequivocal without the other" (Campbell 1970: 69).

used in other cities, as they are particular to Gauteng. Narratives and narrative discourses are a vital component of the data in this study. My informants particularly have provided this thesis with new information about the emergence of taxi hand signs in the taxi transport industry and have related stories about incidents that have occurred over different periods of time, from the 1970s until today. They have offered inside information on the history and operations of taxi associations and the obstructive laws that hampered taxi mobility over time and how these obstacles were dealt with. Incidents of violent clashes between rival taxi associations over routes have been related to me by them; stories about taxi driver training and day-to-day events, relationships between commuters and drivers, stories about taxi vehicle naming and names of places. Drivers have told how they collaborate with commuters in devising new taxi hand signs. Each taxi hand sign, its relationship to place or place name, description of an event or social commentary or history have all been gleaned from informants in formal semi-structured interviews and from commuters and drivers on the streets of Gauteng.

Narrative discourse is encompassed in the context of the taxi hand signs, which is revealed through an ethical research endeavour and theoretical underpinning. Narrative is the means through which I present my analysis because as part of the 'qualitative' approach I am encouraged to recount the experiences of my informants in the same narrative way that these have been told to me. I believe that the most unpretentious and dependable way to retain some of the uncanny insights of informants is to echo the emergence of the taxi signs and what they mean in our society through writing in the same narrative way by which they were obtained.

Narratives form the backbone of this written study for both sighted and blind people using taxi hand signs. They are also the principal means through which I present my analysis in my art and films. The films taken during the interviews, as well as the films produced for the exhibition, are a record of all the narratives related to me by the informants as are the recordings and notes taken simultaneously with my recorder pen, which were all later transcribed.

The ethical aim of this thesis is to promote understanding of taxi hand signs as a commuter language and cultural heritage for all South Africans. The research matter and discursive process, interviews with people, transcriptions, techniques and materials inform the final documentation.

2.1 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH, RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESPONSE

My research and response comprised of three stages. They were:

Preliminary Research

Research Design

Social and Fine Art Response

The qualitative method is particularly suited to the investigation of taxi gestures, incorporating various techniques within the overall method in each research design phase of the investigation. The films are a crucial aspect of the research instrument for all phases.

My research design stage had three phases. They were: Phase One, Sampling, Phase Two, Semi-Structured Interviews and Phase Three, Participant Observation. Phase three is a crucial component of the triangulation design.

2.1.1 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection instruments were important for recording and transcribing accurate information. The resulting documentary film on the exhibition at WAM was a compilation of filmed material, which gave visual context to the taxi hand sign language and the investigative aspects of the research. The research tools used were a recorder pen and notebook,¹⁸ a cell phone camera and a video camera.

¹⁸ The Pulse Livescribe pen works with Windows XP SP2 or Windows Vista SP1 operating system. An infrared camera tracks everything one writes or draws on the paper and transfers notes and audio to a computer. The livescribe 'book' has pages containing millions of micro perforated 8.5" x 11" dots, which consists of my personal coded marks and scribbled texts. Audio and texts are transferred by USB connector to be stored on computer. 2007-2013. Available from: www.livescribe.com, accessed 13/07/2012.

The recorder pen and notebook are storage devices for recording sound and transcribing what has been written, drawn diagrammatically or scribbled. The pen may replace the artist's/anthropologist's 'log', which encompasses all the scribbles and texts in the research process and encourages reflexivity¹⁹, and is a way of defining something in terms of it being related in some logical way to the other (Hofstadter 1985: 412). Ultimately the use of the log or recorder pen encourages reflexivity as a research technique. The recorder pen has been a primary tool for all phases of my investigation because it has permitted accurate recordings of interviews and made possible transcriptions of what the informants had to say. With the recorder pen, corresponding texts and drawings in the notebook allowed me to capture an accurate record. The pen used in conjunction with still photographs taken with a cell phone camera proved to be most valuable in the taxi ranks, streets and in taxi associations and at interviews. It is conveniently small and easily accessible. Although the pen lacks the visual advantage of film, informants agreed readily to have it recording during interviews. Cell phones and their camera functions are so much part of everyday life that people were comfortable with having snapshots taken of the taxi hand signs known to them with its camera.

The research 'log' with recorder pen and camera facilities were comprehensive

¹⁹ I found that the recorder pen, unlike a camera, is useful because it is not noticeably present, and therefore encourages a more relaxed interview and a level of confidentiality important for reflective practice. The recorder pen archives conversations, as during my semi-structured interviews and field work in the taxi ranks. It records in minute detail and detects, to a certain extent, nuances of language and emotional content that may otherwise be lost with only a pen and paper. It can be listened to repeatedly and quoted from accurately. This accuracy includes the exact confirmation of time and place of the interviews.

ways for analysing the conversations with informants and a way of ensuring accuracy of data.

2.1.2 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Preliminary research that I undertook from 2006 to 2009 on taxi hand signs and destinations started when I met taxi drivers informally in specific public locations. It included general spontaneous conversation with any commuter who used minibus taxis to go to any place. I went into taxi ranks and met individual commuters and taxi drivers at random. I used *sampling* methods and a structured and ethically conceived way of working and engaging with taxi users and drivers, always by appointment, as will be explained in the ethics section to follow.

2.1.3 QUESTIONNAIRES

In the initial stages of this research phase, a short written prepared questionnaire was used to gather information from randomly selected commuters and taxi operators. It soon became apparent that this approach was not practical, either in the taxi ranks or on the streets and I decided to dispense with the questionnaires. This was because, first and very significantly, the taxi drivers being interviewed could not be kept for long as they were actively directing or recruiting passengers. Second, commuters were frequently on their own or in a small group signalling for a taxi in the streets or maybe in a queue in a taxi rank to catch a taxi they already knew was going in the direction they needed to go. The taxi could arrive at any given moment, and although the waiting period offered a window of opportunity with the commuter having nowhere else to go, asking people to fill in even a few short details on paper proved difficult. A recorder pen and camera used with the express permission of the person in question, was a direct, quick, informal and unthreatening method to gather data from the informants.

For the individual semi-structured interviews a questionnaire was prepared, but again, apart from the initial questions from Stage One, there was no need for quantification or comparison of data. I found the informants provided valuable information in a more relaxed conversational exchange.

The semi-structured interviews were the primary source of information. Such an exchange resulted in the gathering of data that became the most valuable resource for the thesis.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative research design for this thesis required three very specific, different phases of enquiry. They were:

Phase One, Sampling: This was the first arm of the triangulation design. In this random process, I gathered as much information as possible on the signs and destinations. I also looked for commuters and operators in the taxi industry who I could interview in the second phase.

Phase Two, Semi-structured interviews: In the second arm of the triangulation design I used each semi-structured interview to learn about the informant and to hear their stories, record and film what they had to say about their particular experiences when taking taxis, with taxi hand signs or the taxi transport industry. All of these were transcribed systematically and comprehensively.

Phase Three, Participant Observation: I extended my observation through all the phases as part of the qualitative method of enquiry, including follow-up semi-structured interviews with blind people. Importantly, in this phase participation meant a fully reciprocal arrangement whereby I met with blind people to improve the shapes for the taxi hand sign language for the blind.

Each phase took place in a different location. I used alternative methods of engagement with informants and took notes, recorded and filmed to gather information as accurately as possible. Statistical procedures or other set means of quantification appeared to be too rigid for the taxi hand sign investigation. The qualitative research method encouraged alternative viewpoints and people told me stories that otherwise I may not have been told in a more rigid setting. I was aware of the fact that the signs remain informally devised and that individual signs and their repertoire, or the whole body of signs, are expanded when taxi transport to a new route or destination is required.

It was important for the investigation that each phase be allowed to overlap so that I was open to finding new information at all times. Consequently, the investigations of each phase overlap and interrelate consistently with a view to establishing the overall Gestalt of what taxi hand signs symbolise in the context of Gauteng.

2.2.1 PHASE ONE: SAMPLING

Two kinds of sampling describe data collection for the preliminary research stage and the first phase in the research design stage. They are a) Theoretical sampling and b) Availability sampling. Theoretical sampling, widely used in grounded theory, is the first of two types of sampling that populates the research, as it fostered the collection of necessary data towards a theoretical underpinning for the thesis. The overall qualitative participatory research for this thesis also allows for the term “availability sampling” to describe the preliminary research. Availability samples are “purposive samples”, where elements are sampled in a way that information is easily accessible to the researcher and not likely to result in probability samples (Walizer and Wiener 1978: 425). The intention has been to build on the number and variety of taxi hand signs being used in Gauteng as more signs are created for new routes in unserved areas. The sampling stage relied directly on verbalised responses from questions posed to informants about taxi signs and their associated destinations.

2.2.1.1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I used ‘opportunistic sampling’ whereby one meets or selects to speak to someone randomly, even though the research processes in the taxi ranks were meticulously planned beforehand. Once inside the ranks I worked with research assistants using our strategy to approach people. The same rules applied in the streets where people use taxi hand signs to hail taxis, as well as inside taxi associations where I met drivers and operators in the industry. This approach was an important part of the overall research design because I was also able to obtain the information directly from commuters, taxi drivers and taxi operators wherever and whenever I had the opportunity. I found places where commuters were signing for taxis and was able to observe and interact. Over the years I have also made it my specific

objective to ask people met by chance in many different places to tell me which hand sign they knew or used when taking a taxi. This is perhaps an unorthodox way of collecting information from a broader sample of the population. It proved, however, to be a very useful way of casually continuing research, enabling further cross-checking of signs already documented, and alerting one to a new or as yet undocumented destination. Importantly, it has on several occasions led to the corroboration of an event or narrative associated with a taxi hand sign as exemplified in Chapter 4.

2.2.1.2 CO-RESEARCHERS, INFORMANTS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section addresses ethical considerations during the research phase and discusses one's ethical responsibilities to the university, to working with co-researchers during the different phases of the research and one's commitment and integrity when interacting with others in the field and in interview situations. The University of the Witwatersrand Ethics Committee provided approval for this study to be conducted from 2009.²⁰

2.2.1.3 RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Three research assistants worked together with me in the taxi ranks and on the streets of Gauteng, mainly in the sampling phase. The team included: 1) Peter Mthombeni (Ceramicist/Lecturer), 2) Shirley Khunou (an employee of the Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council),²¹ who assisted me at different times and

²⁰ I submitted my application to the Human Research Ethics Committee Non-Medical in 2009 and was granted clearance for research involving human participants.

²¹ Shirley Khunou was a key person in the taxi scenario and well connected with personnel and taxi operators in taxi associations. Khunou worked with Motshwane at the GJRTC when I met them in 2006. Khunou had previously worked for WATA (Witwatersrand Taxi Association) from 2003–2005. At that time all data concerning the taxi routes and destinations and all administration was still being completed manually. She transferred data to computer for them. When working for SANTACO (South African National Taxi Council) she consulted with taxi owners by assisting them in applying for bank loans to buy taxis. In 2010 she was involved with the Gauteng Transport Department organising taxis to provide transport for the Football World Cup. (Woolf and Khunou 2011: Interview). See Appendix B.

places during the investigation, 3) Zandile Mthembu (who worked for the Central Johannesburg Partnership and knew city transport well). In addition Pike and Dube, both visually impaired, worked on improving and developing the blind language in phase three of the research. The co-researchers selected were dedicated and reliable, with a cross section of skills amongst them contributing in different ways to the research.

Meetings were arranged with the 'team' of co-researchers beforehand to discuss the research aim and approach to others in the field. The terms of reference and payment were recorded and signed in a formal letter prior to the commencement of the research. The intention was to work with the team in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, to extend the code of ethics that pertained to the research team to whoever was approached with questions about the taxi hand signs while the research was being conducted. Their responsibilities and my expectations regarding the collation of a reliable collection of data and what undertaking the sampling entailed was included in the agenda. This included having to obtain permission from each informant to take photographs or record conversations. Questions to be asked, timing and transcriptions were addressed in meetings and minutes were taken, which were then e-mailed to each participant in advance. Each researcher introduced himself or herself to the informants and explained what the study was about, guaranteed confidentiality, and assured informants that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time they might wish to.

One hears many different languages spoken in the taxi ranks apart from the eleven official South African languages as thousands of people from beyond the borders of South Africa use taxis. This was an important factor to consider when meeting

taxi drivers and operators in the taxi associations and in taxi ranks. To ensure that we were communicating ethically, the researchers who accompanied me into the taxi ranks were proficient in several languages and could converse well with the informants whom they selected at random.

The research with taxi drivers, taxi rank managers and commuters was initiated in mid-2006 when I first began gathering information for the first *Taxi Hand Sign* book. I wrote to the chairmen of the various taxi associations introducing myself and asking for them to set up meetings whereby I would be introduced to the queue marshalls, squad car members and executive operators who belong to the taxi associations.

On some occasions during phase two of the research process, a co-researcher accompanied me to taxi associations and some of the trips into the townships and was able to translate our intentions and requirements to the informants. For instance, I was able to set up an appointment to meet both the chairman of Faraday Taxi Association and The Witwatersrand Taxi Association taxi operators who knew the taxi hand signs and destinations. All of these research instances required permission letters. We met groups of 18 to 20 squad car members in taxi associations. Khunou speaks English and is fluent in isiXhosa, isiSotho and isiZulu. Mthombeni is fluent in English, isiZulu and siN'debele. Our task was to ask each person for permission to interview them and take photographs for our records and to explain their rights of refusal should a person want to end their participation in the research. After each sampling investigation with individuals in a group I responded with letters of appreciation to the chairman and mailed the photographs of each person gesturing. By special arrangement²² I also worked with groups of women beaders from the HealthWise Clinic who all helped to collect data for me by filling in questionnaires on taxi hand signs and destinations

²² Sizane Xhosa runs 'Healthwise' in Houghton, Johannesburg as a health clinic and charity organisation for woman with AIDS. These women all commute by taxi and were happy to be interviewed.

to verify my records.

Permission to conduct research was mandatory to gain access to taxi ranks and researching in taxi associations. Mthembu and Khunou in their own way worked closely with the taxi community and introduced me to key people in the community. They also assisted me in acquiring access to the more established taxi ranks to film the research. Even with signed permission letters (which took many e-mails back and forward) we were refused entry to the Bree Street taxi rank on the day. Mthembu assisted me here by convincing the personnel that we should be allowed entry.

2.2.1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRATEGY

In the taxi ranks, at the offices of taxi associations and on the streets of Gauteng where we began the investigation, we sought answers to three basic questions, which were the foundation on which we built further research for this study:

- a) How many different taxi hand signs are there in Gauteng?
- b) To which destination does each hand sign refer?
- c) What meanings or narratives are associated with each sign?

2.2.1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN BRIEF

The brief for each researcher was to approach at least thirty taxi drivers and commuters in each taxi rank. The six principle objectives were to:

- a) Verify taxi hand signs and the associated destination already collated.
- b) Identify newly discovered taxi hand signs and their intended destinations.
- c) Enquire about a possible narrative or meaning behind the sign. This was the most difficult to source, as most people did not know anything more about the sign than the destination it indicated. Those who had a story to tell often volunteered the information as part of the exchange.
- d) Identify key informants during the first phase of the planned research and write down contact details to arrange for later semi-structured interviews.
- e) Photograph each taxi sign.

- f) Write up a report with a photograph of each hand sign, the corresponding destination and any information relating to the meaning of the sign or story connected to it.

With this set of information gathered I could crosscheck the destinations associated with a sign and verify narratives and meanings associated with them.

2.2.1.6 RESEARCH LOCATIONS IN PHASE ONE

The research locations during Phase One included the following: Bree Street Taxi Rank, Randburg Taxi Rank, Roodepoort Taxi Rank, Noord Street Taxi Rank, Alexandra Taxi Ranks, WATA (Witwatersrand Taxi Association), Faraday Taxi Association, DORJLTA (Dobsonville, Roodepoort, Leratong, Johannesburg Taxi Association) And GJRTC (Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council). We also interviewed commuters and drivers at randomly selected streets in the CBD and suburbs of Gauteng²³.

2.2.1.7 DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

Informants from all research phases were asked the three principal questions from Phase One: Which taxi hand signs are in Gauteng are known to them, which destination does each known taxi hand sign refer to, and whether there are any meanings or narratives associated with the sign that are known to them. It soon became clear that this aspect of the data collection from Phase One would need to be ongoing throughout the investigation. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, we often discovered new hand signs simply in conversation with people. Secondly, taxi drivers, when expanding to other areas to provide transport, add a new taxi hand sign for the newly established destination. A sign may be adopted by a driver even though the exact sign is already in 'circulation'. More

²³ Prior to 2009 there were two taxi ranks in Alexandra where all my early research in Alexandra was done. In 2009 the Pan Africa Shopping Mall was opened, "[f]alling under the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), a programme to upgrade infrastructure and living conditions in one of Johannesburg's oldest townships, the Pan Africa Shopping Centre forms part of a comprehensive retail and taxi node that includes a 50 000m² taxi rank, a three-level holding facility for taxis, public parking and structured informal trading" (Dlamini 2013).

importantly, narratives and event information unique to each sign, learned every now and then from a casual informant, would impact on Phase Two of the research and ultimately contribute the theoretical component for the entire thesis.

The fact that taxi hand signs as a collective gestural language are informal and new signs are always created in newly developed areas means that there are destinations associated with the signs that are missing in the thesis. Where I have not been able to verify a destination, for example, if fewer than five people have corroborated a sign, my notes will show that there is no verified sign associated with that destination. The onset of taxi operating licenses for particular routes and destinations for taxis have largely formalised the taxi scenario. Many taxi drivers do stick to their designated routes. Indeed as will be seen in Chapter 3, the issuing of operating licenses has been one of the factors that brought down the incidents of violence and conflict amongst taxi associations. However, it is the spontaneous emergence of taxis setting up new routes and destinations with people who live in these developing areas that sustains and continuously produces the taxi hand signs.

Taxi hand signs documented throughout this thesis were made known to the public through the first published *Taxi Hand Sign* booklets that I initially published and the *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind*. These continue to be modified accordingly as each new taxi hand sign is documented. The completion of the DICTIONARY of taxi hand signs in Chapter 12 signifies the closure of the collection of taxi signs for the thesis.

2.2.2 PHASE TWO: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

2.2.2.1 SUMMARY OF KEY OBJECTIVES

To accomplish key objectives for Phase Two the following methods were used:

- a) The method of participant observation, which was used for the twelve semi-structured interviews. Each informant was to be interviewed on at least two occasions, with a duration of two to four hours each.
- b) The recorder pen, which allowed the researcher the opportunity to

concentrate on content.

- c) I looked for a place where the informant was comfortable to be interviewed. Distance and safety were considered in particular. The person's place of work, a restaurant, my art studio, and, on one occasion, the home of an informant in Kagiso were some of the interview sites.
- d) Transcribing the data from recorder pen and book to the computer.
- e) Analysing the data and writing up the findings.

2.2.2.2 ETHICS AND INFORMANTS

In Phase Two of the research endeavour, before the semi-structured interviews, a permission letter or letter of consent was drafted to be signed by the respective informant. The letter indicated the purpose of the study and made clear what was expected of the participant and assured him/her of his/her anonymity and confidentiality, should this be his/her wish. As with all participants, the letter included the participant's right to decline participation and his/her right to withdraw from the study at any time. Informants were shown the written document pertaining to their interview and were assured that any quotations recorded from the interview would be shown to them for their approval. Making appointments and sharing contact details was mandatory.

I read the agreement letter to them, and made sure they understood what I was asking of them and what I was doing with the information they shared with me (See Chapter 2). I am aware that many people have cultures that differ from my own, and although I met many people in the taxi ranks whose first language was not English, all of the people with whom I had arranged interviews spoke English and willingly participated in my interviews, as the films will testify. The semi-structured interviews were all in-depth investigations, with one or two sessions of three to four hours each.

2.2.2.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was prepared with the initial questions from Phase One of the research, but it was found that only a few pertinent questions were necessary in the early stages of the interview. I favoured an informal exchange, interspersed

with a question or acknowledgement here and there. The camera, recorder pen and note book that was used for all the interviews encouraged this freedom because notes were important but did not need to be detailed because the transcriptions of the recordings provided every word spoken in the interview.

Semi-structured interviews appeared to be the most effective way of researching a subject such as taxi hand signs, where very little has previously been written. There were certain important criteria that enabled me to identify individuals from whom I could source the background events, history and narratives that are associated with taxi hand signs, the most important being the key people in the industry. Secondly, I sought interviewees who had experience with or who were associated in some way with taxis, taxi associations, taxi travel, taxi transport, the taxi industry or were frequent commuters with taxi experience or taxi drivers who have been in the industry for some time.

In the semi-structured interviews I used open-ended questions that encouraged the interviewee to express ideas freely and provide information in order to facilitate obtaining new information. At the stage when I believed I had all the interviews I needed to complete the research, I met a key informant, Solly Msiza a ‘veteran’ taxi driver from the early 1980s. His interview was recorded in the late afternoon in a quiet restaurant. The information that he had to share with me took me by surprise. He not only had knowledge of specific incidents of violence that occurred in the taxi transport context in 1980, but had been involved in the thick of it. Further to this I met and interviewed James Chapman²⁴ through Msiza, and through Chapman I met and interviewed Paradise Mahlangu.²⁵ They had worked together in the 1960s and 1970s and each spoke in depth and at length about laws imposed on the taxis during apartheid and how they overcame adverse conditions imposed on them. As already stated it is narratives such as these that have been the main source of data for this qualitative study. The history of the taxi transport

²⁴ See APPENDIX B. Informants and research methods: Summary.

²⁵ See APPENDIX B. Informants and research methods: Summary.

industry has been told through these stories and should be made available to future researchers.

In sum, the informants interviewed were commuters or operators from different sections of the taxi transport scenario. This is reflected in the narratives told that provided valuable information on incidents not previously recorded and a view of taxi hand signs and the events in history that shaped it.

A complete list of key informants,²⁶ along with the method and setting of each interview is provided in Appendix B.

2.2.3 PHASE THREE: INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS WITH BLIND PEOPLE

Phase Three deals with three separate categories of research: first, the research methodology in relation to a tactile, shape-language designed for blind people to read the taxi hand signs; secondly, to investigate the usefulness of the tactile shapes as shape recognition for young learners; and thirdly, to contribute to orientation and mobility for older school leavers.

2.2.3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND AIMS

The broad aims of Phase Three of the research were: first, to examine the possible usefulness of the creation of taxi symbols for blind people and second, to design and then refine the signs to the point where the blind informants were convinced that they could be easily learned and interpreted.

In pursuit of these aims, I planned the following social interventions and art responses:

- a) To collate a *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* that had an index in braille, which referred to each taxi hand sign for that particular destination.
- b) To offer equal opportunities to both blind and sighted people by providing

²⁶ Other accounts are described in Chapter 3.

information on which taxi hand signs are used for which destination.

c) To contribute to orientation and mobility for blind and partially sighted people in the taxi transport environment in Gauteng.

d) To make the book available from Blind SA and the South African National Council for the Blind to blind adults and at no cost to blind people residing in Gauteng.

After the book was published and launched at Museum Africa in 2009, more signs were catalogued. Semi-structured interviews were arranged with blind educator Ian Hutton. Valuable time was spent on developing the signs and simplifying them to the point where the very essence of the signs remained understandable and easily learned.

2.2.3.2 ETHICS

The ethical criteria that applied to co-researchers earlier in this chapter were also applied to the blind participants where appropriate. The meetings were held at the SA Blind Association, with Pike, Dube and myself present. It was most important to explain that it was the direct and forthright feedback and criticism that I valued and that this was critical to successful development of the shape-language. It was also important to work together in an atmosphere of mutual trust. As with sighted informants in all the research and interview phases, permission letters were written and responded to.

2.2.3.3 TACTILE BLIND LANGUAGE DESIGN RESEARCH

The taxi hand sign tactile shape-language for the blind is a design that developed from an idea to enable blind people to have their own graphic shape-language to read the taxi signs. It is important to note that this shape-language was neither connected to nor conceived as an extension of braille.

I, a sighted person, created the design. As an outsider, it was important to establish whether the shape-language would be readable or even useful for blind people. The success or failure of this graphic language depended on a

collaboration with blind people through learning, experimentation and mutual respect. The aim was to arrange to have a series of interactive meetings with some of the blind employees of Blind SA. To begin the sessions with the two selected informants, Pike and Dube, I had to have a tactile version of the shapes. The person I approached was Phillip Jordaan, Director of Blind SA, who asked me to send him a graphic version of the blind signs in a programme compatible with software for The Tiger Pro Braille Graphics Embosser, of which there are only a very few in South Africa. The shapes would be converted to uniform rows of raised dots. The designs were also tested in a meeting at the South African Council for the Blind, with blind Professor Obert Maguvhe,²⁷ former head of Gauteng Council's Education division and Philip Maibe,²⁸ another visually-impaired informant.

2.2.3.4 SIBONILE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Ian Hutton, Head of Blind Education in Gauteng, invited me to conduct research at Sibonele School for the Blind. I had questions regarding the taxi hand sign shapes becoming part of shape recognition in blind education, even though it clearly required a great deal more comparative and in-depth research than could be completed within the scope of this thesis. However, I also understood that the interview would give me some insights into the usefulness of taxi hand signs for orientation and mobility for blind people.

My role was to observe and participate in the classes that day. I was also given the opportunity to meet and teach taxi hand sign shapes to two twelve-year-old blind learners. What was learned about taxi hand sign blind shapes as part of education in schools and the results of this experimental work on taxi hand signs is detailed in Chapter 8.

²⁷ Dr Maguvhe is one of very few blind professors in South Africa and recently took up a post at Unisa. He consults for the Council and offers his expertise to the visually-impaired community.

²⁸ Philip Maibi was elected to the NMC at the 49th NEC meeting held on 11 April 2013.

2.3 SOCIAL AND FINE ART RESPONSE TO ALL PHASES

The social and fine art response to the research methodology that resulted in the building of new knowledge on taxi hand signs, their narrative content, geographical reference, emergence in history and political connotations are examined and the concepts made clear in Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The art output comprised:

- a) Paintings: Forty-five paintings of coloured gloves in the shape of the different taxi hand signs.
- b) Graphic design: A shape-language for the blind, thirteen basic shapes that combine to form pictures of the taxi hand signs for blind people.
- c) Booklet 1 (2007): The first *Taxi Hand Sign* booklet, comprising of an index of places in Gauteng, corresponding taxi hand signs [painted gloves] and the blind signs in tactile form at the back of the book.²⁹
- d) Blind book (2009): *Taxi Hand Signs for the Blind*, comprising a braille index of places in Gauteng, with corresponding taxi hand signs in tactile raised dots at the back of the book.³⁰
- e) Booklet 2 (2010): The *Taxi Hand Sign* booklet, comprising of an index of places in Gauteng, corresponding taxi hand signs [painted gloves], cartoons and a taxi destination map for Gauteng.³¹
- f) Stamps (2010): Taxi hand signs for blind and sighted persons used on the

²⁹ Published and distributed to libraries in Gauteng.

³⁰ Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind was published in 2009 and launched in Museum Africa, Woolf exhibited her art in conjunction with the exhibition 'L'Afrique: A Tribute to Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel. Museum Africa in Newtown, Johannesburg. The books were distributed by The South African Council for the Blind and Blind SA, and made available at no cost to blind people in Gauteng.

³¹ The Taxi Hand Sign booklet was published and launched at a Standard Bank Art Gallery exhibition, together with the Taxi hand signs on the South African National Commemorative Stamps in 2010.

South African National Commemorative Stamp in 2010.

- g) *Dictionary Grid Artwork*: This consists of all the painted taxi hand signs and the graphic taxi hand sign blind shape language. It is an edition of 10.
- h) *SIGNIFICATION: Textarea* consists of four painted panels on 6 metre board.
- i) *Structuring LIGHT*: A triangle, rectangular shape and circle of light representing three of the fundamental shapes for the taxi hand sign shape-language for the blind. A paradox of illumination for darkness, this installation was projected onto the gallery floor during my exhibition at WAM.
- j) *Films*: Two short 4-minute films, a collation of the material captured during the research interviews and in the field. The artistic intent of the films is detailed in Chapter 9.
- k) *Journal article (2013): A People-centred View on Paratransit in South Africa*, which I co-authored with Johan Joubert. The article has been published in the journal *Cities*.

My art, books and other media are the response to my collective experiences and observations during the time of researching taxi hand signs in this investigation

2.3.1 ANALYSIS OF DATA FOR PUBLICATIONS AND FINE ART

The hand sign images that appear on each page of the booklets may have several associated destinations. Therefore, as I discovered the new taxi signs and ‘existing’ signs, they have added to the collection of painted hand signs. Newly-created signs remain consistent for that selected destination, however, the taxi hand signs have an informal aspect to them. The body of signs may increase as drivers and people in a particular new area need transport. The driver is obliged by law to obtain a Taxi Operating License (OLS) to make this new route official, yet the aspect of devising the taxi hand sign for a new taxi service is an informal

understanding between the driver and it seems, a person or several people living in the area, who decide on its fixing.

Together with their corresponding destinations, the signs were collated for the small DICTIONARY in Chapter 9. These are based on the results of the sampling methodology in Phase One. The *Dictionary Grid* artwork shows how all the blind taxi hand signs were constructed. A viewer can see at a glance the quantity and variety of taxi signs in Gauteng. They can see how the blind shapes developed based on each painted taxi hand sign.

2.3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FOR FILM

Most research for documentary films is qualitative since by their nature, films require intuition and the making of subjective judgments, which cannot be quantified. Moreover, qualitative research for film involves emotions, attitudes, aspects of character, story telling and backgrounds. Taxi hand sign research relies on people whose stories are subjective and learned by word of mouth, where one must continually verify the information gathered. Hence the method of triangulation was used to verify all diverse evidence as much as is possible. I was also open to the use of different techniques and mediums to further corroborate this research. The collection of data through the video or films had two purposes:

- a) To corroborate information from other recorded material
- b) To capture content and context from selected aspects of the research films, some of which were filmed by independent filmmakers,³² for use in the mixed genre films for my final thesis exhibition.

Short documentary videos captured selected aspects of the semi-structured

³² The cinematographer who filmed my taxi hand sign research that took place in Bree Street Metro Mall as well as the Roodepoort Taxi Rank, as well as the filming of Pike the blind man shown doing a taxi hand sign to alert a taxi driver and used in my final film for this thesis, also used the footage differently for his own commercial purposes. This included footage sold to Chinese TV and other TV stations abroad. This was a rare reciprocal opportunity, and to have a record of the research-in-progress of the thesis was lucky, a procedure that otherwise would not have been affordable.

interviews. The videos captured the researchers and their interactions with people in city spaces where crowds gathered to hail taxis and in various taxi ranks. It was only at the stage when most of the research and much of the filming had been completed that I was able to view all the material and start to formulate the storyline for the film. This points to “the loose speculative nature of making today’s documentaries” (Rabiger 2009: 344).

Three films, documenting the co-researchers and people demonstrating taxi hand signs for this thesis, were shot by independent filmmakers in different taxi ranks. All information gleaned from these film records were transcribed and incorporated into the data collection for the thesis.

They are:

- a) Bree Street Metro Mall: This film, shot by filmmakers from Corpcinema, illustrates the researchers and myself discussing how to approach the interviewees using the same ethical criteria as already specified. The film gives a close up view of the interviewees showing the taxi hand sign they know and allowing this to be filmed. It shows the crowded inside of the taxi mall, people queuing for taxis and the researchers at work. The film is also intended to be a documentary example of how to do sound and ethical fieldwork.
- b) The Roodepoort Taxi Rank³³: Corpcinema shot this film. Zeblon Simelane was the first taxi driver that I met and interviewed in 2002 when the taxi hand sign investigation began. I contacted Simelane once more in 2010 asking him if I could come to the Roodepoort taxi rank to interview him

³³ Fieldwork also included the Sandton Taxi Rank, Alexandra Taxi Rank, Rosebank Taxi Rank, Roodepoort Taxi Rank, Randburg Taxi Rank and other taxi ranks in the Tshwane area controlled by the GPRTC. I never managed to obtain permission to go into Noord Street Taxi Rank with a photographer. One of the co-researchers had been robbed in Noord Street Taxi Rank and was afraid to return. Therefore without permission or a guard to take us around I thought it best to go elsewhere, for safety sake.

on film and meet the other taxi drivers. This was agreed upon in writing. It captures the interaction with Simelane, the taxi drivers and myself in the rank. In the final film for my art exhibition for this thesis, Simelane is featured discussing how people living in that area devised the taxi hand sign for a new route and destination.

- c) A film was shot in the Randburg Taxi Rank by an independent filmmaker. It shows individual commuters explaining the taxi hand signs and destinations. A key informant, Patrick Mphepu, Dispute Manager for the Taxi Liaison Committee, was interviewed in the film with two Mthombeni, Khunou and myself interacting with interviewees.³⁴

2.3.3 ETHICS AND FILMED INTERVIEWS

The same code of ethics as outlined earlier was applied to research using film to ensure the consent of the informant being filmed. Apart from having their written permission to be filmed, a friendly, communicative and reassuring attitude was essential in creating a relaxed atmosphere in the interview situation. One way of encouraging the informant to relax was to offer them a chance to handle the camera and have the experience of interviewing me. By demystifying the camera in this way, I was able to imply a more reciprocal arrangement in which control was shared, not imposed (Rabiger 2009: 345). There were times when the camera was put aside when the person did not wish to be filmed. I was able to capture some good character images from interviews completed with blind people, who had no objection to being filmed and were completely natural and expressive in front of the camera. The recorder pen was used as backup for the film. Films shot with my own camera during some of the interviews were primarily for the purpose of capturing the narratives and information communicated by the

³⁴ BBC World News interviewed me (23/03/2010) on radio and created a film of the taxi hand signs being performed in Randburg taxi rank, just before the World Cup in 2010. Others on that programme included “Natalie Merchant ... Burkina Faso architect Francis Kéré ... and taxi signal paintings from South African artist Susan Woolf”. BBC, A Programme from The Strand. Mark Coles. Factual Arts, Culture & the Media. Accessed 2013. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p006qpvx>

informant. The film also captured background noises like the sounds of hooting and traffic, which were used in the two resulting films for the WAM art exhibition.

The artistic intention of the films that resulted from the research phase is addressed in Chapter 9. There are 2 four-minute films: *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi hand signs, in the landscape of little mice* and *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi hand signs, blind in the landscape of little mice*.

‘A People-Centred View on Paratransit in South Africa’³⁵ was written for the accredited journal *Cities*. Much of the information collected by Joubert and myself, (apart from the government regulations or previously documented information for South Africa,) was arrived at using qualitative means of participant observation during semi-structured interviews with drivers and operators in the taxi industry. The recorder pen and camera were used in all the arranged interviews and fully transcribed for our joint use. What resulted was an article where both the cross-disciplinary influences of Joubert’s engineering background and my anthropological background are evident.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The three stages of preliminary research, research design and the resulting social and art response are what ties together the need for and the advantage of a thesis that spans the two disciplines of Anthropology and Art. The first two stages provide the research and linguistic context for the third response. Qualitative methods were used for all stages. In the research design, the triangulation of data

³⁵ The background to the taxi industry is part of the landscape from which taxi gestures emerged and that background is addressed in Chapter 3 of the thesis. The culture of taxi hand signs as a gestural language used by millions of South Africans to traverse across cities is a concept still not fully known by transport experts who live abroad and indeed many motorists in South Africa who have no need for taxi transport. This article in *Cities* illustrated just few examples of taxi hand signs, some narratives about the taxi industry and the history of taxi transport and taxi culture (Woolf and Joubert 2013).

collection from sampling, semi-structured interviews and participant observation drew upon the capacity of each of these techniques to provide a function useful to the purpose. All the data revealed during the research and the careful collection of narratives serves as historical evidence. The fine art and blind graphic taxi language together with other media provide an alternative perspective and another way of understanding the unique culture of taxi hand signs for South Africa.

CHAPTER 3: TAXI TRANSPORT LANDSCAPE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The circumstances in South Africa's history, particularly in the Witwatersrand area, are the topic of this chapter where I argue that the difficulties imposed on migrant labourers from the 1800s onwards ultimately led to the innovation of taxi hand signs by commuters and operators.

South Africa's public bus services had remained fairly undeveloped in the early 1900s and, from the 1930s, black taxi operators were handicapped by increasing political and economical restraints (Khosa 1990:209). The segregationist policies dominant in South Africa are evidenced by the provision and relocation of taxi ranks in the 1930s. Taxi services continued to emerge despite the fact that the government favoured trains as a means of transport. As a result of the implementation of the apartheid system of racial separation in 1948, a private but organised taxi transport sector operating many commuter routes sprung up all over the country. The amalgamation of black taxi operators began in 1959 with the formation of the Soweto Taxi Association in the Witwatersrand. Black taxi ranks were however only formally allocated in city centres in the late 1970s and it was only in the 1980s that a national taxi association was formed by black taxi operators (Khosa1990:210). Section 3.2, below, expands on this history

Despite many obstacles the minibus taxi industry continued to expand. The role played by the government in power, their intention, at first, to ignore and then to thwart the growth of taxi transport, accelerated the emergence of taxi hand signals by encouraging people to find their own way to communicate their need to secure transport. The taxi hand sign language consequently developed as an integral part of the expanding taxi industry. Violence, instability and racism were the context out of which taxi gestures emerged and the purpose of relating the events that affected the transport industry is to argue that the overall environment of the South Africa of the time formed a fertile ground for the taxi hand sign language to emerge.

This argument is reinforced by the narratives, places and events associated with the individual taxi hand signs that are told in Chapter 4. It is important to clarify that the one cannot establish an exact date on which each taxi gesture may have emerged. In fact my intention is not to discuss individual hand signs in this chapter, but rather to focus on contexts and the chronological historical evidence.

The attitude of the authorities to cab drivers from as early as 1902 and the segregationist laws culminating in apartheid from 1948–1994 contributed significantly to the way in which taxis organised themselves in the minibus taxi industry. I examine sequentially the political and social history of transport in South Africa from the 1900s onwards, to demonstrate that Gauteng³⁶ was a fertile environment for taxi hand signs to emerge and to thrive as a transport language, and is now integral to what has become a powerful minibus taxi transport industry today.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, authorities underestimated the potential of the taxis as opposed to trains or other public transport and subjected taxi owners to unparalleled restrictions from the early 1900s onwards, driving the industry to unanticipated outcomes. There are parallels to be made with various obstructive laws imposed on the first horse-and-cart ‘cabbie’ drivers that resulted in the demise of the cab industry. This was followed by the rise of the private automobile from the 1920s and the government of the day’s perpetual failed attempts to subvert the taxi industry. Although the phenomenon of black taxis can be traced from the beginning of the 1900s, the 1930s was a time when black taxi operators were restricted by an onslaught of political and economic restraints. It was not until the 1970s that government officials began to understand that black taxis were providing an essential service (Khosa in Natrass and Ardington 1990: 209). Further, I demonstrate that taxi hand signs, used and learned across a

³⁶ Gauteng encompasses Pretoria, the Witwatersrand and the Vaal triangle.

plethora of languages³⁷ users in Gauteng, are a practical and unique way of commuting because of the background and events that shaped the minibus taxi industry. I include a concise time-line of the most significant racist laws and incidents of violence, which encroached on all aspects of social, political and economic life in South Africa, more so for migrant labourers.

3.2 GAUTENG: TRANSPORT ENVIRONMENT AND HISTORY

Restrictive laws imposed on cab drivers (horse and cart) at the turn of the century are recorded in Charles Van Onselen's two books *New Babylon* (1982) and *New Ninevah* (1976) on the history of the Witwatersrand from 1886 to 1914. In this chapter I rely on Van Onselen for much of the information on cab drivers³⁸ at the turn of the century, to support my argument that many of the complications and issues with cab transport and the regulations in those days have an obvious parallel to events from the 1930s, where restrictions were imposed to undermine the taxi industry.

In this section of the chapter, I want to discuss the historical, political, geographical and social issues associated with the growth and development of the taxi industry in South Africa in order to understand the need out of which taxi hand signs emerged as a coded travel language. I will provide a history, beginning with the Second Boer War when the British conquered the mineral-rich republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State. It ended in 1902 with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging, when both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were made self-governing colonies of the British Empire (Beinart 2001: 89).

³⁷ South Africa in its "new democratic constitution, which came into effect on 4 February 1997, recognises 11 official languages, to which it guarantees equal status. These are: Afrikaans; English; isiNdebele (or SiNdebele); isiXhosa, isiZulu; Sepedi; Sesotho; Setswana; siSwati; shiVenda; Xitsonga". For more information, see www.medioclubsouthafrica.com/index

³⁸ I interviewed an 89-year-old man, Ivan Schwartz, whose grandfather drove the horse drawn cart for Vervoerd. There is an iron cast statue of the passengers and Vervoerd in the cart, with his grandfather's name, engraved in the metal. The statue stands at the Voortrekker monument. See more on the Sanitary Board 'new' regulations horse-cab owners in 1888 in Gerald Anton Leyds's book *A history of Johannesburg: The early years* (1888: 30).

Individual owner-drivers of horse drawn cabs in the sector of the urban economy had already established the first cab owners' association in the Witwatersrand at least eleven years before in 1891. By 1896 there were 80 cab owners and 700 cab drivers making up part of the cab trade in Johannesburg (Van Onselen 1982: 172). This included black cab owners who by 1894 were successfully transporting passengers of all races. However, in the depression year of 1897, the local press intervened and tried to force black people out of the cab business. This was an ill-conceived attempt as the Sanitary Board, which dealt with applications for cab-driving licenses, had in any case declined to lend black people legal recognition (Leyds 1888: 30). Black cabbies, however, remained in business till the advent of British rule in 1900 (Van Onselen 1982: 173) but by 1902 all licenses for black cabbies were withdrawn. When licenses were later re-issued owners found themselves classified as 'second class cabs' prohibited from transporting European passengers.

Thus after surviving more than a decade of legal twilight in Kruger's Republic, Johannesburg's black cabbies emerged at the time of formalised segregation under the Milner administration (Van Onselen 1982: 186). This meant that black cab drivers could only accept fares from "the poorest of the poor Black Africans" (Van Onselen 1982: 186).³⁹ Malay cab owners also suffered under this new classification system as did White, mainly immigrant drivers, when the permit system was devised to screen unqualified or undesirable cabbies trying to reach the Witwatersrand. Many European immigrants, who came into Johannesburg after 1902, differed in religious, cultural and class backgrounds from their predecessors and spoke foreign languages (Leyds 1964: 24).⁴⁰

One of the ways immigrants obtained a work permit in the early 1900s was to

³⁹ The solution to the urban transport problem between 1890 and 1914 was focused on the commencement of first horse drawn electric tram in Johannesburg in 1902, which resulted in the unemployment of hundreds of cab drivers (Von Onselen 1982: 165).

⁴⁰ This is much like the situation in Gauteng today, where drivers of taxis come from vastly different backgrounds and speak different black South African languages, many are migrant labourers from other parts of Africa and abroad, who arrive in South Africa speaking a foreign tongue.

present themselves as cab drivers in the Transvaal, once obtaining the necessary clearance certificate that would make it possible to go to the Witwatersrand (Van Onselen 1982: 187). Co-ordinated action against the Milner administration to strictly regulate the cab trade resulted in the Cab Drivers Union (CDU) being formed in 1902 and the former Cab Owners Association being resurrected. Together they were able to challenge the Town Council's contentious Government Legislation Notice No. 685 which "made provision for the second and subsequent passengers on a cab journey" (Van Onselen 1982: 188), which greatly reduced cab owners' fares. Such tactics by government are reminiscent of similar incidents in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, when the Road Transportation Act of 1977 was introduced into law, taxi drivers were told that they could no longer drive nine-passenger vehicles and would have to revert to sedans to transport four passengers (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 2). This legislation is addressed in more detail further on in this chapter.

Serious conflicts arose between the horse and cab owners and their drivers in 1905, where the small wages paid by the cab owners to the drivers were deeply resented by the drivers who were struggling to earn a living (Van Onselen 1982: 189). Ultimately it led to driver deceit over the amount of money handed over, then stricter owner control and eventually in desperation, the drivers taking it upon themselves to forge the new licenses, which they required to find further employment.⁴¹ Cab owners and drivers protested vehemently over the Town Council's issuing of new more restrictive licenses, leading to the five-day strike of 1905 in Fordsburg (Van Onselen 1982: 193). The non-attendance and disputes proved not to be without incidents of violence. Although they succeeded in preventing the new London-style licenses from ever being issued it was the beginning of the end for the horse-drawn cab trade. The first electric tram ran in

⁴¹ Although such hostilities leading to a full-scale class confrontation in 1905 concerned the post-war antagonisms, again analogies to this may be found with forged drivers licenses, police harassment of taxi drivers, taxi drivers' flagrant disregard for traffic laws and taxi violence across the board in the late apartheid era. A further equivalence can be found in the protests organised by cab drivers in the early 1900s, which resonates very much with current taxi driver situations and strikes.

central Johannesburg and was extended to the suburbs in 1906.⁴² The Transvaal Taxi-cab Co.Ltd emerged in 1909 to run a taxi service in the city. Protests in the form of a petition were in vain to halt the collapse of the cab trade (Van Onselen 1982: 195). It was the “declining Cabman’s Association itself, who used the existing racist laws to eject their fellow ‘Malay’ cab drivers who had been operating ‘first class’ cabs in the city” (Van Onselen 1982: 196). The Union of South Africa was established in 1910 (Magubane 1996: 30), joining the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State. In 1913, under British rule, the Natives Land Act⁴³ was passed, limiting black land ownership to selected black territories (Magubane 1996: 248). Hence between 1911 and 1913 the Cabman’s Association made use of the dominant ‘White labour policy’ to persuade local authorities to take action against the remaining ‘Malay’ cabbies accepting ‘first class fares’ (Van Onselen 1982: 196).

Despite the government’s support of transport by rail for black workers, Meshack Khosa⁴⁴ reminds us that there were independent bus and motorised taxi operators emerging and operating in the 1920s (Khosa 1990: 251). The Le Roux Commission report on transport in 1929, stated, however, that the state of transport was regrettably “one of great confusion and disorder” and that competitiveness between modes of transport as such was out of control (Khosa 1991b: 234). Subsequently the Commission recommended that stringent regulations be enforced:

[T]he Motor Carrier Transport Act (No 39) was passed in 1930 and

⁴² Events in the development of urban transport in the Witwatersrand suggest that Paul Kruger and the Volksraad who originally underestimated the potential size of the market for a horse-drawn tram service, ultimately recognised the value of such transport and this is evidenced by “burger economic penetration into the new system” illustrating the Boers’ willingness to progress (Von Onselen 1982: 195).

⁴³ The Natives Land Act is also known as the ‘Union Land Act’.

⁴⁴ Khosa states that “Bus fare subsidy, the difference between an economic fare charged by a bus operator and the amount paid by Black passengers has played a vital role in the formation of the apartheid city in South Africa ... [T]he state used subsidies as one of the myriad strategies excluding Blacks politically, controlling them socially and making them dependent economically” (Khosa 1990: 251).

introduced transport regulation on a scale unprecedented in South Africa: competition was stifled and transport monopolies were created (Khosa 1991b: 234).

The 1930 Act was thus a deliberated response to the unexpected growth of the taxi industry from the 1920s because as taxis grew in popularity the authorities perceived them as a threat to the railways. However, the policy to protect the railways from road carrier competition expanded to limit competition in areas even where there were no railways (Khosa 1991b: 234). These legal restrictions had far-reaching consequences well beyond the 1950s, which affected black trading, location, size and types of business:

Government discouraged Black trading and business in African townships by using various brutal and repressive strategies including the infamous One-man-One-Business policy (Khosa 1991b: 234).

Hence the 1930 Act, which was enacted to subvert taxi transport to protect the railways, provided the impetus for other far more damaging policies, the effects of which impacted on many independent transport operators throughout South Africa, not only taxis. In an attempt to protect the railways from competition the 1930 Act had stipulated that transportation of passengers by road without a permit was prohibited, essentially making transport a state monopoly held by the South African Transport Service (SATS). Jacky Dugard and Makubetse Sekhonabne describe the problems caused as a result of the 1930 Act whereby:

[N]o transportation of goods or passengers was allowed without permission from a Local Road Transportation Board (LRTB). Obtaining a permit from the LRTB was all but impossible for Black operators who, falling under the discriminatory influx control system, found it difficult to prove that they had a good formal employment record, had lived in the magisterial district as legally registered tenants for a number of years, and were in possession of a Daily Labourer's Permit (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 14).

In 1945, the *Native Urban Areas Consolidation Act No 25* (Dugard 1978: 422) was issued with the intent of tightening influx controls (Fine & Davis 1990:76).

This act also included the first version of the infamous Section 10.⁴⁵ The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act No 49 of 1953 sought to create separate social environments for different population groups (Christopher 1994: 143). Laws and regulations forced segregation on buses, trains and taxis and almost all social places⁴⁶ (Thompson 1990: 197). Hence the legislation deeply and effectively disturbed all areas of social life with all modes of transport equally targeted. What is more significant was that the system resulted in over 90% of taxi permit applications by blacks being rejected. Sekhonyane and Dugard in their 2004 report in *Crime Quarterly* state that:

[M]ost Black taxi operators operated illegally using private saloon vehicles as taxis ... Indeed, even when an applicant did manage to qualify for a taxi permit, the act only authorised the use of small cars (restricted to carrying four passengers) and there was a quota system allowing only a limited number of licenses to be issued each year (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 2).

The aforementioned legislation including Acts of 1930, 1945 and 1953, which created legislation limiting taxi licenses and restricting passengers to smaller vehicles, resulted in taxis operating illegally in order for operators to survive.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ In the 1945 Urban Areas Consolidation Act, 'Section 10' governed who could stay in the urban areas. Black people, who had been born in the urban areas and had lived there continuously since then, and those who had been in continuous employment for ten years or continuous residence in the urban areas for fifteen years, were the only categories of black people legally entitled to stay in urban areas (Dugard 1978: 74; Horrell 1978: 173 [in Goodwin 2006]). Not much had been altered compared to the more often referred-to version in the Natives Laws Amendment Act of 1952 (Khosa 2001: 302).

⁴⁶ In 1948, 'Whites Only' or '*Blankes Alleen*' notices had "appeared in every conceivable place. Laws and regulations confirmed or imposed segregation for taxis, ambulances, hearses, buses, trains, elevators, benches lavatories, parks, church halls, town halls, cinemas, theaters, cafes, restaurants and hotels, as well as schools and universities" (Thompson 1990: 197). However, since "a court had ruled that segregation was not lawful if public facilities for different racial groups were not equal (as in waiting rooms at railroad stations), Parliament passed the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act to legalize such inequality" (Thompson 1990: 190).

⁴⁷ In the early 1980s and onwards "taxi operators began using larger 'kombi' minibus taxis that could carry up to 15 passengers. Until formal deregulation in 1987, such taxis were illegal. Yet they were popular among black commuters because, unlike other public transport options ... [T]hey offered late-night services; travelled to out-of-the-way places; picked up commuters from, and dropped them back at, their homes; charged reasonable fares; made convenient stops on long distances; and cut down time spent in long queues at bus and train stations. As the number of illegal kombi taxis began escalating, changes were occurring in the apartheid state that had a profound effect on the industry. As early as the 1970s, the government began to view its near-

They came together to form local informal taxi associations, some known to be in operation even in the 1930s.⁴⁸ During the apartheid struggle (1948), public transport services became sporadic and unpredictable. With the majority of the wealth already distributed amongst the minority whites, public transport became associated with low-income non-whites, while whites relied more and more on private cars (Woolf and Joubert 2013: 6).

Originally, the modes of transport into the cities for black people were provided by municipality buses and the privately owned PUTCO (The Public Utility Transport Corporation) buses, which had been established in 1945 after the 1944 bus strike. In 1957 *The Star* Newspaper reported the bus boycott⁴⁹ sparked by a one penny increase in fares and that resulted in the three-month bus boycott in Alexandra township, which had people walking and others hitching a lift on horse-drawn carts (*The Star*, January 7, 1957)⁵⁰.

monopoly on public transportation, which had initially been utilised to protect and prop up the South African Transport Services (SATS), as an economic liability” (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 2).

⁴⁸ Interview with Chapman, 30/08/2011.

⁴⁹ See *The Star* Newspaper (1957). “One penny is all it took. One penny sparked a three-month bus boycott in Alexandra township 50 years ago this year, with 15 000 people walking about 30 kilometres each day to and from work. The boycott started on 3 January 1957 and within a few days some 60 000 commuters were walking after residents of Sophiatown and Pretoria joined the boycott in solidarity. “As they walked they sang and chanted slogans such as ‘asinalali’ (‘we have no money’) and ‘azikwelwa’ ‘we will not ride’,” (*Reader’s Digest* 1957 quoted in *The Star* Newspaper, 07 January 1957).

⁵⁰ It appears that the community solidarity that developed as a result of the apartheid regime encouraged the interaction and sense of place that underwrites the efficacy of taxi hand signs. However the bus boycotts marked the first concerted campaign by the majority of the black population against the white Nationalist government that took power in 1948 and the desperate lack of transport saw the origination of taxi hand signs as an alternative way for commuters and drivers to co-operate on taxi hand signs for transport. Mangena (2007) wrote in the *Mail and Guardian* that veterans of the bus boycotts believe that it was these oppositional movements that became the inspiration for later anti-apartheid protests such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising.

Ezra Singadi, whom I interviewed in March 2010, recounted his personal experience during apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s. He described how people's personal lives were affected by separation on the stations and trains and how ultimately others were determined to provide alternative transport:

People would arrive at the station not knowing how long to wait before the next train arrived or if there would be a place on the train for them. The trains were divided into two sections, first-class carriages for whites, which took up more than half of the train never mind there were many more black and coloured people waiting than whites. The fewer carriages were for us. Many people could not always get to work on time because the trains were full and you could not use the empty carriages. If you could have a car you were in business. We began to give lifts to people stranded at the station. It was illegal but it was a chance to have a business. The police were looking out for us, if we had passengers and especially if driver were seen driving back and forward you could be arrested. But many of us were keen. There were ways we could start this taxi business. If a person could loan or buy a vehicle they could start their own business as an owner or driver (Interview with Singadi 15/03/2010).

It was extremely difficult for taxi operators to organise meetings. Chapman, explained the difficulties they encountered with SABTA (South African Black Taxi Association) meetings during the apartheid era in the early 1970s, and the problems with lack of free access to places, which affected all aspects of mobility and encouraged innovative and often 'illegal' behaviour:

If you were going to Nelspruit, firstly you needed a permit because there were whites and blacks in the same car, so we would ignore that. Then you would get to Nelspruit. That started in the 1970s and it went through till SANTAKA took over. So now you'd have to organise. You'd have to open a branch in each area. You can't travel together. When you get to Nelspruit, you [white person] can't go into the township with them [black people]. And you can't eat anywhere together, because blacks and whites can't eat together, so you can't go meet anywhere. So you'd have to go buy fish and chips or pap and put it on the bonnet of your car and stand around and eat it because that's the only thing you could do (Interview with Mzisa, 22/08/2011).

After the 1976 uprising that started in Soweto, the Van Breda Commission of Inquiry 1977 found that South Africa "had reached a stage of economic and industrial development which enabled it to move towards a freer competition in

transportation” (McCaul 1990: 38). When the Road Transportation Act of 1977 ruled that a bus be defined by a vehicle that carried nine passengers (including the driver), taxi drivers found a loophole⁵¹ they could take advantage of. It resulted in the legal use of minibus vehicles to carry eight passengers without having to conform to strict public transport vehicle regulations (Woolf and Joubert 2013: 7).

Bus boycotts in the 1980s also had the unanticipated effect of increasing demand for alternative forms of transport. This was because during this period, buses and trains were frequently attacked by youths, forcing commuters to use taxis (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 2).

The first taxi permits were area-based and authorised taxi drivers to operate in regions within a radius of 100 km around a central point. Competition for passengers was fierce and there was conflict between drivers over ownership of routes. Violent clashes ensued (Woolf and Joubert 2013: 3). In 1983 the then Minister of Transport, Hendrick Schoeman appointed the controversial Welgemoed Commission of Inquiry. He recommended that bus companies be protected from the minibus kombi vehicles and that “taxis be made illegal by closing the one loophole that existed and granting no more permits” (Barrett 2003: 7). The Welgemoed Commission of Inquiry aimed for the “depoliticizing” of transport in South Africa (Preston-Whyte and Rogerson 1991: 131), recommending that taxis no longer be allowed to carry eight passengers, and that they should go back to using the four-passenger sedan vehicles. The Commission

⁵¹ James Chapman recalled how he started his journey with the taxi industry. In 1978, Chapman was the owner of a small refuelling station in Pretoria on the corner of Boom and Bloed Streets, which his family owned. The refuelling station still exists and the area is one of the major taxi rank areas in Pretoria today. At the back of the refuelling station was the headquarters of the Pretoria and District Natives Taxi Organisation (PADNATO). PADNATO, a member organisation of SABTA, was Chapman’s entry into the taxi industry. Initially as a service provider and later he became the advisor, secretary and legal advisor. Chapman is currently general manager of Taxi Choice, the business arm of the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO). Chapman remains instrumental in engaging with government to argue against unjust legislation and bridge the cultural divide between the taxi industry and government. Chapman convinced government to recognise the South African Black Taxi Association (SABTA) as the main taxi organisation (Interview with Chapman, 30/08/2011).

proposed stronger regulation and a separate category for vehicles carrying between five and 25 passengers and acknowledged legal (and illegal) taxis as direct competition for buses (Woolf and Joubert 2013: 3).

Solly Msiza,⁵² a taxi driver during the early 1980s, recalled the escalating violence between taxi operators at that time. He also described how groups of political activists or ‘comrades’ would get aboard taxis and force them to abandon their business and take them to political rallies.

In those days, the unrest in the townships was so severe that there was no control of the Comrades who belonged to the UDF.⁵³ They hijacked taxis for their rallies. Those guys were scaring everybody – young people who were very aggressive fighting for their freedom – we called them Comrades. And then they’d just take your taxi and go to a rally. They jumped into the taxi and commanded that you as the driver take them where they’re going. They hijacked you but they brought you back afterwards! I was a member of Tsakane Youth Congress and a taxi driver and then I made an arrangement with the Association I belonged to and the Comrades – If there is a rally somewhere make us aware in time so we can allocate a taxi for you and we can compensate the owner his loss for the day (Interview with Mzisa, 22/08/2011).

Having stakes in both the taxi and political realms, Msiza was later instrumental in encouraging communication between the two groups in order to address the problem of transport to avoid the hijackings. Msiza also recounts the efforts of Godfrey Ntlatleng, the leader of the Pretoria United Taxi Association (PUTA) at the time. Ntlatleng’s business adviser was Chapman. Ntlatleng spoke to him explaining that they, the taxi owners, “are having problems with government, they’re going to kill our industry” (Interview with Mzisa, 22/08/2011). Chapman challenged government and threatened court action. After meeting with the taxi industry, government relented and awarded the right to operate 10-seater buses. A

⁵² Joubert and Woolf 2011; Interview with Solly Msiza, 22/08/ 2011.

⁵³ United Democratic Front (UDF).

separate government sponsored National Transport Policy Study (NTPS) in 1984 recommended that a 16-seater minibus taxi be allowed to compete with buses and that illegal operators be granted permits on a restricted quota basis (Barrett 2003: 7).

There were, however, other contentious issues.⁵⁴ There was animosity between SABTA and the South African Long Distance Taxi Association (SALDTA). There were no permits allotted for taxis to drive between cities. Despite being issued many fines, the SALDTA drivers continued illegally until the government was forced to issue long-distance permits. SABTA, nonetheless, believed it was their right as residents in the area to control the more lucrative long-distance routes. Msiza describes how the guns, literally, came out:

I remember going to Newcastle and when I got to the taxi rank there were people dead at the taxi rank and I realised it was the conflict between our members and SALDTA members (Interview with Mzisa, 22/08/2011).

The government solution was to split the taxi ranks: half for SALDTA and half for SABTA. By that time many taxi associations had sprung up apart from SABTA. This included the National African Federated Transport Organisation (NAFTO), affiliated to the National Federated Chamber of Commerce (NAFCOC), the United Long-Distance Taxi Association (ULTA) and the Transport Operators' Peace Initiative Conglomerate Association (TOPICA). The violence continued unabated (Woolf and Joubert 2013: 11).

In 1985 the Competition Board vehemently opposed the quota system, insisting that the only control to be met should be a legal operator and a road worthy

⁵⁴ The Old Road Transportation Act provided for taxi drivers to have radius-based permits and they authorised that taxi drivers operated in regions with a radius of 100 kilometres around a central point. Competition for passengers was fierce and there was conflict between drivers over ownership of routes. Chapman recalled, "[T]hey were called Radius Permits. So when I started with SABTA, what I did was to bring about discussions with SABTA and the private sector. So I met with the banks and asked them 'why aren't you financing these people?'. Then we started financing the taxis. And I spoke to the manufacturers and I asked are you making these vehicles specifically for the taxi industry, they weren't" (Interview with Chapman, 30/08/2011).

vehicle. It argued for a totally unregulated taxi industry (Barrett 2003: 7). Delays in legal amendments saw the Local Road Transportation Board (LRTB) reject 64% of permits from Soweto-based applications and as much as 84% for Soweto-Johannesburg applications (McCaul 1990: 38). This fuelled the already volatile political situation. In 1986, 16-seaters were legalised for taxi use and by the late 1980s the norm was for minibus taxis to carry 15 passengers. As Barrett (2003:7) notes, despite “the ambivalence of government policy” and the confusion that ensued, the taxi industry grew rapidly and “the period of policy confusion was a heyday for taxi owners who managed to enter the industry”. The White Paper on National Transport Policy of 1987 paved the way for deregulation, along with the Transport Deregulation Act of 1988 and effectively legalised the 16-seater minibus taxis (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 2). The number of taxi permits issued increased rapidly.

The South African Black Taxi Association (SABTA), the only recognised body by the end of 1989, warned that blanket deregulation such as this would lead to too many operators entering the market too soon and would result in chaos and violence. As a result of the deregulation, the taxi industry remained largely over-traded with levels of competition. Ambiguous permits, associations claiming taxi ranks and subsequent conflicts between local and long-distance taxi associations at the ranks, often resulted in violent clashes (Cervero and Golub 2007). Chapman⁵⁵ recalled an incident in 1989, of how “a particularly courageous man, a true veteran, T.J. Ngcoya handled himself” during one of these violent clashes in a taxi rank:

⁵⁵ Chapman started working with the Patnato taxi association in the 1970s and ultimately became their lawyer. Chapman in conversation with myself, said, that he met “Paradise Mahlangu ... who we call a veteran [of the taxi industry]. And then I was introduced to SABTA, (South African Black Taxi Association), and very shortly after that, I was asked by SABTA if I would act as their adviser and they gave me the position of National Adviser. I was not paid anything, and I do just want to make this point very clear. Some people have called me the founder of the taxi or the father of the taxi industry, and I absolutely don’t want this type of statement made. This industry was there long before I came along. It started in the 1930s, it was strong” (Woolf and Chapman 2011, Interview). See also, Ebersohn article featuring Paradise Mahlangu in “Paradise Gained” in Wessel Ebersohn Business – South Africa, the journal of trade, industry and investment “[T]he man who has taken over the reins as president of the Southern African Black Taxi Association (Sabta)” Accessed 10/10/2013. Available from: <http://01202009.com/scans/Taxi%20Story.pdf>.

He's one of the guys, such a brave man. He'd walk into the middle of the rank, and there'd actually be shooting on the rank and stand in the middle of the rank, dead quiet, until the shooting stopped, and he'd say: 'guys, put your guns down, come over here, were going to sit here and talk, until we've resolved this issue'. And I must tell you, 99% of the time that would be the end of it. They would sit there, they'd bring lights on at night, they'd be sitting through part of the evening (Interview with Chapman, 30/08/2011).

Ngcoya was President of SABTA in 1989 (Khosa 1994:1).⁵⁶ Many attempts to broker peace between rival taxi associations, unfortunately, led to the ambush and killing of the peace brokers (Masipa 1997; Masipa and Rodney 1997).

In 1988, taxi drivers in an attempt to counter numerous exploitative labour practices had formed their own taxi union and many were affiliated to the COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) (Khosa in Smith 1992: 188). But tension existed with SABTA and SALDTA who did not initially respond positively to this development and also refused to register (as they were expected to do) with the National Manpower Commission. Unionised taxi drivers were at risk of being fired and taxi owners preferred to recruit their labour force from rural areas (Khosa in Smith 1992: 188). This tendency to employ very poor rural taxi drivers and to pay them by setting a target figure that they had to achieve by the end of a working day has led to problems that continue even today. Khosa describes the chances that drivers take to reach and exceed the target amount set by the taxi owners: taxi drivers overload passengers and break speed limits, which put their passengers at risk (Khosa in Smith 1992: 188). Attempts within the taxi industry to regulate and formalise itself in response to unfair government practices resulted in those who did not want to be unionised choosing alternative informal arrangements to do business.

During an interview with four taxi drivers⁵⁷ at a Wimpy in Tshwane in 2011, the

⁵⁶ Khosa quotes James Ngcoya, President of the South African Black Taxi Association, having said "*Si.ba um/dwnto nehawu zomcebo welizwe lama-Africa*", (We are becoming the spear and the shield of our people's economic struggle).

⁵⁷ See APPENDIX B. Informants and research methods: Summary.

drivers explained how becoming a taxi driver was a process. As a way of ‘getting in’, a person would start off by getting a job at a taxi/car wash. One of the four drivers, Leslie Thiyo, tells the story. “When you are getting money at the car wash. You put your money in the bank every time you work” (Interview with Thiyo, 2708/2011). A person could expect to work at the garage in the car wash section for perhaps one or two years because during this period he could be given driving lessons. Once a person has a license, it is most often a family member who is a taxi owner or a taxi driver that might need a driver to assist with a selected route. Becoming a member of a taxi association is expensive so this may only become a viable option later on. Thiyo had been driving for his brother, a taxi owner, for the past seven years (Interview with Thiyo, 27/08/2011).⁵⁸

Permit enforcement encouraged aspirant taxi drivers. Many operators competed on the same routes, resulting in a ‘free-for-all’ market, which led to corruption at every level of traffic enforcement and vehicle roadworthiness (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 15) and as Chapman confirmed, the taxi violence appeared to be encouraged by the apartheid government with the call to deregulate the taxi industry

Alongside a bid to ‘capitalise’ portions of the Black community, the sudden deregulation of transport became a means of complementing the state’s broader destabilisation strategies in the run-up to negotiations by exacerbating socio-economic and political tensions within Black communities. An almost immediate and far-reaching consequence of rapid deregulation was the rise of taxi associations, which have been directly associated with the violence that has shadowed the industry since 1987 (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 15).

These cycles of increasingly sophisticated taxi violence between taxi associations, wherein government and police have in certain instances been seen to be complicit, did not end with the end of apartheid in 1994 and escalated in the post-

⁵⁸ Joubert and myself interviewed four taxi operators, Samuel Mandla, Isaac Masilola, Rufas Tlubatla and Lesley Thiyo. It was very noisy although I managed to record and film parts of the interview.

1994 period. Nelson Mandela had become the first democratically elected president, nonetheless the minibus taxi industry continued to operate informally without government support.

As the state's control over the economy and society has weakened in the course of South Africa's transition, taxi associations have developed as informal agents of regulation, protection and extortion (Dugard 2001: 3).

Violence increased with competition between taxi associations and associations often appeared to be taking advantage of taxi drivers in their employ (Woolf and Joubert 2010: Interview). Between 1995 and 1998 the National Taxi Task Team (NTTT) sought re-regulation and potential solutions to the violence, which had escalated in places to mafia-like use of violence as a means of suppressing competition (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 16). Some large taxi associations, also called 'mother-bodies' to which local associations were affiliated, were opposed to the new government scheme of re-capitalisation (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 16). Mindful of the apparent failure of its re-regulation plans, in 1999 the government changed its focus to restructuring the industry through a recapitalisation process (TRP) (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 3).

Government did not finance the minibus taxis. The first major effort to formalise the taxi industry was the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme. This was a multi-billion rand effort from Government to provide a ZAR 50,000 incentive to taxi owners; when the owners brought in their old and unroadworthy minibus taxis they could replace them with newer, safety-standardised vehicles. As a requirement to participate in the scheme, taxi owners also had to convert their radial/area-based operating licenses for the more recent route-based licenses. This was an effort to limit taxis to specific routes and avoid possible violent clashes for lucrative routes where such routes are not well defined. The programme was controversial enough to let former feuding taxi groups, most notably SANTACO (South African National Taxi Council) and NTA (National Taxi Alliance), to join under the unified umbrella of SANTACO. Government rejected NTA's resistance to the formation of the unified body, insisting to deal with the matter only if they

have a single body representing the taxi industry (Woolf and Joubert 2013: 6).

The taxi industry subsequently voted this structure into place. To unite the fragmented and strife-ridden industry, the NTA, SANTACO and the nine provincial taxi councils voted the newly formed SANTACO into office (Liebenberg 2001: 1). The NTA remained an independent active organisation with many affiliated associations. All operators since then are required by law to obtain an operating license for an approved route, to avoid the earlier violent confrontation over passengers that the old system caused. However, both processes have run into problems and although the government's taxi recapitalisation plan is no longer a pipe dream, it is yet to complete the programme. Transport Minister Peters confirmed that a total of 135,894 taxis would have been scrapped by the end of March 2013 and 81,735 taxi still needed to be scrapped under the programme (Ensor 2013: 1)

A number of issues have emerged both from the side of government and the industry and many considered the initiative a failure. Controversy still exists among many taxi drivers who believe they have not benefited from the programme. In *Thredbo 12, International Conference Series on Competition and Ownership in Land Passenger Transport*, Christoffel Venter argues that recapitalisation could have had significant transformational impact on the taxi industry as a whole, yet it lacked sufficient engagement with an industry that, in essence, is structured more informally (Venter 2011).

With the CPTR (Current Public Transport Records) identifying every route in every municipality, all municipalities submit tenders to get assistance to identify particular routes in an area. This equips them to plan an operating license strategy to a particular area. De Abreu, a consultant in the taxi transport industry whom I interviewed in 2011, argues that this primary database of information is critical to taxis and associations in terms of organisation and business. However, he points

out that a good deal of the informal⁵⁹ mode of minibus taxi transport with driver and commuter interaction undoubtedly predominates as a feature of the taxi industry (Woolf and De Abreu: Interview 28/06/2011). It appears more realistic to expect Recapitalisation to contribute to the progression towards a more formalised industry than transforming it completely. De Abreu says that commuters and drivers deviate from so called norms such as planned routes at will, saying that a regular passenger in the taxi or even on the BRT (Bus Rapid Transport) may ask the driver to deviate from the route and the driver may do this spontaneously without the deviation being reported. Thus the cities may believe that there is an operation there and it has been changed for another route without the city having been informed (Woolf and De Abreu: Interview 28/06/2011).

The inclination of a minibus taxi driver spontaneously to change direction to please a passenger, to change routes for a regular commuter living out of the way or even to re-route if he is warned that there is a traffic block ahead, is a result of the informal and, perhaps, unique nature of the industry. It is clear that taxi transport and similarly taxi hand signs are informally conceived. Nonetheless what is often overlooked is that the taxi industry is in general very well regulated in terms of councils and taxi associations and although “it’s a kind of free market”, to some extent one can probably refer to taxi ‘cartels’ in terms of how decisions are made, both informally and formally. More than 70% of public transport users in South Africa make use of minibus taxis in urban areas (Interview, Joubert: 22/05/2011). Joubert also compares how types of taxi hand signs are adopted for new destinations in the informal way that pricing structures are sometimes adopted.

Hence it goes directly to the point I have argued in this chapter that unusually difficult social conditions, exacerbated by racist laws and destructive regulations imposed mainly on the black population by the government have resulted in

⁵⁹ The cost of transport seems to change according to petrol price, destination distance and whim. Passengers I have spoken to usually know the prices on their routes. When passengers want to know the cost of going to a particular destination they seldom travel to, they have to ask. Cost remains informal; nothing seems standardised in this regard.

uncommon circumstances. The conditions from 1886 that have affected the lives of immigrants and the cab and taxi industry led to the augmentation of the silent gestural language that directs communication with minibus taxi drivers to this day.

3.3 TAXI HAND SIGNS IN A QUASI-INFORMAL LANDSCAPE

The word ‘informal’ contains its opposite, ‘formal’; interestingly, the word ‘form’ is particularly revealing of taxi hand signs and the ostensibly informal gestural language that obtains within the taxi industry. The endeavours of economic anthropologist Keith Hart were integral in defining the term ‘informal economy’ as a unit of study when he argues that:

[T]he informal economy might be a passive adjunct of growth originating elsewhere or its dynamism might be a crucial ingredient of economic transformation in some cases (Hart 2005:9).

Hart recognises the value of the informal in the economy but he also observes the apparently conflicting informal/formal elements that are at the same time linked already:

[S]ince the idea of an ‘informal economy’ is entailed by the institutional effort to organize society along formal lines ‘Form’ is the rule, an idea of what ought to be universal in social life (Hart 2005:9).

The ‘form’ that Hart describes exists in obscure ways in aspects of the informally named system of taxi hand signs. Such practices appear “to be informal because its forms are largely invisible to the bureaucratic gaze” (Hart 2005:2). Paul Browning argues in favour of eventual government subsidies for the so-called informal but powerful minibus taxi industry. Browning considers an overwhelming paradox, that although the minibus-taxi industry “is recognised as the genuine example of black economic empowerment” (Browning 2006:2) and that taxi operators have built a twenty billion rand industry in less than three decades, it continually fails to respond ethically “to public sector efforts to enhance its standards of operation, and the private sector finds it very hard to develop sustainable commercial deals with taxi operators” (2006: 2). He argues

that there are extreme differences in the mindset of the so-called ‘informal’ taxis and the formal sectors of government and business (2006: 2). In the world of economics ‘informal economy’ is about sectors of the economy that lie beyond quantification and are not formally part of the NNP (Net National Product) and are outside of the tax net.

The question of informality of the minibus taxis may frequently be misunderstood, especially by non-users of taxis. ‘Informal’ may describe the taxi context, where taxis have for years been considered ‘a law unto themselves’ always having to compete against busses, trains and other taxi drivers. Joubert describes the way taxis operate informally while at the same time an underlying business structure exists within the operating procedures. Commuters on occasions draw attention to the generally casual and spontaneous actions of minibus taxi drivers who deviate on the spur of the moment from planned routes (Woolf and Joubert 2012: 2). This became known as *izindlela zamagundwane* in isiZulu. It suggests that taxis scurry “like little mice” along hidden routes (Mthombeni 2013: personal communication). Taxi drivers often ignore specific route specifications, even though drivers have since 2012 been obliged to adhere to the prescribed route on their taxi operating license certificates (Woolf and Joubert 2012: 7).

So there’s a lot of positivity in terms of offering economic opportunities to low income earners – and that is [seldom] addressed ... the way they refer to South Africa is unfortunately always very negative - it always has to do with the violence associated with the taxi industry (Interview, Joubert: 22/05/2011).

To some extent Joubert is challenging the many who infer that the violence in the taxi industry is a result of the informal way that taxis operate.

Taxi hand signs, which seem so informally conceived, have an element of formality in the way they are invented and applied. A taxi operator that I interviewed confirmed his involvement with the ATA (Alexandra Taxi Association) in the 1960s when discussions took place amongst a group of drivers on which hand sign each driver would adopt (Mphephu, Interview 2009). It

appears that sometimes decisions are made in meetings whereby drivers adopt a particular hand sign for their designated destination and pass that information on to the passenger alighting from their taxi.

Forms of the taxi hand signs are equally subject to decisions made by small communities residing in the same area. In these communities there could perhaps be a shared interest, if only for those who reside in the same location. Individuals who 'design' a hand sign for a designated destination are not credited with the innovation. Rather it is customary for a new taxi sign to be approved of and adopted by the people living in the area. At the same time the driver agrees to a destination and must submit to the transport department for an operating license for a suggested route. These are aspects of an informal situation, which nevertheless has a certain implicit formality. This was confirmed when I arranged a filming session in the Roodepoort Taxi Rank. I interviewed Zeblon Simelane, the taxi driver I had initially met four years earlier when I began my research on the taxi signs. Simelane had advanced in status and was now in an executive position in the DORLJOTA Taxi Association. I asked him how he knew which sign to use for a new taxi destination. This was his reply:

There is a way of making people to understand, and we used to share ideas with those residents there, we call a meeting, alright we talk to them, here is this new development, you need transport, now let's agree on a sign of what to use, what kind of sign and stuff, then we agree on a sign (Simelane, video and interview 02/06/2010).

Hence a formal decision was made between the driver and the people who live in the areas in which the taxi driver is licensed to operate. Without the availability of information on the different signs and destinations used in Gauteng and having no regulations required by the transport department, it is the residents that take it upon themselves to consolidate taxi signification for their area. A sign selected by people in one part of Roodepoort might well be duplicated or already be in use in another place. The duplicated signs usually occur in areas a good distance from one another, so there is little chance of confusing destinations.

From the outside looking in, it appears that the minibus taxi industry is chaotic

and lacks formal structure because in many ways the drivers resist systems of formality imposed by government. Drivers may adhere to certain formal requirements made by the association of which they are members and may also have an operating license. The taxi industry then can be said to be both informally and formally structured. Joubert describes the way that men plan their career paths in an apparently informal sector to become taxi drivers. Minibus taxi drivers I have spoken to have expressed the aim to ultimately have their own minibus taxi business⁶⁰.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Information on events that have shaped the developing taxi transport industry show how struggles between blacks and the colonial state in the urban transport sector gave rise to some of the social, economic and cultural forms and practices that we see today, including the use of taxi hand signs. Taxi hand signs are also more than a language moulded from these circumstances: they are also a microcosm of what succeeds in an informal and inclusive way in the taxi landscape in South Africa.

Commuters, taxi operators, mobility consultants, engineers and taxi drivers, some of whom have been in the industry from the early 1970s, provided key information in the interviews. Their individual experiences and perceptions of the events that have crafted the taxi transport industry have been crucial in enabling me to understand the historical underpinnings of both the taxi transport industry and of the taxi hand signs that are central to its operation.

⁶⁰ The structures of businesses owned by minibus taxi owners are varied and complex. Jackie Dugard (1996:41) explains that “The difference between the number of vehicles owned by the operator, and the number of drivers employed is attributable to the fact that one owner may have three taxis and lease 2 others from another owner. If the operator employs 4 drivers and drives 1 taxi him/herself, s/he is the operator of 5 taxis: the owner of 3 taxis; the employer of 4 drivers, and the driver of 1 taxi. Hence s/he employs more drivers than she owns taxis.” (Dugard 1996:41). Further reading on these structures is available online in *The minibus taxi industry in South Africa: A servant for the urban poor?* “The minibus taxi industry in South Africa has been marked historically by exploitative labour relations between owners and drivers, which seemingly maximise profit at all costs ... One of the key contributing factors has been the absence of formalised employment contracts” (Fabosi 2013).

Apartheid and restrictive laws, poverty, people living in outlying areas and deficient transport in and around the cities fashioned the explosion that is the taxi industry today and promoted the singularly unique, organic spirit of transport operations in South Africa. In its daily operation, commuters and drivers have been creative in devising and adopting a unique travel language. Taxi hand signs thus function informally within the broader context of the taxi industry and can only be understood against the background of its history.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVES AND SIGNS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The action of people silently signing to summon a minibus taxi may appear momentarily spontaneous and singular when first observed, but most simple systems conceal their complexity behind their surface simplicity. I consider how an easily learned gestural system to communicate a destination for a ride with minibus taxi drivers is achieved in taxi hand signs by investigating their emergence and their related narrative content in this chapter.

Stationary or walking pedestrians needed to find ways to communicate to drivers in fast-moving vehicles across a certain distance and, despite any visual and language barriers, swiftly and clearly enough to receive an action appropriate to their needs. Drivers also needed to communicate their availability to pedestrians. Therefore, taxi hand signs appear simplistic only in retrospect.

Taxi hand signs are a practical, multi-lingual and, typically, ‘user friendly’ gestural practice for millions of commuters. They have become a fully integrated part of a symbolic cultural landscape of Gauteng’s minibus taxi transport system. Taxi hand signs emerged out of the apartheid era and are a unique and exceptional gestural language, shaped particularly by the places they indicate to and the narratives associated with their form and shape. Taxi gestures overall are part of performance and that the narratives or myth inherent in the signs may reveal the political and social situation at a particular location and time in South African history. I argue that these circumstances differentiate them from most other sign languages in the gestural category.

Taxi hand signs are complex: they often have an *indexical* aspect in that they “point to” the place to which they refer and often use the gestural shape of a pointing finger, or a finger or hand in motion towards the place indicated; but some of the signs have *iconic* features of resemblance (such as the shape of the orange for “T Junction”, “Orange Farm” or “KwaThema”); others have *symbolic* (arbitrary, purely conventional) qualities. See Chapter 12, DICTIONARY OF

TAXI HAND SIGNS, where the taxi hand signs are classified by category.

The taxi signs inform us of geographical, social or political episodes exhibiting an intriguing culture, for Gauteng particularly, where taxi hand signification is most prolific. An original taxi hand sign narrative, having encouraged the concept for a particular sign, may have altered in transference in the way that many stories or conversations do, when passed on by word of mouth. Some taxi hand signs are interpretations of particular incidents that have occurred recently within the community or perhaps in an event that has been reported in the media. Based on the accounts conveyed by commuters and operators in the taxi industry, knowledge of the narrative or myth that may have given rise to the sign, or of the sign's meanings beyond the destination it indicates, are not in any way a criterion required for a taxi hand signs to hail a minibus taxi or reach a particular destination successfully. In addition, the actual source of the narratives associated with the taxi hand signs, especially when related to history, cannot be wholly assured because as previously stated, most stories are transferred from person to person. In some cases a narrative evolves out of a sign and at other times the narrative becomes immortalised in the sign. I argue that it is the narrative content of the sign that is significant because it speaks of specific aspects of an intrinsically South African past and the present social and economic situation. This expands on the concept that a taxi hand sign may communicate a taxi lift to a required destination, yet is also a vessel that preserves or perpetuates a fragment of life or a geographical image as a way of identifying a particular field of cultural knowledge that is part of Gauteng. In order to demonstrate this one needs to know more about the possible narratives aligned with the signs and the events and circumstances out of which they may have evolved. I demonstrate that narrative, myth and meaning that are inherent in the individual taxi signs are unique and have particular significances with and for the South African landscape.

Names of places themselves have a correspondence with taxi hand signs. This is because individually the place names relate to a similar type of narratives that have to do with aspects of social life, events, history and politics within Gauteng.

A narrative relating to a situation, a current or past event or description of a place or destination is embedded in different ways in each individual taxi hand sign. In the 1980s and 1990s, minibus taxi operators displayed the names of famous and inspirational people on their minibus taxis.

Lastly, in section 4.3, the views of the general public and media perceptions of the minibus taxi industry are revealed in a select, consistently reiterated words, which, when ‘deconstructed’, reveal much about the taxi transport industry and the context in which taxi drivers, operators and commuters co-exist. Aspects of these four informative facets of narrative inherent in the embedded narratives in each individual hand sign and in the names and political and social commentary reveal how taxi hand signs are viewed in the community at large.

4.2 NARRATIVES AND MEANING IN NAMES

In this section I argue that a parallel exists between taxi hand sign narratives and South African names of places and people, which seem to point to contested histories and to divergent ways of memorialising places. Place names are beacons for taxi hand signs. South African towns and destinations, which may have historical, social, geographical and political narratives attached to them, are in turn depicted by taxi hand signs. Even specific incidences in the news, myths and stories from oral histories or popular cult movies can inspire a name, a taxi name or a taxi hand sign. The names given for ostensibly practical reasons to places like streets, suburbs and towns often turn out to be associated with people’s memories or aspirations (Jenkins 2007: 87) For example, Jenkins writes that the name of a post office in Polokwane – Mushung – means ‘Tree under which people used to wait for transport’.

The Marabastad taxi gesture is known to have been a trigger for some resentment amongst certain residents of Pretoria. The sign describes an aspect of the *muti* murder of a prominent figure in the taxi industry, an operator who is represented in a way hurtful to those who knew and respected him by the suggestion evoked

by the taxi hand sign. There are many townships in South Africa⁶¹ where associated incidents reflect political and social events from South Africa's oppressive apartheid past until the present time. Another example of this is the Kliptown taxi hand sign, which is discussed further on in this section.

Furthermore, the official naming of institutions, cities and roads is sometimes used by the government to exercise control or power.⁶² Names are subject to enthusiastic acceptance from some or vehement resistance by others in the community.

From 2005, there has been much controversy around the proposed changing of the name of the city of Pretoria to Tshwane. Any number of names could be made up for a place and that would be valid as long as people adopt it as a convention. There are several explanations for the meaning of Tshwane that may be reflected in some of the hand signs in the area. Tshwane is one example of the fact that, as with the taxi hand signs, people frequently associate different narratives or meanings with the same name. One explanation is that it originates from the Setswana word '*tshwana*' meaning 'black cow'. During a time of drought, a black cow was used as a central part of a rainmaking ceremony whereby water was fetched from the (not-yet-so-named) Tshwane river and sprinkled on the cow. The cow was then allowed to graze freely and, it was believed, rain would fall wherever the cow grazed. The story goes that the drought was broken in this way, and the river thereafter was named 'Tshwane', derived from '*tshwana*' (Joffe 2008: 1).

As the city of Pretoria developed closer to the Apies River, it became synonymous with its African name, Tshwane. The word *apies* means 'small monkeys' in

⁶¹ See Jenkins who wrote that "An extensive parallel naming system exists for many towns and cities perhaps because of the multitude of different languages spoken, eleven of which have been declared official" (2007: 87).

⁶² In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I show how aspects of control and noise have shaped taxi hand signs and here I argue that names are similarly influenced by power and have oral histories reflected in them.

Afrikaans. The name Tshwane is, however, not derived from *apies* and does not mean ‘ape(s) or monkey(s)’. The confusion probably originates from the translation of the name Apies Rivier versus the name Tshwane also referring to the river (Joffe 2008). Others believe that the name originated in the early 1800s, in honour of Tshwane, the son of Chief Mushi. Further claims have arisen around the meaning of the word by the city municipality. ‘Tshwane’ they say, means ‘we are the same’ or ‘we are one because we live together’. In fact, as one commuter pointed out, ‘tshwane’ would actually mean *ga re Tshwane* or ‘we are not the same’.⁶³ The name ‘Gauteng’ is Sesotho actually means ‘place of leopards’ yet was also derived from the Afrikaans word, *goud* or ‘gold’. Some objectors incorrectly claimed that it contained elements of the Khoi word for excrement (Jenkins 2007: 113). In section 4.3 one may see aspects of the aforementioned brief examples from section 4.2 where the culture of story telling that is seen in place names are reflected in taxi hand signs in a similar way.

4.3 THE WHERE, WHAT AND WHY OF TAXI HAND SIGNS

All cultures are inherently informed by narratives. In black South African culture, this tradition is largely oral. As a result, taxi hand signs are the product of an oral tradition, suggesting something quite specific about the cultural context from which it has evolved. In searching for the most likely narrative associated with the origins of a sign, narratives may have altered over time, as it is expressed orally, being passed on from one person to another. In the mixed society of Gauteng, the common practice of signing for taxis is centred around specific historical and socially constituted domains of knowledge that are affected by oral histories and personal experiences. I have chosen narratives most widely identified as being the one most likely to be the source of a given sign, even though the narrative that

⁶³ The meaning of the word *Tshwane* has been derived from the Internet at *African Languages.com* 2006/07. It consists of a list of place name and meanings from the “South African Geographical Names System” database. Available from: www.africanlanguages.com/south_africa/place_names.html, accessed 2013.

most informants credit with originating the sign may be one that they may have changed over time to align with contemporary explanations.

Taxi hand signs are visual expressions for places, incidents and people, a naming of sorts that reveal the narratives and histories that inform them. There is also a distinction between colonial, white settlers' names for places and hidden 'informal' or 'other' black indigenous names that may have predated the colonial names. A taxi hand sign may refer to a place that has retained its indigenous name but it may just as easily refer to an event associated with it, or a physical attribute of the place, or even a shopping mall that is the main feature of a place. The narrative interpretation that originally inspired a particular taxi hand sign may have altered or been reinterpreted over time by the people who operate or hail minibus taxis. Since there is no known documentation or way of knowing a precise moment or a particular individual who initiated the taxi hand signs, I find myself making assumptions, alongside the commuters and taxi operators I interview or converse with, about origins of taxi signs or the narratives associated with them. These could be based on visual, geographical, social or political incidences or oral histories that appear to have influenced that gesture. Some of the signs describe a place name with a descriptive visual representation of the shape or numeric value that the hand and visible fingers denote, such as the four fingers up sign that represents going to Fourways.

The visual presence of so many commuters using taxi hand signs encourages a particular impression of Gauteng that is somehow different to other cities in South Africa, where there may be fewer incidences of signing for minibus taxis. The narrative content and meaning suggested in the taxi signs as a collective is most revealing socially and politically. What is commonly portrayed through the oral narratives are the sober and exceptionally harsh reality of past and present that living in Gauteng can bring. The places that might best illustrate this are: Kwa Thema, Kliptown, Marabastad, Orange Farm, Diepsloot, Train Station, Gauteng, Tshwane and Pretoria, Tembisa, Local, Vereeniging, Duduza. In this section I first offer explanations for signs that have developed in a particular place or about a particular person. Second, I show place names, which the taxi hand signs describe

graphically, in order to either represent the associated narratives or indicate the actual meaning of the word. Where relevant I describe the shape and movement of the particular taxi hand sign.

4.3.1 KWATHEMA

To take a taxi to KwaThema, a commuter has to go the main taxi rank in Springs.⁶⁴ KwaThema means *Rest in Peace*, which may have been chosen by African families in their relocation in 1951. The KwaThema taxi hand sign is performed showing two flat hands, palms together, resting on the left side of the person's face. This same gesture has become a schema for 'going to sleep' in Western culture and is often illustrated in children's theatre performances, fairytales and poetry. Therefore, the action of the taxi sign of going to sleep does not match the meaning of the name KwaThema because 'rest in peace' is generally an expression used after a person has passed away. Yet, recent violent events show that people refer to the name 'rest' or 'peace' and translate the name literally. Recent events confirm the community's connection and association to the name 'KwaThema' and they are often vocal about the lack of either 'rest' or 'peace' that besets the township. As recently as in 2010 and 2011, there have been incidences of violence against and murder of lesbians and gays. One example of this is an article in the *Mail and Guardian* by Bongani Nkosi⁶⁵ who reported that "Lesbian activist Noxolo Nogwaza's stabbed, stoned and beaten body was found in a ditch in KwaThema in 2011. Nkosi describes how at the funeral a friend of the victim shouted out "We will not 'rest' ... until Nogwaza's killers are brought to justice ... uNoxolo's name means 'peace' ... *uNoxolo akalelang*"—Noxolo is not sleeping!". As with narratives passed down from one person to another the reason for choosing the connotations of KwaThema may have altered to suit what

⁶⁴ In 1951, KwaThema was established to accommodate African families removed from Payneville, near Springs. Hugh Masekela, well known South African trumpeter and musician spent his early years there. KwaThema consists of nine other townships: Daveyton, Duduza, Katlehong, Lethabong, Tembisa, Thokosa Tsakane, Vosloorus, Wattville. Available from: <http://www.saweb.co.za/townships/main.html>, accessed in 2013.

⁶⁵ See, Bongani Nkosi, the education reporter at the Mail & Guardian Online. Available from: mg.co.za/author/bongani-nkosi.

commuters associate the name with today'. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No AU-009 Kwa Thema and Figures on DVD 2, B Painted. No B-10]

4.3.2 KLIPTOWN

The taxi hand sign to Kriptown is a social commentary about the living conditions of people and their particular circumstances.⁶⁶ This is supported by an interview and teaching experience that I had at Sibonile⁶⁷ School for Blind, where I met teachers and learners at the school to determine if the tactile shapes representing the taxi hand signs would add any value to mobility training for blind teenagers or assist in shape recognition for younger blind learners. There I met Sam Boshielo one the senior educators in education who firstly asked if I knew the taxi hand sign to Kriptown:

What about this? [Boshielo asks as he demonstrates and explains the sign] You wave your left hand across your nose to show the smell, while the other hand waves downwards to say stop and pick me up here. The township of Kriptown is next to a huge rubbish dump. The people show that they live next to where the rubbish is dumped (Interview: 2011).

He demonstrated the two-handed taxi gesture and described graphically the rubbish dump that borders Kriptown. I enquired if he knew precisely who, within the community, or when, this sign was developed. Although he did not know who had originated the sign, it was his opinion that very bad roads and lack of access for waste removal were the main reasons for why garbage accumulated nearby the informal settlement of Kriptown. In his view, the taxi hand sign taken on by residents living near the dump is a form of protest:

[I]t was a sort of a mocking sign. When you stop a taxi to go there. It was a mocking gesture for the people who were going to Kriptown (Anonymous 2011: Interview).

This taxi gesture is a kind of performance, waving one hand left to right in front

⁶⁶ Kriptown was established in 1903.

⁶⁷ Sibonile School for the blind is a special needs school located in Kliprivier in Gauteng.

of their noses to show that it smells bad and the other hand waves up and down, palm downwards, to ask the taxi to slow down!

One only has to drive along the outskirts of the township, as I did when I visited Sibonile School, to be aware of the extent of the rubbish dump.⁶⁸ The name of Kliptown is not described or translated by the taxi hand sign; rather it is evident that the community has constructed a narrative around the sign that reflects the conditions of where they live. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No IM009 Kliptown and [Figures on DVD 2. B-Painted No B-10 and B-13].

4.3.3 MARABASTAD

In 2001, a well-known and well-respected taxi operator from Marabastad in Pretoria was abducted and murdered and his body parts used for *muti* (a term used for traditional medicine in South Africa). The taxi hand sign for Marabastad was apparently motivated by this tragedy.

The sign requires both hands gesturing. The left hand is held above the right hand, in a downward direction towards the ground, all fingertips and thumb are touching, pinched together, the shape representing a man's testicles. Beneath this construct is the right hand, in a flat palm, upward position. The movement of the hand held beneath, is left to right, back and forth enacting a cutting motion to indicate that the person was mutilated in this way.⁶⁹ The narrative for the

⁶⁸ An online report by the City of Johannesburg, on Kliptown states that "Waste is one of the most pressing environmental problems in Klipspruit Illegal dumping, a major source of environmental pollution, has led to accumulated rubbish in open spaces and along the area's roads. Pikitup ... has not been able to cope with the rate of illegal dumping, the report says ... it is difficult for waste disposal trucks to reach most of the illegal dumpsites in the informal settlements because of congestion and the lack of roads. Consequently, the rubbish has built up over time ... the main sources of waste are informal settlements" Available from: <http://www.joburg.org.za>, accessed on 14/10/2013.

⁶⁹ My informants were not specific about the way the taxi operator actually died. The could not say if it was from having his testicles severed expressly for *muti* or if he was killed by other means and this also included mutilation of his body parts. Whoever created the taxi hand sign that others adopted to indicate the Marabastad destination and speak about the murder may have been indicating mutilation of any body part. But people who know the story say that the taxi sign indicates testicles. See, Ashford who writes that "[B]ody parts harvested through killings that are colloquially referred to as *muti* murders" [which] are reputed to contain the most powerful substances for use in wealth creating *muti*" (2005: 41).

Marabastad sign has been corroborated by commuters particularly in the Tshwane area and with some of the informants I interviewed.⁷⁰ For those who remembered the taxi operator, this sign is considered disrespectful to the memory of him. However, most commuters going to Marabastad have learned the sign by word-of-mouth or by imitating other people signing and may be quite unaware of what the hand sign denotes or the controversy surrounding the use of the sign. The Marabastad sign has both historical and political significance, specific to South Africa. The sexual implications and aggressive narrative that this taxi hand sign represents is particularly important in reflecting the fundamentally violent and unstable situation in Marabastad⁷¹ and the overall dissatisfaction between taxi drivers and commuters in Gauteng.

The consequence of witchcraft⁷² evidenced in the cutting up of body parts in the murder of the taxi operator should be noted because it has relevance to the narrative that literally shaped the Marabastad taxi hand gesture. To those who know its meaning, it is the visual evidence – the image and three dimensionality of the severed testicles of the operator portrayed by the sign – which is particularly offensive to some. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No IM-008 Marabastad and Figures on DVD 2. B-Painted No B-13].

4.3.4 ORANGE FARM

Describing names of places would seem to be the most obvious and the easiest

⁷⁰ I am told that there is an alternative sign to Marabastad. It is a duplicate of the pointed finger to town sign. The commuter would need to be standing on the left hand side of the road in Pretoria for the taxi driver to know that they are signing to Marabastad (Tsebe, Interview: 2011).

⁷¹ A report by Patrick Hlahla, “Taxi troubles: angry residents block R55” illustrates another violent episode in Marabastad. The incident occurred on 5 October 2011, where “Taxi owner Evans Moremi was shot dead in a running battle after a stand-off lasting nearly two hours between the Pretoria-Randburg - Soshanguve Taxi Association (PRSTA) and the Zwananane Marabastad Taxi Association (ZMTA). This led to the closure of the rank. Moremi, 45, was a PRSTA transport operator and a member of the Olievenhoutbosch patrol squad. The PRSTA and the ZMTA have been engaged in an ongoing fight for nearly two years” (Hlahla 2011). Available from www.IndependentOnline.com, accessed 2013.

⁷² Eric Worby highlights the “rich anthropology of witchcraft and envy in central and southern Africa” (Worby 2010: 421). Ashforth explains that ‘*muti* murders’ are an illegitimate way of gaining personal “wealth or power at other people’s expense” (Ashforth 2005: 41). He explains that “to kill someone ‘using *Muti*’ is to kill him with witchcraft” (Ashforth 2005: 109).

way to communicate a destination. The act of gesturing would seek to describe and mirror the name that the place calls to mind and, in turn then, the narrative that it evokes. Some are straight-forward descriptive taxi hand signs for place names, for instance, the two hands with each displaying a pointed index finger crossing the other finger indicates cross roads; the curved thumb and finger carving out a letter C for Cresta; and the half way sign which has the one vertical hand chopping the other flat hand beneath in half.

The taxi hand sign to Orange Farm is also directly descriptive of its name. With a forward pointing hand, all four fingers and the thumb are bent upwards as if to hold an orange. The 'space' created is the shape of the volume that the orange would have occupied. This so called 'negative' space is the symbol or code for the absent orange but it could just as easily suggest a tennis ball, tea cup or any round fruit fitting into the cupped hand. It is, however, immediately perceived to be an orange because of the name of the destination, Orange Farm.

People who use deaf sign language add an extra dimension to the Orange Farm sign. They describe the 'orange' with the left hand in the same way as the taxi sign does and then, in addition, describe the word 'farm', with the right hand. The palm of the right hand is parallel to the floor, fingers bent downwards. This hand moves in a sweeping movement across to the right, to mimic the parallel lines of the plowed fields on a farm. The taxi hand sign to Orange Farm encourages a visualisation of something that is absent (the orange) and portrayed by something that is present (the hand). The deaf sign indicating a 'farm' encourages a stronger visual narrative, showing both the orange and the farm. Imagine the fingers of the right hand dragged across the sand. What would be left behind are indexical markings on the sand of where the fingers have left traces of equidistant single rows. These indicated parallel lines that represent the rows of crops. Therefore as is examined in Chapter 6, 'presence' as represented by 'trace' elements in the context of all taxi hand signs are seen to be relevant to each individual sign. The narrative is embedded in the enactment of the sign. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No IM-010 Orange Farm and Figures on DVD 2. B-*Painted* No B-7 and B-9].

4.3.5 DIEPSLOOT

This is a taxi hand sign that is shaped to describe geographically the entrance to the settlement of Diepsloot. The taxi sign to Diepsloot is acted out with one hand in a sequence of hand postures, dipping downward and then upward in a forward movement several times. The narrative is in the performance, imitating the bumpy road that has to be negotiated when arriving at the neglected over-populated area of Diepsloot, a township that developed informally after 1994. The taxi gesture is an evocative performance, yet the action is deceptively playful. The conditions in Diepsloot as implied by the taxi hand movement are that of a neglected landscape. For commuters in Gauteng, the gesture to Diepsloot is one of the most fully established and well-known taxi hand signs unique in Gauteng. Nevertheless, it is also an example of a taxi hand sign used in another city altogether, where a completely different narrative is well known. Commuters use the same ‘rising and falling’ hand sign in the coastal city of Durban to catch a ride in the direction of the beach. Here the gesture imitates the crest and fall of waves in the ocean. There is obviously no political motive in this case, instead it is of a directional type and graphically illustrative of the movement of the sea. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No IM-005 Diepsloot and Figures on DVD 2. *B-Painted* No B-7, B-9 & D-6].

4.3.6 KAGISO

A similar category of taxi hand sign is used within Kagiso,⁷³ west of Johannesburg, (Van Kessel 2000: 155) which shares characteristics akin to the Diepsloot ‘wave’. In SeTswana *kagiso* means peace. The hand movement acts out geographically, the area of Kagiso. It describes the vicinity of Kagiso by telling the story of a winding complex road system. The commuter signs with a flat hand facing left, using a side-to-side sweeping movement, weaving back and forth as it goes forward, performing a snake like motion which looks like a meandering pathway [See FILM, No 4 on DVD]. The people who live in Kagiso use the most recent sign that had been adopted for other more recently-built shopping malls.

⁷³ Ineke Van Kessel writes that “before 1971 Kagiso was part of Krugersdorp. That changed after 1971 when townships were taken away from municipalities and put under control of Bantu administration boards” (Van Kessel 2000:155).

With all fingers curled and facing the floor, each of the bent fingers symbolise one of the many shops in a mall [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No AU 013 Mall].

4.3.7 DUDUZA

It may not be apparent to non-taxi users that some taxi signs are in fact a body gesture or ‘performance’ and that hand signalling is not the only way taxi commuters sign. The performance involves a specific part of the body, which performs a type of ‘gestural morphology’ as the commuter uses his/her body to sign to Duduza. A story unfolds here. The commuter turns around and ‘wriggles’ his or her bottom as a signal to the driver of the oncoming taxi. Commuters say this sign meant going to a place of action, where socially and politically everything was happening. It recognises the courageous spirit of resistance of Duduza during the 1980s. The history of this township, however, tells a narrative of challenges, poverty, broken promises and resistance. The name *Duduza* means ‘to comfort’ in English. This was to comfort the forced removal of the residents from the then Charterston township, which was also known as Beirut.

During 1984–85 the East Rand township of Duduza, like many other black townships in South Africa, became the scene of ongoing confrontation between township residents and the security forces. The violence and scale of popular participation in these confrontations stood in sharp contrast to the apparent ‘quiescence’, which had previously characterised the township (Seekings 1990: Intro).

Duduza was one of the most highly active townships in South Africa in the fight against apartheid. It is also recorded as the first place where a ‘necklace mob’ burned a person to death using a tyre filled with gasoline around the neck. Poet Sandile Dikene wrote in *Conversations with Poets who Refuse to Speak* about the violence in Duduza. Sandile lamented that:

Duduza, the Vaal triangle and even Cradock were obvious targets of the first emergency regulations because they were literally on fire. In Duduza, Maki Skhosana was one of the first victims of a series of necklace murders that spread through the country like a veld fire in that year and onwards. This was also a much publicised case. The SABC

screened some seriously gruesome footage on the girl's murder at a funeral in the township. In absolute disgust, Bishop Desmond Tutu threatened to leave the country – “If the violence continues, I will pack my bags, collect my family and leave this beautiful country that I love so passionately and so deeply,” he said. Duduza was burning (2002).

The sign to Duduza is, in fact, an offensive act, one of defiance. Some commuters have suggested that there is a certain tongue-in-cheek humour in performing the sign this way.

4.3.8 MALLS

With the rapid development of new shopping malls in townships around Gauteng⁷⁴ a newly established taxi hand sign tells a story of what comprises a mall. Commuters hail a taxi to these malls by signing with an elbow bent and arm parallel to the floor with an upside-down cupped hand action with all fingers and the thumb separated. This is a mirror image of the Orange Farm cupped hand, but in this case the negative space between the finger construct mimics a mall. In addition, the fingers and the thumb represent the variety of small shops within the shopping mall [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No AU 013 Mall].

4.3.9 TRAIN STATION GESTURES

Memories or photographs of the old steam trains of the early twentieth century seem to have inspired the taxi hand sign for commuters to hail a taxi to all the train stations in South Africa. The commuter shows a bent arm and closed fist at waist level, echoing the old-time conventional dual-wheel circulatory movement of the iron train wheels. An imitation of the moving ‘dual-wheel’ taxi hand sign has emerged over time. Many people indicate that they are going to the train station by describing a circular imaginary wheel like motion, using their arm and

⁷⁴ Alexandra township's first mall, the Pan Africa Shopping Centre, forms part of a large retail and taxi node that includes a 50,000m taxi rank, a three-level holding facility for taxis, public parking and structured informal trading”. Soweto's Maponya Mall was built in 2007. Available from www.servicepublication.co.za, accessed on 16/04/2013.

fist.⁷⁵ Taxi hand signs to local train stations do sometimes differ from the aforementioned. For example, there is a forward facing fist sign where the fist is rotated (pointed away from the body) in a tight circular rotating movement. This is used to summon a taxi ride that leads directly to the train station in Dobsonville.

4.3.10 LOCAL

Another well-established sign is the ‘local’ taxi hand sign with the index finger pointing downwards. This indicates the general direction to suburbs away from the CBD. In Johannesburg, it generally points in the direction of the Northern suburbs. The narrative told by the taxi hand sign to any nearby location is a downward point using the pointed finger to trace an envisioned circle. If it could be imagined that this circle was drawn in sand, one could see that it only traces a small area, telling the taxi driver that the passenger wants a lift and is not going far. The passenger is expressing the wish to be dropped off anywhere close by within that area. This taxi sign is familiar to millions, and makes its immediacy and presence felt in every area in Gauteng where taxis operate and the same sign is used to go a short distance in other towns in South Africa. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No ID 004 Local].

4.3.11 VEREENIGING

The name *Vereeniging* is derived from the Afrikaans ([Dutch](#)) word meaning ‘association or union’. Dr TN Leslie became Vereeniging’s first mayor in 1892 (Leigh 1968). He recounted the story of a young woman who fled from the warring Impis (armies) of Mzililikazi (Haggard 1882: 119).

The Impis, in retreating from Chaka Zulu,⁷⁶ apparently left death and destruction

⁷⁵ As a result, developed photographs I have taken of people doing this sign have come out with the fist completely blurred! A blur, therefore, is evidence of the illusion of movement, of a trace element of something that ‘has been there’ and is ‘moving’ to another place. It indicates a presence and an indexical relation. This imagined and perceived presence is also addressed in the beginning of Chapter 5.

⁷⁶ Haggard wrote that “[O]ne of his most famous generals, Mosilikatze, surnamed the Lion, seceded from him with a large number of his soldiers, and striking up in a north-westerly direction, settled in or about what is now the Morico district of the Transvaal (1882: 70).

in their wake. A woman and her infant son escaped and found shelter in a cave, however, “the mother died; the infant survived, and according to legend was tended by animals” (Leigh 1968: 1). Later as *trekboers* began settling in the area one of them adopted the child, who was given the name ‘*Wildebees*’ (wildebeest). It is understood that he became an armour bearer for Paul Kruger and took part with Kruger in the many raids that took place at the time. In 1891 Leslie met Wildebees, who was by then an old man living near the Klip River. He apparently remembered that “when he was young the whole country swarmed with game of every kind, lions, eland, wildebeest, blesbok, and springbok. Vereeniging was founded the following year in 1892 (Leigh 1968: 1). According to several commuters who use the taxi hand sign to Vereeniging – the pointed baby finger and index finger – represent the horns of an animal. It is doubtful, however, that commuters who traverse across Vereeniging from all over Africa or those who live in Gauteng have any knowledge of the taxi hand sign being associated with the Wildebees myth. The original narrative of Vereeniging as illustrated by the taxi hand signs appear to represent the animals that were either part of that myth or had a presence on farms in Vereeniging in the 1960s to 1980s. Other commuters and taxi drivers have claimed that the two fingers and thumb in the taxi hand sign, represents the *Three Rivers* in Vereeniging.⁷⁷ [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No AU 014 Vereeniging and Figures on DVD 2. B-Painted No B-9].

4.3.12 GERMISTON

Taxi drivers and commuters to Germiston have been known to be using the same sign as the one for Vereeniging as Germiston is also associated with animals. It is named after an early 1700s Scottish farm near Glasgow called Germiston Manor. *Dukathole*, near Germiston, means ‘where the calves go astray’, the use of an animal characteristic echoed in a taxi hand sign could be quite appropriately used for the Germiston area too (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2001: 3). However, after

⁷⁷ There is no connection to the name Vereeniging as such. This is derived from the Afrikaans/Dutch word meaning "association" or "union" (The Emfuleni Local Municipality: 2010).

speaking to commuters and taxi drivers, it has been suggested that the two pointed fingers represent the parallel lines of train tracks. Germiston was the primary intersection or junction point for the South African railway system from the early 1920s (Bonner & Nieftagodien 2001: 3). This is yet another example of duplication of a sign for different municipalities, namely Germiston and Vereeniging. Since both are situated in different municipalities, the place where the person is signing from will determine whether they are going to Vereeniging or Germiston. There are also different taxi signs that are used to direct to the smaller townships within Germiston.

4.3.13 KATLEHONG

The taxi hand signs using either one or two fists held upright are regularly used for traveling from anywhere within the Germiston area to the township of Katlehong. This is an example of a taxi hand sign that, in any other context, may have a completely different connotation and the reason for selecting the fist to represent Katlehong is not known. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No AU-015 Katlehong and Figures on DVD 2. B-Painted No B-9].

4.3.14 SANDTON AND ALEXANDRA

Taxi hand signs to Alexandra in Sandton⁷⁸ could be described as ‘nondescript’ because the hand sign with a finger pointing downwards can probably only be described as the opposite direction to town. Gauteng CBD is represented by the pointed finger upward taxi sign, commonly utilised by commuters in other main town centres in South Africa. Hence, not all destinations have correlations to the shape or form of a taxi gesture, nor can one assume an interesting history, narrative or event to be associated with every sign. The taxi hand signs and related

⁷⁸ See the book *Sandton: the making of a Town* by Jane Carruthers (1993). In 1969, the Transvaal Board for the Development of Peri Urban Areas suggested the name ‘Zanfontein’ for the new town on the northern perimeter of Johannesburg, after one of the Voortrekker farms. The twelve Town Councillors however suggested the name ‘Sandown’. Finally instead of Sandown the name Sandton was selected. This was a way of including the suburb of Bryanston into the area (Carruthers 1993: 20).

place names of KwaThema, Kliptown, Marabastad, Orange Farm, Diepsloot and Duduza, all appear to describe conditions of life in the city.

What has also been shown in this section is that individuals have their own, sometimes shared narrative interpretation of particular taxi hand signs. Such narratives across Gauteng reflect conditions of places and events and histories that may have evolved, changed or reinterpreted over time. The combination of narratives, performance, places and taxi names substantiate that taxi hand signs do not exist as an isolated travel language but are distinctively part of the extensive taxi transport network in the city, which is expressed through verbal communication and the written word. The complexity of shared understanding has been refined to a simple code. [See Dictionary Chapter 12. No IM 006 Alexandra and Figures on DVD 2. *B-Painted* No B-7].

4.4 TAXI HEROES

The tales associated with taxi gestures are seen to parallel the naming of people, places and objects. Names reflecting social, geographical, political and everyday life inhere in taxi hand signing and this extends to taxi drivers who have a tradition of naming their individual or collective taxis. The names on taxis were at times a way of advertising and attracting commuters so that taxi drivers sometimes used names of celebrities on their vehicles. Names that celebrate aggressive heroism have been seen to emerge in taxi ranks and with taxi drivers. Although the narrative content is similarly significant, minibus taxi owners seem to have a different way of naming their vehicles to represent either taxi hand signs or names of places.

Political commentary and heroes in society, fantasy or film are used by individual

taxi operators who give names to their vehicles.⁷⁹ In the 1980s the drivers started giving names to panel-van model Chevrolet 48's, even though the Chevrolet 70 would have been more suitable for taxi use. One of the very earliest taxis was named the *6 Mabona*, translated it means '6 eyes' to characterise the Chrysler with 6 big headlights. A popular taxi⁸⁰ was called *Nkomoziyo Phuza*. Translated from IsiZulu it means that the 'Cattle go to drink'.

The minibus taxi drivers named the then popular Toyota Super 10 the 'Zola Budd', after the South African-born world champion, barefoot track-and-field runner Zola (Budd) Pieterse. The main Toyota rival, an Isuzu, was nicknamed the 'Mary Dekker' after the controversial incident at the 1984 Olympics 3000m race in which the then world champion, Mary Decker, stumbled and fell after a collision with Zola Budd. Wessel Ebersohn wrote in 1994 in *Business – South Africa, The Journal of Trade, Industry and Investment*, that "Within the communities they serve the taxis are commonly known as Zola Budds because of their tendency to crash" (Ebersohn 2009).⁸¹ So by implication the Decker minibus taxis and the Budd minibus taxis were also rivals. Taxi drivers, also named their minibus taxis after their heroes. The Decker and Budd minibus taxi names were the inspiration for the late singer Brenda Fassie (d. 2004) who was named the *Madonna of the Townships* by *Time* magazine in 2001. Fassie had a hit single in

⁷⁹ In the mid-20th century, slogans and various catch phrases emerged on taxi chassis. Brand names were created to showcase the taxi driver or a specific group of taxi drivers. Some slogans signified a status that minibus taxi drivers aspired to. In those days taxis had been assigned defined areas to operate within Gauteng, usually within the 100 kilometre radius as mentioned in Chapter 2. Slogans were a way of attracting commuters to taxis belonging to one association, in the specific area where the taxi transport service was available. Today in 2012 some taxi associations are known by their slogans. Shirley Khounu explained that, "For Faraday (taxi association) stickers, they write Home Sweet Home ... DORLJOTA (taxi association) they have got their sign, which is gold and black, it's like, I think it's a sort of a fist. So they have their stickers on the front windscreen and the rear" (Woolf and Khounu, Interview: 2011).

⁸⁰ Several informants have told me that they remember a taxi that was called *Nkomoziyo Phuza* which they thought was either a Chrysler or a Chevrolet.

⁸¹ *Business – South Africa, The Journal of Trade, Industry and Investment*. The actual journal details and dates are not provided. The article deals with occurrences up to 1994. Accessed 10/10/2013. Available from: <http://01202009.com/scans/Taxi%20Story.pdf>.

the 1980s with her track *Zola Budd* (Philadelphia 2001),⁸² which was inspired by the spirit of ‘taxi culture’.

Taxi drivers also displayed the logos of soccer teams in their vehicle windows. Local black soccer teams and soccer heroes from Orlando Pirates, Moroka Swallows and Kaizer Chiefs were probably the most common icons of all, with the logos of the selected teams displayed in taxi windows certainly distinguishing their icons and club support, if not in name, then in image.

Images and information on local struggle heroes were not easily accessible because of media restrictions during the apartheid era. Live television in South Africa had been effectively banned until a tightly censored state broadcasting SABC TV was launched in 1976. Comic books, mostly super-hero comics, such as *Luke Cage* from the United States of America flooded the market. However, in 1975 *Mighty Man*,⁸³ the first illustrated super-hero as an alternative to photo-comics was introduced. (Wood 2011: 1). Hence comic book characters were frequently the heroes of the 1970s and taxi drivers adopted names, which were displayed on their taxis popularising the idea of violence and adventure.

A government initiative to scrap the old minibus taxis and replace them with new Toyota vehicles (an 18-seater and a 35-seater) is currently underway, despite a process fraught with problems. It is illegal to apply any kind of graffiti on the new Toyotas as the ‘official’ logo is displayed on the body of the taxi. Nonetheless one still sees many of the pre-2010 minibus taxis. These *Skorokoro*, so called when totally dilapidated, have the names and graffiti on the car. Individual names and

⁸² See, Disa Philadelphia’s article in Time Magazine in 2001. She writes “Fassie is also named ‘The Queen of Kwaito’, a pulsating pop style that exploded out of the townships in the early ‘90s and that Fassie quickly adopted”. Kwaito is slang for ‘these guys are hot’”. Available from www.content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000782,00.html, accessed 2013.

⁸³ The creative originator of Mighty Man was Richard Manville. Mighty Man comic was made into a movie in 1978. “It was filmed in Zulu, and the director was Percival Rubens. However, by the time it was released, the comic had stopped publication”, a circumstance of the unrest in Soweto in 1977 (Wood 2011). Available from www.southafricancomicbooks.blogspot.com/2011/10/sowetos-super-man-mighty-man-and-mid.html, accessed 06/06/2013.

slogans read for example: *Bad 2 tha Bone; If You Good You Good; If You Bad You Better; The Beast; Bulldog; Piss Off; Brought Back to Life; Enter our Dimension; Endangered and Hooded Villain!* These slogans seem to reflect a violent gangster sub-culture in Soweto dating back to 1935.

Young unemployed youths in townships make heroes of gang leaders and *tsotsis* (Glaser 2000: 51). The *tsotsis* brag that their lives are made comfortable by engaging in criminal activities. They are consequently often regarded as heroes or role models (Mokwena 1991: 6) and this is reflected in the violent names and slogans on the minibus taxis. Secondly, even taxis in opposition to one another represented heroic political figures. Iconic struggle heroes such as Bishop Desmond Tutu (1931), Steven Biko (1946–1977), Oliver Tambo (1917–1993), Chris Hani, (1942–1993) Walter Sisulu (1912–2003) and Nelson Mandela have found their names and iconic images displayed on the back of many taxis. In 2012, minibus taxi owners in their new Toyota taxi, *Ses'fikile 2.7 VVT-I* 16-seater, will be called *Semenya*, after the renowned South African athlete Caster Semenya (Moya 2012: 1). Minibus taxi owners selected heroes or heroines because of the pride they have in their new vehicles. A taxi owner would select a celebrity after whose achievements it is inspiring to name his taxi. The context of violence and conflict in the struggle against racial segregation has its parallels with Semenya. The choice of Semenya as a hero to name the most recent taxi seemed even more appropriate because of her own triumph over suffering.⁸⁴

Iconic names are adopted and often displayed in minibus taxi windows or are painted on the body. These names carry with them references to events, people and places, similar to those that encompass the taxi hand sign stories.

⁸⁴ Caster Semenya's abuse, relating to her gender being questioned, came about after her victory in the 2009 world championships in Berlin. It had been obligatory to undergo drug and outlandish gender tests. Semenya complained of "unwarranted and invasive scrutiny of the most intimate and private details of my being". Despite being barred from the track for almost a year Semenya made her Olympian debut in the 2012 London Olympic Games. Available from: <http://toromagazine.com/sports/egos-and-icons/20100407/semenyas-purgatory-continues>, accessed 13:03:2013.

4.5 CONCLUSION

It is well understood that the meaning of a simple verbal message passed from one person to the next can alter considerably over time. In the narratives related to taxi signs the original stories or reasons for creating a taxi sign may also have been lost in translation. Nonetheless the narratives in the names, places and words that are referred to in signing and in the taxi situation in general are authentic for each individual that knows them. They hold in them a richness that reflects aspects of networking and the multicultural ways and histories of commuters that live and pass through this province. With so little published literature on taxi hand signs, what has emerged from my research is not whether the narratives constructed within the environment for the signs' origins and significations are 'true' or not, rather that they are true or meaningful for each person who uses them.

I have explored the customs of naming places in South Africa (focusing on Gauteng) and found that narratives associated with taxi hand signs relate particularly to destinations that are frequently also the inspiration for a place name. Everyday conversation relating to the taxi industry, which affects the lives and livelihood of so many people, contributes to the overall social narrative of Gauteng. A common thread links to the silent unique taxi sign system across many dimensions. I have recorded narratives in names of places and names selected for taxis and collectively referred to their visual, practical and historical aspects, physical conditions, experiences and even smells, as in the case of Kliptown signs. These are directly linked to narratives related to events, observations, histories, belief systems and culture. People have creatively constructed narratives around the taxi hand signs by using the names of the places they point to. Consequently the content, form and shape of taxi hand signs and the meanings and narrative content in names are born out of the same vocabulary.

It appears that the instrumental meanings of taxi hand signs are axiomatic in the sense that they are apparently 'obvious' because of their prolific use by commuters across Gauteng. Nevertheless, history, culture and society are arguably reflected through the narratives encapsulated by taxi hand signs as much as this is mirrored in the meanings assigned to names of places and of taxis themselves.

CHAPTER 5: SYSTEMS OF TAXI SIGNS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine different facets of signification starting with categories of gesture and then juxtaposing signification in humans and the animal kingdom. I turn to the arena of signification in mathematics, computation gesture recognition and noise pollution in the taxi landscape.

Peoples' collective experiences shape their languages and affect the way they live their lives. Similarly taxi hand signs reflect South African oral histories, culture, geography, politics and events over time. Taxi hand gestures, which occur independently of speech, have become a feature of everyday communication in Gauteng as people use them successfully to navigate in and around the province. Taxi hand signification can be called a communication system that may be placed among the various categories of gesture. Section 5.2 briefly outlines what some of the other categories of gesture consist of and establishes where the system of taxi hand signs belongs among them. Features of gesticulation, pantomime, emblems and beats are significant in order to illustrate the common and uncommon ground that they share with taxi hand signs and to point out the contrasting elements found in categories of gesture that co-occur with speech (Sebeok 1981: 37).

In section 5.3, I have selected the theories of particular semioticians who have observed and analysed signification in both human gesturing and the animal kingdom.

In section 5.4.1, I address communication and message formulae in mathematics. Computer technologists have turned their research attention to gesture analysis and the study of communication in the environment through semiotics and linguistics. Section 5.4.2 postulates that, through computerisation, humans are themselves becoming sign vehicles in their technological environment in an intuitive way. For instance, there is a correlation, if not an entirely congruent one, between signification in mathematics and technology on the one hand and human gesturing on the other. My four phases of taxi signing have been formulated and is

detailed in section 5.5.

Another correlation with taxi signification is the phenomenon of noise discussed in section 5.6. Usually associated with loudness, noise may initially seem to be quite a strange and contradictory element to cite along with silent gestures. Characteristics of noise are discussed firstly in section 5.6 where noise in technology and computation with the focus on gesture is discussed. This is of relevance in that it translates graphically and spatially in my art for this thesis. Aspects of noise in graphic applications are addressed as is the phenomenon of silence in power and politics.

Lastly in section 5.6.6, I argue that noise plays an inhibiting role in the taxi hand signification process and this has to do with the city streets and the environment of commuters and minibus taxi drivers. In section 5.6.5, noise in the form of echolocation for blind people is highlighted as a positive alternative method used by blind people to navigate their environment social situations, matters of place and distance, light and dark, and weather conditions.⁸⁵

5.2 GESTICULATION, PANTOMIME, EMBLEMS AND BEATS

Gestures, although sometimes regarded as more ‘natural and expressive’ than speech are generally linked in form and meaning to accompanying words, narratives and contexts. They are often overlooked as part of a more structured human language (Haviland 2006). As a spontaneous movement of the body closely synchronised with talk, gesticulation seems to be bound expressively to what speakers are saying. Nonetheless a second category of gesticulations is conceptually intermediate between conventional emblems and bodily movements and is not necessarily linked to speech (Haviland 2006: 1).⁸⁶ Taxi signs are a form of the second type of gesticulation, for instance, when the Kliptown taxi gesture is

⁸⁵ Loud noises and crowd congestion are also a type of noise because they stand in the way of communication.

⁸⁶ Haviland (2005) where he defines emblems as “a conventionalized gesture, usually standing alone as its own utterance, with a “correct” form and culturally specific meaning” (17).

performed. While the separate gestures of the left and the right hands provide a code for a distinct message, the combined use of the two gestures completes and communicates a novel message. The shape of the two hands and the message relating to the Kliptown location are explained in Chapter 4. In some instances, a taxi hand sign is a full body performance, as in the case of the taxi sign to Duduza, where the commuter shakes his or her bottom to the approaching taxi. Taxi hand signs have similar characteristics to gesticulation in that both are expressive but silent. Neither use speech as a way of completing the message.

A pantomime is generally referred to as a significant gesture without speech and an often complex and sequential movement that is not part of a gesture 'code' (McNeill 2000: 2). A pantomime does not accompany speech and like gesticulation does not seem to obey any organisational constraints. The taxi hand signs may act out or perform an explanation or description of a spoken word but they are not to be considered the same as the theatrical pantomime, which may be subject to traditional forms and rules (Fischer-Lichte 1992: 29). Taxi hand signs perform and communicate a destination and may have a narrative or representation of a place. For this reason they have more content than a pantomime. Pantomime gestures imitate words and emblems and standardised gestures can function as complete utterances in their own right.

Emblems resemble spoken language enough to have long ago entered metalinguistic consciousness as a kind of speech substitute or complement (Haviland 2003: 198). They consist of conventionally formed shapes and movements of hands and arms, which have specific shared significances and are culturally variable. Hence they are also closely tied to language formally, functionally, and even ideologically (Haviland 2003). An aspect of their 'quotability' is that such gestures can be in some ways rendered into words, but can be 'quoted' by citing the correct way of performing them: "you do this [gesture], and it means X" (Haviland 2006: 7). Yet emblems do not constitute the components of a language system as might be the case with other signing (Kendon 2004: 105).

One of the defining features of conventionalised emblems is that they are also subject to standards of correctness in the way of performing a sign. Changes to the citation form may result in something meaningless in that the message may not be interpreted by the addressee and the expected response not elicited. This is the one aspect of emblems that do relate to the taxi signs, which must also be accurate in each performance for each sign. There are close cultural correlations to the emblematic gestural system called the ‘Clever’ sign used mainly to communicate amongst young black urban males in South African townships, mainly in Gauteng. Heather Brookes explains that the ‘Clever’ gesture conveys a variety of meanings and functions related to the core paradigmatic meaning of ‘seeing’ and the core “sociointeractional function of acceptance and inclusion”, saying that “seeing is an important cultural value in black urban society particularly in relation to being clever” (Brookes 2001: 167). With the first and fourth fingers pointing to the eyes and the two middle fingers pointing downwards towards the palm, thumb inwards, these quotable gestures are often used when speech is impossible or inappropriate or to mark a certain word or phrase. Significantly though, the shape of the gesture remains a constant, but its movement is mostly sideways back and forth and near the face. Almost one hundred and fifty different meanings are performed with the same ‘Clever’ gesture (Brookes 2001: 168). The ‘Clever’ sign is also a matter of identity. Brookes states “speech, the ability to mix and switch languages, use of quotable gestures, and bodily movement are primary markers of township insider/outsider status” (2001: 179).

Beats have no representational character and are non-iconic (Kendon 2004: 105); they have characteristics of indexicality. In some ways similar to emblems, beats form part of the development of rhetorical styles and gestures such as in performance (Gullberg 2010: 16). A more visual aspect of gesture in beats is that they relate to an indexicality of expression. Beats are thus “indexical signals *par excellence*” precisely because they often seem to do little more than track or index the flow of the speaker’s syllables and serve as a kind of visual indicator of the ongoing talk” (Haviland 2005: 13). Beats are “gestures with only two phases (up/down, in/out) indexing the word or phrase it accompanies as being significant” (Mulder 1996: 3). There are certain signs whose significances are

essentially unmotivated by either resemblance or context. These are similar to Peircean symbols, which rely on a conventional and arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified (Haviland 2006: 10). Taxi gestures do differ from beats when there is a correlation with speech; nonetheless the logical use of signs in the city and the aspect of indicating or pointing is aligned to indexicality that is shared with beats.

As already pointed out, taxi hand signs have certain similarities and differences to gesticulation, pantomimes, emblems and beats and other types of gesturing adopted in townships in Gauteng. However, what remains true is that taxi hand signifiers communicate and are revealing in unique ways that are illuminated through the study of other gestural systems. Next, I address the semiotic environment of signification, which also takes note of signs and communication between animals.

5.3 THE SEMIOTIC ENVIRONMENT

I draw from theories on signification by different semioticians to understand and explain the phases that inform the continuum of taxi signification.

This study commences with the background and processes of semiotic theorists whose findings are studied by mathematicians, engineers and computer programmers to advance knowledge of gesture. This information provides a creative interpretative impetus or framework and contributes to an understanding of signification of taxi hand gestures and the context wherein they function.

Semiotics, the body of knowledge developed by the study of actions of signs, like every living discipline, depends upon a community of inquirers united through the recognition and adoption of basic principles. These values establish the ground-concepts and guide-concepts for their ongoing research (Deely 2004: Abstract). Such investigations included the work of pioneers in the field of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Jacob von Uexküll (1864–1944), Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), Thure von Uexküll (1908–2004) and Claude Levi-Strauss's (1908–2009) work on semiosis served to describe signs and meanings in

relation to physical and cultural environments and have become foundational to advancing the fields of semiotics, philosophy, the sciences and technology.

Von Uexküll, in establishing the concept of *Umwelt*, presented an invaluable doctrine of signs, which occupy a central place in semiotics today. Research and findings on signification in the animal or natural world preceded the coining of ‘semiotics’ as a science (Deely 2004: 12). Von Uexküll understood the correlation between nature, man and language and offered this example:

Nature may be compared to a composer who listens to his own works played on an instrument of his own construction. This results in a strangely reciprocal relationship between nature, which has created man, and man, who not only in his art and science, but also in his experiential universe, has created nature. [...] The formula of the reciprocal relationship between man, who must, in his self-world, create nature, and nature, which has brought forth the human species, requires us to consider the relationship between sign processes in nature and in language (1992: 281–282).

He argued that humans in creating their own space in the world turn to nature and the animal kingdom to learn about communication, sign processes and the environment. There is a correlation in concepts of the sign between Peirce and von Uexküll’s biologically sophisticated theory of signs in his research “Umwelt-Forschung” (Smith 2005: 200). Von Uexküll’s investigation into signs in the animal kingdom led to his statement that in the final analysis there is only “one receptor sign and one effector sign” adding that:

Our visual sensory cells produce the same perception whatever the source of stimulation. From this we may conclude that each living cell is an engineer who perceives and acts, and has *perceptual* or *receptor* signs (*Merkzeichen*) and impulses or *effector* signs (*Wirkzeichen*) which are specific to it. The manifold perceiving and acting of the whole animal may thus be reduced to the cooperation of all the tiny cells, each of which commands only one receptor sign and one effector sign (1934: 6).

Even though von Uexküll and Peirce never met, Peirce argues that thought develops in the organic world and “that there cannot be thought without signs” (Sebeok 1989: xxvi). For Peirce, “signs and meaning begin in feeling with its temporal, spatial, and relational facets” whereas for von Uexküll the signways

“reflected two classes of elementary sign processes in living beings: organizing signs (composed of time and space in given contexts) and signs of content in context” (Smith 2005: 200). All signs, as described by von Uexküll, must be understood in terms of what they are made up of within the context of the environmental conditions in which they exist. He spoke of space and time sequences found in language, sound and mathematical thinking. Von Uexküll’s son, Thure,⁸⁷ contributed significantly to the realignment of the semiotic threshold (i.e., the threshold below which genuine sign action cannot properly be said to take place) from the borderline between nature and culture to the borderline separating life from non-life — thus effectively making the study of living systems a study of semiosis. He defined a natural sign as “a unit with several elements that are functionally related to each other and to the whole, similar in this respect to cause and effect” (Kalevi and Hoffmeyer 2005: 487). Accuracy is a crucial element in signification in the animal kingdom. In highlighting “animal realism” both Sebeok and François Jacob⁸⁸ argue that the perception of how an organism investigates its environment must essentially reflect aspects of reality, which are directly related to its own behaviour as it is, in fact, unquestionably associated with human behaviour and has an absolute need to perceive its environment (Jacob and Weiss 2001: 137).⁸⁹

Peirce, who further claimed that both natural and conventional signs exist in a triadic relationship, elaborated this thinking. Peirce describes a co-operation of

⁸⁷ To distinguish between the Jacob von Uexküll and his son Thure von Uexküll, I use ‘T’ in front of von Uexküll in the reference.

⁸⁸ François Jacob, André Lwoff and Jacques Monod were jointly awarded The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1965 for their discoveries concerning genetic control of enzyme and virus synthesis.

⁸⁹ See, Radford, L. (2008). Why do gestures matter? Piaget, following Immanuel Kant emphasised the important role of sensory–motor actions in communication. Although his epistemology was to a great extent influential, this excluded gestures and the body from the analysis of abstract thinking (Radford 2008:112). Gehlen, the German social theorist who termed the expression “sensuous cognition” argued against this theory saying that thinking cannot only be reduced to that of impalpable ideas; it is instead made up of speech, gestures, and our actual actions with cultural signs and objects (Radford 2008: 2).

three parts – a sign, an object of the signification and the interpretant:

A sign, or representamen, is something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen (Peirce 1955: 99).

These three elements are, in fact, interchangeable, evolving perhaps from sign-vehicle to object or interpretant in a “semiotic spiral”. He maintains the significance of the sign vehicle (which could be the animal) is to be accurate because the animal’s survival may depend on this accuracy. Deely explains that:

[I]t is the natural sign (or ‘sign-vehicle’), that carries the burden of the signifying, ... because the animal’s survival depends on getting right the manner in which the physical environment is incorporated into its world of objects, its Umwelt, when it comes to food, sex, and danger (Deely 2004: 28).

The system of signification is a code that represents both signifier and signified and the codes provide the rules, which generate signs as concrete occurrences in the communication process (Eco 1979: 49). Hence, one is witnessing the process of signification when an interpretive response is aroused in the addressee and when this course of action is made possible by the presence of the code (Eco 1979: 49).⁹⁰ Following Peirce’s trichotomy of signs (in its most uncomplicated form “a sign, an object, and an interpretant” (Atkin 2010:3) in relation to taxi gestures, the sign object would be the destination or place that the commuter desires to go to. The driver/addressee must select only aspects of the sign that are relevant to correctly interpret the taxi hand sign.

⁹⁰ In a system of signification when “its couples present entities with absent units ... on the basis of an underlying rule - something actually presented to the perception of the addressee stands for something else, there is signification” (Eco 1979: 8). Hence Eco refers to “*everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing as something else*” and it requires the necessary recognition from the referent [place] in order for a response to be initiated (Eco 1979: 16).

Peirce's components of the triadic sign reflect an unending process of semiosis. However, Peirce emphasised the importance of the interpretant which is "central to the content of the sign, in that, the meaning of a sign is manifest in the interpretation that it generates in sign users" and thus it is "the *signifying element*, and it is not the sign as a whole that signifies" (Malpas 2006: 3). It is the sign that determines an interpretant (Malpas 2006: 4). Importantly though Peirce's claim in his early years was that a sign generates an interpretant for it to be a sign. It is, therefore, the interpretant coding for the sign that generates one signal after the next. The string of interpretants is generated from an "infinite semiosis" (Malpas 2006: 7).

"For Peirce, the relationship between the object of a sign and the sign that represents it is one of determination: the object determines the sign" (Malpas 2006: 4). His interpretations were enhanced by graphically representing "thoughts and arguments and diagramming relations among them" (Leja in Smith and Wilde 2002: 3). Peirce⁹¹ classified seven sign ways, which make up the linguistic, musical, social-personal, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic and naturalistic signways (Smith 2005).⁹² His concept suggests that "signs, semiosis, and meaning act through the signways and inextricably link the individual to the surrounding physical and cultural environments" (Smith 2005: 200). Specific sign ways are relevant, argued Peirce, because they are present among many other cultures in the world. Parallels to taxi gestures exist in three of the seven

⁹¹ In *The essential writings of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Edward Moore wrote that Peirce published no book in philosophy. He published a great many articles and left unpublished an even larger amount of manuscript material. Although he tried to organise his material into book form, he never successfully did so. (1998). See, *Charles S. Peirce: the essential writings* where Moore wrote that after his death Peirce's wife sold his unpublished manuscripts to Harvard University (Moore 1972: 3).

⁹² "The seven signways and their particular representational forms are as follows: (a) linguistic, concerning all kinds of written or spoken verbal language; (b) musical, involving the conventions, sounds, rhythms, and skills of music; (c) logical-mathematical, concerning linear and sequential knowledge and operations; (d) spatial, referring to visual-spatial arrays; (e) bodily-kinesthetic, involving use of the body and its parts; (f) social-personal, concerning the signs of knowing about others and oneself, and (g) naturalistic, involving the recognition of patterns in the natural and cultural worlds and the classification of objects and events. In this listing, the social-personal signway eliminates Gardner's distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal factors while at the same time highlighting the sociocultural bases of signs" (Smith 2005).

categories. The three categories that have parallel features in taxi hand signs are namely:

The ‘Logical-mathematical’⁹³ aspect, which refers to linear and sequential knowledge and operations. These are statements of mathematical relation, which when applied to scientific technological events show the sequential and successful outcomes in any practical situation. It is examined in relation to the sequential line of events in taxi hand signification, which I have developed in section 6.3.

Parallel features are, in the second case, seen in the spatial and bodily-kinesthetic events that describe visual-spatial arrangements and ‘bodily-kinesthetic’ that involve a sense of gestural or bodily movements. For example, with taxi signing there are many instances where more than one movement is performed while conveying a particular message. An increasing number of the taxi hand signs are becoming dual or two-handed signs as the taxi hand signs expand and develop over time.

In the third case, narrative reflecting socio-political incidences in the community and oral histories are an important aspect of the taxi hand signs. They could be placed both in the first type of the Peircian sign ways, linguistic and in the sixth category of the sign ways, which are socio-personal. At first glance the taxi hand signs appear to be more socio-personal as they are overtly present in art, poetry, and are a type of performance. They correlate with Howard Smith’s endeavours to feature education as “a psychosemiotic enterprise grounded in both Peircean theory and modern research” (Smith 2005: 13), claiming that education consists of learning the signs, and especially the symbols; “the major signs of one’s culture, including its myths, rituals, and ways of being” (13). In the same way too, some of the taxi hand signs have content that reflect narrative, myth and history.

⁹³ See Burris 2009 where he argues that “Peirce (1880) eliminated the Aristotelian derivation of particular statements from universal statements by giving the modern semantics for ‘All A is B.’ ... [H]e extended the algebra of logic for classes to the algebra of logic for binary relations and introduced general sums and products to handle quantification. Schröder, using the framework developed by Peirce, organized and greatly fleshed-out the 19th century achievements in the algebra of logic in his three-volume master-work *Algebra der Logik* (1890–1910); in particular, as Tarski noted, ‘Peirce’s work was continued and extended in a very thorough and systematic way’.

Nevertheless I argue that a major part of understanding the taxi hand signs is through literature, exemplified in the first place in Peirce's sign theory and his interpretation of the structure of signification. Derrida's theories of deconstruction are also relevant in this regard, as I discuss below.

With deconstruction I follow Derrida's refutation of formal structure and the relationship between underpinnings of textual matters that open up avenues of exploration into taxi signification, which may be further deepened by an artistic response.

Associated with the speech continuum is the range of gestures that reflect the presence versus the absence of the characteristic semiotic properties of a linguistic system (McNeill 2000: 2) and, as explained in the introduction, it is useful to introduce a set of distinctions to help situate taxi hand signs within the gestural category to which they belong. In Peirce's thinking, a trichotomy of signs may be classified "according to how the object functioned in signification" (Atkin 2010:13). He called a sign an *icon* when it reflected qualitative features of an object in the signification process, for instance, in a graphic artwork.

5.4 THROUGH TECHNICAL LENSES

The informal way that the body of taxi hand signs expands and develops sets them apart from other gestural languages. This is because the place that the taxi sign refers to may have a different name another part of town altogether. The innovators of the sign, either the commuter, the driver or a combination of both, are not always aware that the same taxi hand sign may already be in use elsewhere in Gauteng. In the case of the taxi gestures particularly, a sign may be area specific. So, while many people use a five-finger sign to go to Randburg, somewhere in Roodepoort or in Pretoria commuters may also be using the same sign to go to a different location.⁹⁴ Each place where the user wants to go – that it

⁹⁴ This is not unusual when one considers that all cities have street names that may be the same in a different area. A map of a city indicates the different areas that all happen to have a street with the same name.

“refers to” – is the referent but this does not mean that a new route being planned to go to the same place will be represented by the same shaped gesture.

The taxi hand signs are the signs or recognisable codes that communicate with minibus taxi drivers to provide transport in the city (Atkin 2010: 3). The area where the commuter is signing provides the additional information necessary to recognise that this is a taxi sign. The precise area in which the person signing is in is the clue, be it in the street or a taxi rank. A similar hand sign performed indoors or even in another country would more likely have another meaning, no doubt part of another gestural landscape.

One example of the significance of area occurred during the shooting of a short documentary film in 2010 as part of the research for this thesis. We filmed Pike, who has been blind since birth, using a taxi hand sign to hail a taxi to the Naledi station in Dobsonville. Pike was using the correct taxi hand sign but standing in the wrong place and was not even signing in the correct direction. Yet, a minibus taxi driver, who stopped to give him a lift, noticed him. This is a daily occurrence for Pike where, invariably he may be standing and signing in a different place yet is spotted by a minibus taxi driver who stops to collect him. The taxi hand sign being used out of context in another city or location would not elicit the desired response.

When describing natural and causal signs or where there is some existential or physical connection between the sign and its object, Peirce called this an *index*. A *symbol* he pointed out is like a word, a convention, habit, or social rule or law that connects the sign with its object (Atkin 2010: 13). Peirce was cognisant of the fact that a combination of these three characteristics – iconic, indexical and symbolic – may necessarily inhere in any single sign (Atkin 2010: 13). With each different taxi hand sign either one or all of these characteristics may be relevant in communicating meaningful information semiotically. Certain features of gesticulation, emblems and beats can be found in the component of taxi hand signs and that this should to be established before one can observe, through semiotics and different facets of knowledge addressed in this chapter, what

contribution taxi gestures make within the context of signification, transport and the city.

5.4.1 MATHEMATICS: COMMUNICATION AND RECEPTION

Taxi hand signs are informally devised and can be comfortably interpreted through creative artistic imaginings and play. I have investigated the structure, functions and meanings from a semiotic point of view. I also inquire how signification from a mathematical perspective and using computational principles, might reinforce what I have learned from semiotic theories of the gestural communication process. The question of how the places or referents are successfully represented by taxi hands, their forms, meanings, movement and form can be analysed through three lenses: literature, mathematical and computational terms and lastly through the overarching principles of deconstruction.

An alternative way of analysing the operational aspects of taxi hand signification is to examine the technical aspects of information theory and mathematical calculations. These may be used to illustrate how messages being transmitted by taxi hand signs reflect a coded form of communication that is similar to other hand gesture messages. Hence, all types of gesture are subject to analysis using information theory, although information per se cannot to be confused with meaning. It is this relationship to semiotics, mathematics, computation and art that is reciprocally beneficial. All these elements make up a credible description of what taxi hand signification encompasses from a descriptive, analytical and aesthetic point of view.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ See *The Open Work* by Umberto Eco. In describing information theory, Eco goes on to calculate amounts of information in messages. He measures probabilities that events take place and discusses the relationship to possible events. He discusses arithmetic and geometric progression expressed in logarithms, including how information theory proceeds by binary choices. He concludes “the quantity of information conveyed by a given message is equal to the binary logarithm of the number of possibilities necessary to define a message without ambiguity” (Eco 1989: 46). Eco’s concern with amounts of information transmitted aligns with Shannon and Weaver on information theory who consider “information as directly proportional to entropy” (Eco 1989: 56).

While complex equations and mathematical functions are clearly beyond the scope of this thesis, it is useful to draw from theories that are significant in logical expression, mathematical calculations, and cognitive, literate and graphic explanations. These often underpin the meaning of communication through taxi hand signs. Hand signs – codes and hand movements as a communicative modality that supplement speech – have been widely investigated in the field of human-computer interaction (Wachsmuth 1998: 21) and this field remains a key focus in future technological advancement. This correlation is discussed further in this chapter where spatial relationships, textual matters in deconstruction and conceptual art are discussed in relation to computer human dual recognition processes and taxi signification.

In this section I point out the contributions made by semioticians Saussure and Peirce in contributing to the mathematical solutions formulated many years later by Shannon and Weaver. Peirce's work in mathematics⁹⁶ and the sciences assisted in the advancement in technology when in 1886 he saw that 'Boolean'⁹⁷ calculations could be carried out via electrical circuits, anticipating Shannon by more than fifty years (Barnett 2009: 16). Shannon and Weaver's theories of communication (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 8) and its reformulation were in the form of codes and messages, transmitters and receivers. Computer technologists

⁹⁶ See, Maarten de Rijke's *The Logic of Peirce Algebras*. These have "emerged as the common mathematical structures underlying many phenomena being studied in program semantics" as well as in "natural language analysis" (De Rijke 1994: 228). Peirce algebras emerge in a number of areas. "Frameworks are studied that have Peirce algebras in common as their underlying mathematical structures: knowledge representation, natural language analysis, weakest pre-specifications, arrow logic, and modal logic. In terminological languages one expresses information about hierarchies of concepts. They allow the definition of concepts and roles built out of primitive concepts and roles using various language constructs" (De Rijke 1994: 230).

⁹⁷ See Ivan Beaulieu (2008) "Peirce's Contribution to American Cryptography". Claude Shannon, in explaining his insight into the relationship between Boolean logic and electronic circuits, says that 'No one else was familiar with both fields at the same time.' Beaulieu states that this applies equally to the 'encyclopaedic mind' of Charles Sanders Peirce adding that "Two particular discoveries stand out in a historical perspective, because they are undisputable strokes of genius in two related technical fields" (Beaulieu 2008:263), and that "the fact that Peirce more than fifty years before Shannon had the same insight on electrical circuits" as may be seen in K. L. Ketner's work in 1984 (Beaulieu 2008:264).

investigated gesturing in the behavioural world. It is this understanding of how human beings, plants and animals communicate that is the foundation of semiosis and technology.⁹⁸

In their applied mathematical theorems on signification and communication Shannon and Weaver,⁹⁹ describe communication in the broadest sense to embrace “all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another” (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 3). This includes written and oral speech, music, theatre, television, film and across the visual arts and all human behavior. They argue that all mechanisms that track, communicate, compute, code and signal are related (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 3). Hence the theories and measurements of Shannon’s formulas are used in scientific exploration with the building of computers, radios and signal systems. Both the mathematical and engineering theories of communication advanced by Shannon, Weaver and others, perhaps more specifically, the engineering theory developed by Shannon, “contributes to a form of coding, specifically the basic theory of cryptography”. This too had been anticipated by Peirce who formulated the cryptosystem, which involved a system to encrypt and decrypt messages, thereby introducing ideas that were decades ahead of his time” (Beaulieu 2008: 264).

Similarly the trichotomy as seen in Peirce’s sign system resonates with Shannon and Weaver as they likewise question the act of communication that occur in three stages: technically, they investigate how accurately symbols of communication can be transmitted; semantically, they inquire how precisely the transmitted symbols convey the specific meaning intended; and finally, they question how effectively the received meaning affects conduct in the desired way (Shannon & Weaver 1963: 4). The identification of these three communication problems provides valuable insights into comprehending sign systems. Weaver concluded

⁹⁸ See *Computing machinery and intelligence*, (1950). The study of gesture for the purpose of computation had its earliest awakening with Alan Mathison Turing (1912–1954) who worked in pattern formation [for computation] and mathematical biology.

⁹⁹ Read further in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Shannon and Weaver as well as the “Three Levels of Communication Problems” (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 114).

that in the final analysis, the interrelation of levels of communication problems, as defined in the three separate issues of Technical, Semantic and Effectiveness, are in fact so considerable that “the separation into three levels is really artificial and undesirable” (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 25). The major burden of this argument is that the mathematical theory is exceedingly general in its scope and has such depth and power that:

[T]he relationship it reveals indiscriminately applies to all these and to other forms of communication ... that the theory is sufficiently imaginatively motivated so that it is dealing with the real inner core of the communications problem (Weaver 1963: 25).

Weaver adds that the mathematical design of a general communication system must include decoding on a secondary level. That is the ability to match the statistical *semantic* characteristics of the message to the statistical *semantic* capacity of the totality of the receivers (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 25). Shannon expands this communication in a linear fashion to include procedures where “one mechanism affects another mechanism” echoing Peirce’s thoughts on “infinite semiosis”. Peirce speaks of a relationship between signs and interpretants. Hence, beyond interpreting the essential signifying relation between sign and object in any given instance, he also proposed that “the generated interpretant itself functioned as a further, more-developed sign of the object in question” (Atkin 2010: 6), resulting in a continuance as one further sign signifies to the next, ultimately leading to an infinite chain of signs:

If any sign must generate an interpretant in order to be a sign, and any sign is itself the interpretant of some further sign, then clearly, there must be an infinity of signs both proceeding and preceding from any given instance of signification (Atkin 2010: 7).

Shannon translates such scenarios of continuance mathematically through a broader application of fundamental principles of communication theory (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 95). His theory of information had immense impact on the development of telecommunication. Weaver’s insights correspond to linguists or social scientists addressing broad communication issues, which “include all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another” (Shannon and Weaver 1963:

95). It is evident that hand gesture recognition is an important area of research for the purpose of coding and Human-computer Interaction.¹⁰⁰ Shannon's ways of measuring complex message systems and their transmissions using mathematical applications and theories resonate semiotically. However, marginally these aforementioned highly complex concepts are considered in this section, it is these correlations that have enabled the success of gesture recognition in computation and which determines the connection between the human and the technical, taxi signs and technology.

5.4.2 COMPUTATION AND GESTURE RECOGNITION

Gesture recognition systems in computation are examined in this thesis in order to enhance my own vocabulary in describing taxi hand signification. Technical experts in gesture recognition have 'taught' the computer or mobile phone to detect the gesturing hand of a person and respond to its movement across a keypad. In order for computers to function precisely in recognising and responding to human gestures, technicians must first calculate the exact visual and functional characteristics of gestures, even the finest details as understanding the different cultural norms of gestures worldwide. Current computational breakthroughs in user interfaces are based on semiotic, technical, graphic, mathematical and analytical studies and acute visual observation. I argue particularly that the study of gesture recognition, used for the purpose of achieving 'user friendly' computation, has been significant in comprehending taxi gestures.

In the case of the computer user recognition, the computer holds three different positions performed at various intervals in time regarding signification. This depends on when the computer system, screen and keyboard are being used by the person/operator using it, or when the person's gesture is being recognised by the computer, in order to make available various functions for the operator. When both operator and computer are recognising each other, the computer can fulfill all

¹⁰⁰ See Human-computer Interaction in the theories of Mulder (1996), Manovich (2001), Elmezain (2008) and Fagerberg (2003).

three roles in Peirce's process of signification. It may be the sign object before being activated, the referant once its functions are recognised and operational, or the addressee when it is interpreting and reacting to the operator's gesture. What is interesting in relation to taxi signification and communication is the importance of the various spatial concerns, which relate to imaging which move across the computer screen as well as physical space between user and computer. These in turn share conceptions of artistic interpretation and meaning, as previously discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the artist and to artworks.

The material space between the user and the computer or the user and the cell phone has equivalences with descriptions of spatial matters when relating deconstruction theory to art. Such analogies can be found the introduction to *The Truth in Painting* where Derrida (1987:20) states that he is "interested in the idiom in painting" and the notion of exchange between language 'idiom' and art; that he considers space between the viewer or the critic standing outside of the framework of the art, being part of the artwork itself. These issues are dealt with in Chapter 4, where spatiality and movement of individual taxi signs are addressed. More especially in William Kentridge's mode of art making, he walks the path between erasing and reworking his artwork and returning to the camera to shoot each new frame. This space 'outside of the object' is a tangible one in new technology. Until recently, for instance, the user could only operate the computer by activating the keyboard and working with information projected onto on the screen, or monitor. The computer being a passive sign object would be activated by the user. Gestural movements are described in computer terms as 'ergodic'. Claude Cadoz defined three functional roles of human gesture: semiotic, ergodic, and epistemic (1994). He thought of the gestural channel as a means of action on the physical world as well as communication means. If semiotic gestures are used to communicate meaningful information then the function of ergodic gestures is to create and manipulate artifacts (Young 2008: 14).

Ergodic functions are sequential interconnected transitive hand movements, adapted in time and space. Beyond the graphic rendition of moving hand gestures displayed on the monitor, the term, 'ergodic' is essential as a tool for the

computer¹⁰¹ to recognise the gesture that the user is performing to achieve a certain function. Consequently ergodic functions assist one in describing the movement, time and spatial elements of taxi hand gestures, especially those whose actions evolve from one position to the next in a single taxi hand sign expression.¹⁰² Ergodic refers to ‘motion’ trajectories, or in this case, the movement of a hand gesture being measured in time sequences. The computer must still be able to recognise a gesture even though it may have moved marginally from one random point and back again. To accomplish this technical task there are certain ergodic hand movement modalities, time and spatial elements. These are incorporated into computer software to evoke computer/user recognition in and to interpret gestures graphically on screen. Taxi hand signs that include movement may comfortably fit into Mulder’s classification of ergodic hand movements which consist of “change effectuated: position, orientation and shape” (Mulder 1996: 5). It, therefore, appears, as far as ergodic hand movements are concerned, that the semiotic function, communicating meaningful information, through semiotic gestures, is always present, whether consciously intended or not, (Mulder 1996: 10). The computer is therefore programmed to recognise the shape of individual hand gestures, even though every hand has different characteristics, are different sizes and move differently in time and space. The movement of the gesturing hand needed to be considered for a global application, where changes in style and performance are also affected by cultural differences.¹⁰³

Gesture research for use in computer recognition commences with classifying the gestures and their movements in space and time with relevance to computers and to understanding functions of taxi signification. Mahmaud Elmezain, Al-Hamadi

¹⁰¹ Such ‘intransitive’ hand gestures may be known as ‘Cadoz’s semiotic hand movements or ergodic hand movements” (Mulder 1996: 5).

¹⁰² Taxi hand signs, share characteristics of other gestures which express entirely “the intention and motivation of its author” (Mulder: 1996: 5).

¹⁰³ Derrida’s motivation for his 1967 work on deconstruction began with the conviction that a previously unrecognized teleology (phonocentrism and logocentrism) was related to every concept pertaining to writing, language and signification. It was the acknowledgment of these limitations that prompted in Derrida the “*dual recognition*” of writing and language, which resulted in the origination of deconstruction (Kates 2005: xxiii).

and Michaelis investigate the relations between semiotic and ergodic functions of hand movements, including comparative aspects, differences between them and research on “possible (mutual) dependencies in terms of neuro-motor systems” (Elmezain, Al-Hamadi and Michaelis 2008: 393). The goal of this gesture interpretation is to drive the advanced “human-machine communication to bring the performance of human-machine interaction close to human-human interaction” (Elmezain, Al-Hamadi and Michaelis 2008: 393).¹⁰⁴

Current investigations in the technical and computing world are led by Kendon in linguistics and semiotics, John Haviland, linguistic anthropologist, and Cadoz, an instrumental gesture theorist. Kendon argues that there is no such thing as a universal gesture (Mulder 1996: 6). In summarising aspects of gesture, Haviland, following Peirce, argues that “the same semiotic properties associated with verbal signs inhere in gesture, both with respect to form and meaning” (Haviland 2006: 1). Gesture displays many of the features of known cultural practices “based on culturally specific standards of form and use and organised around coordination between individuals” (Haviland 2006: 1). He regards cultural influences for computer and user dual recognition as an important factor and adds that a gesture is not an entity on its own, it is an exchange between the sign and the interpreter. Most gestures he argues are performed using space directly and are “a further link between utterances and the social and spatiotemporal contexts in which they occur, as well as with other ongoing practical activities” (Haviland 2006: 1). The extensive range of precise and complicated movements that hand signing can accomplish affords many possibilities for the invention of diverse language

¹⁰⁴ Elmezain, Al-Hamadi and Michaelis focus on image processing, pattern recognition and human computer interaction. Computers programmed to recognise gesture in motion may be based on Hidden Markov Models (HMM). This method investigates the extraction of meaningful gesture from continuous hand motion. An automatic system is proposed that could successfully select isolated and meaningful gestures at a very high average rate of recognition. The movement of the hands describe “a spatio-temporal pattern which may be static or dynamic or both” (Elmezain, G., Al-Hamadi, A, and Michaelis. S. 2008: 393). For computation purposes, static morphs of the hands or hands that are not in motion are called ‘postures’ and hands where there is movement are called ‘gestures’. Nevertheless, even surface knowledge of computer/video image capture, demonstrates correlations and parallels to all linguistic models, including associations with psycho-semiosis and other sciences that investigate gesture, a complicated area of study which may not have relevance for taxi signification in this thesis.

systems, illustrating the power and versatility of hand signing (Haviland 2006: 1). One may find parallels for taxi hand signs in the descriptions of these hand movements over and above knowing the practical purpose of taxi travel for which taxi hand signs are used. Much may be learned from parallel technological investigations and human gesturing.

The hand sign is the most dynamic and versatile gestural articulator capable of a large range of quite specific and complex configurations which share significance in a range of different manual sign systems, from gestural emblems to full-blown sign languages to less regimented but nonetheless partially systematic gesticulation (Haviland 2006: 8). I argue that the versatility of hand signification and gesticulation extends to many types of complete sign languages. However, difficulties still arise in computer recognition of gestures with the same meaning, which vary in different cultures. An example of cultural differences in a globally accepted gesture is the affirmative “yes” nod. A person may nod in an upward direction as an up and up nod, or the movement is a down and lower down nod. One person will shake hands with you by lifting your hand up to about shoulder height and then drop it, another will move your hand less high and then down again, a third will “pump” it up and down two or three times. The Western single-phase handshake is extended to a double handshake in South Africa and becomes a three-phased handshake in other parts of Africa. African handshakes or greetings that are performed in three sequential stages allow for more time to appraise the other person.¹⁰⁵ Hardware and software creators are striving to emulate this level of complexity so that technology usage becomes more intuitive for humans. Such complexities or recognition problems are true for all gestural systems for the same reasons of cultural differences and context. People who are unacquainted with taxi hand signs and their meanings may misinterpret the signals based on these two basic reasons, which may affect any interpretations.

¹⁰⁵ In Western culture these may be called ‘etic’ differences and can be viewed as various realisations of the one ‘emic’ element: ‘shaking hands’. *The Insider/Outsider Debate*, edited by Thomas Headland, Kenneth Pike, and Marvin Harris (1990) by Sage Publications quoted from Siertsema 1969:586).

Technicians who translate hand gestures into a graphic mode may find that a simpler version in the form of an icon will translate more clearly to a wider audience. This formalisation is for easy gesture recognition purposes on computers and cell phones. The icons give access to further information. Although a variety of graphical and auditory connections can be programmed into the computer to create the tasks required in a specific way, the definitive aim would be to make the computer and its peripherals 'transparent' (Mulder 1996: 12). By doing so the tasks are revealed in a way that makes their performance as natural as possible. This may be an ideal intention as Mulder explains:

[T]he concept of naturalness may apply for ergonomic hand movements, nevertheless semiotic hand movements prohibit such naturalness for all of humankind, unless the system knows which culture the user belongs to (1996:16).

Hence, technologists aim to reach a wider audience. As explained in the previous paragraph, much of the aim of transparency is to reach across all languages by creating ways of modifying images to communicate in a way acceptable to cultures worldwide. Two major problems present themselves in real-time gesture recognition systems for continuous gesture to be meaningful. They are: firstly, the segmentation that determines when a gesture starts and ends during hand motion trajectory, the intermediate movement of the hand between two gestures; and secondly, that the same gesture varies in shape and duration (Elmezain, Al-Hamadi and Michaelis 2008: 393). This points to 'stereo image capture', a particularly technical area.¹⁰⁶ One may now be more equipped to explain how these movements can be described in practical terms for taxi hand signs because the same issues of movement present themselves.

When capturing the movement from a so-called beginning point to a possible end

¹⁰⁶ There are also potential applications in Human-computer Interaction (HCI) and they differ from one another in their operation. Included in these models are "Neural Network, Fuzzy Systems, and HMM. HMM "is widely used in handwriting, speech and character recognition ... it is capable of modelling spatio-temporal time series where the same gesture can differ in shape and duration" (Elmezain 2008: 393).

point, no two gestural movements are alike and some are more complex than others. A more complicated taxi hand sign would be one where two hands make up the sign to indicate a place. For instance, in the sign to go to Phola Park, only one hand is used for the first five stops. This taxi sign, using the right hand, has the index finger and one next to it pointing sideways, the other two fingers are folded into the palm. The thumb points upwards. When indicating the first to fifth stop, the Phola Park sign bends upward at the wrist, evolving to indicate one, two, three four or five fingers. In order to indicate the sixth to ninth stop, the number of fingers (either six, seven, eight or the nine) using both hands must be shown to the driver, after the Phola Park sign has been done. Hence, the left and right hands are involved in this performance even though the standard sign to Paola Park remains as described.

Many taxi hand signs are stationary at the point of signing; for instance, the signs to Randburg, Fourways, the CBD, Halfway House and many more, while others are ‘ergodic’¹⁰⁷ signs that involve moving arms, hands or fingers like the ones for Diepsloot, Kliptown, Marabastad and the T Junction sign. When a taxi hand gesture starts and ends during a hand motion trajectory there are two aspects of time sequences where movement occurs. One example of this is the movement from the specific point where the arm begins to move in relation to the body and secondly, the movement which defines the characteristic of that sign. Peirce’s trichotomy of signs has relevance. The driver, computer or interpretant of the sign need select only aspects of the sign/representamen (taxi hand sign gesture) that are pertinent in grasping the meaning or message being projected. The selection may

¹⁰⁷ In ‘Vision Based’ methods, which require only a camera for gesture computer recognition, a simple wave ‘good-bye’ hand gesture falls into the same category of a Diepsloot wave and is described as “a dynamic movement referring to a sequence of hand postures connected by continuous motions over a short time span thus realizing a natural interaction between humans and computers” (Garg, Naveen and Sanjeev 2009: 1025).

This sequence of hand postures, dipping downward and then upward several times is the type of ergodic movement described as ‘Vision Based’ in technology for computers. This type of movement involves “a sequence of hand postures connected by continuous motions over a short time span ... realizing a natural interaction between humans and computers” (Garg, Naveen and Sanjeev 2009: 1025). These waves can be considered ‘ergodic’ because they are hand movements performed in space.

involve only the parts of the whole movement of the taxi hand sign, which may include the arm, hand or fingers in various stages of motion that are ‘speaking of’ the referent or destination that the hand sign indicates to. Other aspects of the hand movement thus become superfluous. Such observations in the culture of gesture contribute towards computers and cell phones being programmed to recognise complex human gestural movements in motion. A measurable distance between the starting point and the end point of a hand gesture may also be a spatial, psychological or philosophical matter and can be described as ‘an interval between two times’ (Durgen 2007: 55).

One can determine movement of the hand between two taxi gestures or variances in shape and duration with each commuter who performs a taxi signification act. Instances of this can be seen in several taxi signals, which convey more than one message with additional information included. Usually both hands are required in the signing. A variation of directional hand movements, specific repetitive pathways, functions of time, time sequences and space are all considered as an important component in conveying the message. The taxi sign to get off at a junction, for example, may also be employed for another designated destination, for instance, passengers going to TT Extension in Soshanguve, Pretoria.¹⁰⁸ Two hands are used to make the T sign, one on top in a horizontal position and the other supporting that hand in a vertical position. In order to indicate which area or drop off point that person is indicating to, another separate hand movement must be performed. This time simply holding up as many fingers that are needed to show the number from 1–7. Therefore the T-junction sign is a combination sign showing a second hand sign indicating the number of the section in that place. I

¹⁰⁸ Taxi hand signs may need to indicate different sections of a place the passenger is going to, for example Pretoria (Arcadia, Capital Park, Gezina, Môregloed, Queenswood, Rietfontein, Riviera, Villieria), Soshanguve (Blocks TT, UU, WW & Extensions TT, 2, 3, 4, 5, ... m20 between ext.4,5, and 9, ... 7.1.1.1

Soshanguve Rietgat Main Taxi Rank (origin), all local ... DD, FF, GG, HH, JJ, KK, MM, NN, SS, TT, X, UU, YY, WW, F, G, L, M, ... extensions 1 - 13 and all future extensions and returns. ... proceed straight between block uu and ww, offload at Wonerpark Shopping complex and informal taxi rank. (National Gazette No 35010 of 10-February-2012, Volume 560). Available from:

www.greengazette.co.za/.../national-gazette-35010-of-10-february-2

call this arrangement of two different sign functions a combination sign. A person signing to Diepsloot to show how bumpy the road is performs a motion like a roller coaster ride. The arm moves forward and the hand dips downward and then upward several times (Garg, Naveen and Sanjeev 2009: 1025).

5.5 TAXI SIGNIFICATION CONTINUUMS IN FOUR STAGES

As a collective practice relevant to most cities and surrounding urban areas in South Africa, taxi hand signs are a gestural language, which share a mutual intention for the purpose of travelling to reach an intended destination. Taxi hand signs are popular because as an autonomous group they sign silently and communicate across all languages spoken in Gauteng. Each unique taxi hand sign conveys a message, which relates to the destination of choice. None of the taxi hand signs known thus far are linked directly to speech or are dependent on additional verbal communication at the time of signing. Gestural systems like taxi hand signs do not necessitate grammar, as is the case in the more comprehensive, fully established, sign language for the deaf.

Many complexities inhere in this gestural language, yet it is only at a functional level that taxi signs have been understood up to now. The Diepsloot wave, the sign to Kliptown and to Phola Park are ergodic, moving around or in and out of space, or even just exercising a slight movement back and forth.

In the process of communication there is also the question of time between performing the taxi sign and the driver receiving and responding to it. The commuter may be a fair distance from the taxi, making recognising the sign more difficult for the driver. The speed at which the driver is travelling may also affect the efficiency of the system of signing. The commuter has to wait for the right taxi to come along as, unlike busses or trains, there are no scheduled times. It is possible that the commuter may see the taxi going in his or her desired direction, before the driver recognises the signal and stops for the passenger. This is not the case inside a taxi rank where a Queue marshall points out the taxi going to a particular place.

The informal way in which taxi hand signs have typically thus far been learned suggests that language, or at least the spoken word, is inadvertently an extension to each new sign that is taught by any other person. The passenger who does not know which taxi sign to use for a specific destination must approach and ask another person how to do the sign by naming the destination they are going to. There is a distinctive characteristic of taxi hand signs that further sets them apart from other kinds of hand signing in the gestural category. The interaction with another commuter occurs even before the act of signifying can begin for the newcomer who needs to hail a minibus taxi and is perhaps unfamiliar with systems in taxi ranks and taxi transport on the whole. The scenario plays out in a continuum of four possible acts and four different time sequences. These are:

Stage One: Enquiring which sign to use

(speech or imitating signs performed by others)

Stage Two: Performing the correct taxi hand sign to the desired destination

(the signifier/taxi sign and signified/referent/place)

Stage Three: The space (time lapse) of recognition by the addressee or driver

(meaning)

Stage Four: Driver in active anticipation/response

(addressee)

Stage One

First, there is the generally accepted and largely sociable manner where other passengers show or teach the gesture required for the other person to hail a taxi to

their destination.¹⁰⁹ In this instance speaking to the ‘stranger’ is necessary and the communication is direct between two people – the casual instructor and the commuter asking for the sign. In order to hail a minibus taxi, one either has to know the sign to enact, copy someone, or have someone kind enough to assist. Having to use a gestural system to communicate is not always straightforward. This is revealed in a recorded semi-structured interview in 2011, which took place at Shirley Khunou’s home in the township of Kagiso, west of Johannesburg. Khunou explained the difficulties she and her friend faced when they did not know the taxi sign to Jericho:

Like I said to you, I was at my daughter’s place and her mother-in-law also came. She is staying in Jericho [near] Pretoria. She is used to being collected by car to come visit back home. But the car was not there. I don’t know the taxi signs in Pretoria that much you know and we were waiting there. When the taxis come out, I screamed and waved. I wanted a taxi that goes to Erasmus ... [but did not] know what [taxi hand] sign they are using (Khunou interview: 2011)

Khunou has worked for more than one taxi association and is familiar with the transport industry, yet is nonetheless dependent on other commuters to show her the correct gesture to go to their preferred destination. In the incident Khunou related, a stranger was able to assist them:

Some gentlemen came and then we asked him we want the taxis that goes to Erasmus because we don’t know what to do. He told us we should also look for taxis stickers ... with the ET logo and he showed us how to do this sign [Shirley demonstrates the gesture which is a forward movement and waving to and fro]. Yes, but this time I was using it in Pretoria to go for Erasmus, this is the taxi for a person who is going to Jericho... So, when the next taxi came we got the taxi. That simple! But you can imagine if we did not know the sign! It was going to be difficult. We were supposed to wait there for a taxi that offloads somebody! Something of that sorts. So ... my point here is that it is important to have taxi hand signs in a book (Khunou 2011: Interview).

¹⁰⁹ It is only recently as investigation for this thesis progressed that documentation of taxi hand signs, maps and destinations for minibus taxi travel have become available for commuters, apart from the Johannesburg City Council, as mentioned in the introduction in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

This example is typical of the situation in which many commuters may find themselves, especially if a commuter is departing from unfamiliar territory. Of course, each situation is different and more often than not people have already found out the right sign to use when embarking on their minibus taxi trip. Nevertheless it is apparent that it could take a while before the commuter has the correct taxi hand sign to flag down a minibus taxi.

Abner Tsebe, a chairman of three taxi associations in Pretoria East, the Greater Pretoria Regional Taxi Council, Pretoria Taxi Council and Gauteng Taxi Council, explains that although he owns a private car, it is sometimes cheaper and more convenient to take a minibus taxi, albeit more time consuming. He affirms that he is familiar with quite a few of the taxi hand signs, and uses either the 'wave' to go to Diepsloot or the single fist gesture, sometimes used to get to the nearby mall. Asked how he learned a new taxi hand sign, Abner explained that knowing the signs are simply a way of life:

OK, Normally we just look. We see these people that are going to town and we just copy it from there ... let's say for example you are living in Alexandra, you are used to that life and it just comes automatically to you. We grow up in this environment and you just know. The signs I think are very important, to everybody in every area ... for our community, signs are very important. People ... must learn as a child to know the signs. Even if a person does not use a taxi every day, he knows that. People must know these things as if it is in their blood they must know it [instinctively] as if you read a newspaper, a book. The same for the blind person or our disabled people (Tsebe 2010: Interview).

As Tsebe explains, commuters copy others who are signing, rather than ask another person which sign they should use. Then, when the taxi stops they may ask the driver where his taxi is going and have the driver point out the sign or taxi to use. This happens often when people do not want to ask another commuter which sign to use. There are many reasons for this, the most common reason being a question of trust and a possible reluctance to engage with a stranger. It is simply easier to ask a taxi driver which sign to use and if his or her trip includes the direction they are going. Solly Msiza, a taxi operator and former taxi driver who was a taxi driver in the 1980s, is adamant that the signs are informally

created and learned by passengers:

Therefore there's no way someone can tell you this sign means this because this sign can mean this in Springs and in Soweto means something different ... If you see two passengers and ask where they're going, they'll tell you then they say I'm going to (this or that place) Then it becomes the norm – it goes from one passenger to another and there's no way a meeting was discussed for that (Msiza 2011: Interview).

Thus, for each person the informal way in which they learn to sign when choosing a destination varies a great deal and the context in which each exchange takes place differs. Since many taxi commuters are given a lift on the sidewalk as opposed to formal sign-posted ranks, commuters are reliant on knowledge of others by asking or imitating a sign being performed. The potential passenger often uses a taxi sign in anticipation of the sign being seen by the taxi driver and does not necessarily know which taxi coming towards them from a distance may be the one. At this point there may be one individual signalling while the other person has not yet come into view. This is the situation when a commuter is signalling for a taxi.

Stage Two

In the second instance, the commuter uses the newly learned taxi hand gesture to wave down the taxi going to his or her destination. For some people this sign is not always easily learned, especially if one is going in an alternative direction or there may not be anyone who knows.

Stage Three

In the third stage there is the recognition of the commuter's sign by the driver, that cognitive space or lull in time between the moments of recognition by the addressee.

Stage Four

A fourth, apparently less obvious part of the signification process, is a matter of time. Two delays in the time are apparent. First, a delayed time sequence may occur from when the commuter initially performs the taxi hand sign, the reason being that there are no guarantees that the taxi driver going to the area the

commuter wishes to travel will arrive any time soon. That is why one often sees people taxi hand signing on the side of a road and they may wait quite some time before they get a ride. Second, the expectation of the taxi driver scouring the streets looking for passengers to fill seats in the taxi for the anticipated trip on his designated route. Hence, as the addressee, the driver is both proactive and reactive in this collaborative signification performance. The minibus taxi driver is on the lookout for commuters going in his direction, often using hooting techniques to draw attention to his arrival in an area where people are signalling. His part is not that of a passive receiver of a coded message. Rather he is, in most situations, active in attracting clientele and is a proactive solicitor of business. The driver is by extension a fundamental part of the gestural dance within the context of the signification process. He is an effective part of the communication cycle, actively looking out for a passenger signalling for a ride. The gestural cycle is only complete when the driver drops the passenger off at his or her preferred destination. Once inside the taxi ranks, taxi hand signals are not necessary. A completely different situation exists in some of the larger taxi ranks, where the taxi operators employ a marshall whose job it is to solicit passengers to fill the taxi for the next trip. Taxis mostly depart only when full, so the quicker seats are occupied in a taxi, the sooner its departure. Once filled, the taxi driver remunerates the marshall in cash, usually R10 per full taxi. Msiza explains, "In some ranks the taxis [they] register for the position. On the long-distance routes the marshall's collect the money and give it to the office. At the end of the month or the week the owner gets his money." (Msiza 2011: Interview). Signing is, however, seen just outside of the ranks where taxis are seen leaving for their destinations. This is information I have gathered from first-hand experiences in the taxi ranks and also from several informants during different interviews.

It is evident that taxi hand signs, as a means of signalling a preferred destination to hail a taxi and commute across Gauteng, are an unqualified success as far as transport in the city is concerned. First, in the absence of a formally arranged taxi or bus schedule, the commuter is able to attract the attention of a taxi driver going where he or she wishes to go. Second, many taxi drivers are flexible as far as side roads are concerned and may drive into areas buses would not be able to go to.

Thirdly, speaking English, Xhosa or another African language is not necessary. One only needs to know the name of the destination and be shown the correct taxi hand sign to take a taxi.

Nevertheless, the communication cycle that this signification performance initiates is often subject to unforeseen interventions. What is evident is that society and in particular, minibuss taxi commuters are at times hindered or assisted by the consequences of ‘noise’, which appears to affect taxi hand signification, transport and all that it relates to.

5.6 NOISE AND RELATED PHENOMENA

5.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Noise can present itself in the form of visual distractions or markings, pertaining to both hand-painted and graphic images and to computational images. Noise of different kinds affect technical, graphic and real-time conditions and in similar ways has consequences that impact on the efficiency of taxi hand signification for both blind and sighted commuters. Noise is commonly associated with something auditory, usually loudness or an unwelcome sound of interference. Yet, noise is common to the senses, it can affect meanings in the transmission of messages in human, animal or electronic communication. Noise can be visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory and/or bound by space, distance, time, emotion, speech or reason. Noise intersects in speech and politics. There are many different types of noise and ways in which levels of noise in signification effectively block, distort change or interfere with signals, gestures or messages. Taxi gestures may succeed or fail because of one or another noise event.

Noise in politics and the law can be a powerful tool in shaping the taxi industry and affecting the development of taxi hand sign language. Noise can present as a negative force but can also be used as a positive component in the enhancement of technology. Communication witnessed in animal species, especially through sonar and echolocation, can assist blind people in navigating their environment. Many blind commuters use noise to guide them across busy streets and stations to hail taxis. Specific aspects of noise are as follows: noise in technology and

computation; noise in speech, power and politics; noise and echolocation; and finally the question of noise in taxi hand signification and taxi transport.

5.6.2 NOISE IN TECHNOLOGY AND COMPUTATION

Technical systems and computer programmes are becoming increasingly complex in an effort to minimise or eliminate noise. However, some sort of noise is always present and the question is how much noise is acceptable for successful communication to take place. Noise may also be a positive occurrence in computational areas and in the orientation of blind people. In media theory and electronics, noise that inhibits communication refers to random, unpredictable and undesirable signals, or changes in signals that mask desired information. The ideal system is one that encodes just enough redundant information in signals to enable the receiver to recover any information lost as a result of noise (Lyons 1968: 88). Therefore, in technology noise must be both controlled and restricted for clarity of message data, yet noise is also a valuable asset in broad communication. An example is noise in computation and audiovisual data.

Although every year sees advances in the ability of devices to store more and more data electronically and although improvements in bandwidth allow for faster data transfer, technicians are far from ready to eliminate the need to compress audiovisual data. However, far from being considered “an aberration, a flaw in the otherwise pure and perfect world of the digital, where even a single bit of information is never missing” (Manovich 2001: 70), compression, which reduces the quality of the data for faster transfer and reduced storage requirements, is actually not as large a problem as it may seem to be. Rather it is well understood in the computation and the media field that a loss of data or noise is in many instances a necessary component for effective delivery of some types of audiovisual data (Manovich 2001: 70). This means that the editing process is made easier and the delivery of the resultant file to the viewer is faster.

If one takes, for example, a single digital image which consists of millions of pixels, one understands that all of this data requires considerable storage space in a computer. This also means that the larger the image the longer the time it takes

“(in contrast to a text file) to transmit over a network”, hence the software and hardware used to acquire, store, manipulate, and transmit digital images uniformly rely on lossy compression (Manovich 2001: 70). Les Manovich in *The Language of New Media* explains that:

[T]he technique of making image files smaller by deleting some information... Depending on the format, The technique involves a compromise between image quality and file size... the smaller the size of a compressed file, the more visible are the visual artifacts introduced in deleting information. Depending on the level of compression, these artifacts range from barely noticeable to quite pronounced (2001: 70).

This describes how noise can be used to create a compressed file for storage purposes so that the computer user has more space to work on current images. It is part of computer culture to take advantage of noise or ‘lossy compression’ and utilise it in particular situations. Likewise, full resolution Photoshop pictures are big files. In order to make the files easily accessible across e-mail and the web, their resolution has to be lowered and some pixels removed. A low-resolution file, although it can easily be seen on the monitor, is fuzzy when printed (because information has been stripped). On the other hand, in software programmes, programmers face the dilemma of programming the software to prepare for every contingency while striving for user-friendly software operation. It is a fine line between a usable programme and one in which complexity may overwhelm the user. Hence compression has made the interaction of computers for people communicative and user friendly. The best software has been pared down to achieve a balance between noise and usability, simplicity and full communication. Manovich explains that:

Lossy compression is the very foundation of computer culture ... while in theory computer technology entails the flawless replication of data, its actual use in contemporary society is characterized by the loss of data, degradation, and noise; the noise which is often even stronger than that of traditional analog media (Manovich 2001: 70).

On the other hand, the control of levels of noise in the area of communication, the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence or text, for instance, is paramount for the meaning of the message received to be clear and comprehensible. In the same way

as the discourse that surrounds a language unit assists in determining its interpretation, so is context as significant in this application as it is with taxi hand signs.

Noise can in fact be any type of interference or interruption of a message, distortion of a meaning or a disruption in transmission in the cognitive passage of signs and their referents, the place they are indicating to. Theorists of noise have demonstrated that noise in speech, for example, is not necessarily an interruption or a hindrance. In his book *Literary semiotics: a critical approach* Scott Simpkins takes the example from Jacques Attali who provides an opposing, perhaps even controversial, view of the phenomenon of noise by arguing that it is “a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of the emission. Interference ... would certainly be in keeping with the control-orientated stance in semiotics” yet could instead be seen as a competitive force (Simpkins 2001: 162). This would be like a person interrupting a conversation whose noise merely adds to the overall static of intersecting messages by becoming a rich site of meaning exchanges, even creating or enhancing meanings (Simpkins 2001:162). One may separate matters attributed to noise into two types: in the first instance interrupting a message that is being transmitted signifies a certain type of obstacle or censorship. This situation applies to taxi signification in many different ways. For instance, drivers and commuters must contend with environmental conditions like rain, smog, mist, light and darkness. Noise on the streets and in taxi ranks, traffic congestion and safety and crime considerations may be considered noise that inhibits taxi signification. In the second instance, Attali speaks of an absence of meaning in “pure noise” or in the meaningless repetition of a message, which has the effect of freeing the imagination, saying that:

[A]bsolute ambiguity, a construction outside meaning ... makes possible the creation of a new order on another level of organization, of a new code in another network (Simpkins 2001: 162,163).

This is the effect of thinking laterally and creatively allowing for new meanings to emerge out of improbability and uncertainty. I take this position with my concept of space and trace in my artwork *Signification* (discussed in Chapter 6).

Quite distinct from engaging the imagination is the matter of noise control for intelligibility and clarity. The control of noise is particularly important in ensuring that the meaning of the message is not altered.¹¹⁰ Weaver explains that the mathematical design of a general communication system must include decoding on a secondary level. That is, the ability to match the statistical *semantic* characteristics of the message to the statistical *semantic* capacity of the totality of the receivers (Shannon and Weaver 1963). His argument is that during the process of transmission, it is “unfortunately characteristic that certain things are added to the signal which were not intended by the information source” (1963:7). These additions could be anything from distortions of sound, for instance, in telephony, static in radio, shape and pictorial distortions in televisions due to snow and other errors in transmission that are common to phenomenon like telegraphy or facsimiles. All such occurrences are referred to as noise (Shannon and Weaver 1963: 7). In order to facilitate the accuracy of action that takes place one must consider the object or message being communicated. This may concern the environment or airwaves wherein messages that are transmitted or apparent similarities of certain aspects of failed, misinterpreted or interrupted technical problems concerned with the accuracy of transmission. The expected outcome must, however, yield a tangible and practically applicable result¹¹¹ (Weaver 1949: 3).

Eco’s concern also addresses interruption of power where he argues that ‘white

¹¹⁰ See, issues of noise control in reviewing a mechanical episode, Eco in his book *A Theory of Semiotics*, makes use of an example of a model used for controlling and maintaining water saturation levels in a watershed, first proposed by engineer Tuttllo de Mauro (b.1932). This model considers the possible presence of noise on the channel, which could potentially cause disturbance in the system that could alter the nature of the signals, making detection difficult. A solution is found by complicating the new signal code to make the transmission of information more secure. “Newer versions of software applications include larger amounts of code to handle operations effectively, without noise” (Eco 1979: 305).

¹¹¹ Weaver describes the evaluation of complex scientific matters, such as, “how automatic equipment to track an airplane and to compute its probable future positions, affects another mechanism such as a guided missile chasing this airplane” (Weaver 1949:3).

noise' is a threat to the stability of logical semiosis. It concerns laws which pertain to the meanings of messages "dependent on its organization according to certain laws of probability" or in a linguistic system. He claimed that such a 'dis-order' is a constant threat to the message itself, which would degenerate into "white noise" (Eco in Simpkins 2001: 135). Eco further describes white noise as the "undifferentiated sum of all frequencies – a noise which, logically speaking, should give us the greatest possible amount of information, but which in fact gives us none at all" (Eco in Simpkins 2001: 135). In the face of the original chaos, he says that there is "a limit beyond which a wealth of information becomes a mere noise" (Eco in Simpkins 2001: 135).

He claims that only an experienced critic can identify the potential of communicability in a given entity or its 'openness' to possibilities across various readings. Perhaps only then could a message "be considered an act of communication and not just an absurd dialogue between a signal that is, mere noise, and a reception that is nothing more than a solipsistic ranting" (Eco in Simpkins 2001: 135). He answers his own skepticism by stating that total sign consumption can be prevented by semiotic economy. Information possesses rich aesthetic meaning within a certain message. There are measures to control and inhibit noise in order to exact meaningful communication. Eco explains that "it is a restrained expenditure of significant communication, to the extent that this wealth is contained, noise is forestalled and meaningful communication is possible" (Eco in Simpkins 2001: 136).

Computers cannot gauge actual emotional content in communication and an extremely exaggerated signal or gesture may not always be accurately interpreted. This is exemplified in Wii Sports on the Internet, where a frustrated player may exaggerate a gesture and in such a situation the software may misread this as an incorrect movement. On the other hand, software for computers and cell phones are programmed to accept degrees of movement caused by emotional demeanour. These ergodic movements are affected by change, position, orientation and shape. The semiotic function and communicating meaningful information is always present through semiotic gesture (Mulder 1996: 10).

5.6.3 NOISE IN GRAPHIC APPLICATIONS

In the first place, noise is usually employed as a positive advantage to give the illusion of movement of an object from one point of a hand-worked 'canvas' or computer 'screen' to another. My artwork, *Signification*, explores the proposition that any type of line, smudge mark or trace element may indicate something left behind by the object or message, having been there in another space, place and time. It is these elements that I am relying on to trace taxi hand signification and so-called messaging across the city. Several of the graphic paintings of my gloved taxi hand signs, rendered as various coloured gloves on paper, have been illustrated as if in motion. Some may be shown to be waving from left to right, up and down or backward and forward. In a painting or graphic on a flat surface it appears more effective to create these illusions of motion with the visual noise of distortions and abstractions, which may include fragmentation or suggestion, alluding to form and sensation. Any type of fracturing of a visual object is noise because it disrupts the surface of the object and destroys the original form. This is equally true of two and three dimensional objects, and can be seen in Kentridge and Marx's *The Firewalker* sculpture (2010),¹¹² in the Johannesburg inner city, which is an example where art deliberately disrupts the material to maximise visual noise and to effect movement. The sculpture, based on a two-dimensional image recreating the original paper maquette, consists of large black and white metal plates, positioned in layers, evocative of torn bits of paper. Walking around the sculpture provides a multitude of broken images, until at one point all the images come together and *The Firewalker* comes alive as a woman, striding forward with a burning brazier on her head (Johannesburg Development Agency: 2009). The taxi hand sign wave to Diepsloot painted on a flat paper surface employs visual noise and elements of trace, by breaking down the image of a waving yellow glove into successively fragmented, smudged or almost obliterated marks. This is a much-employed technique in art language where noise is used to

¹¹² See, South African Artists Book. *William Kentridge and Gerard Marx. Fire Walker* (2011). Measurements: Box = 452 x 357mm. Inscription: Signed by the artists. Johannesburg, Fourthwall Books.

positive effect¹¹³ and translates effectively in computer imagery and motion. Kentridge has drawn and semi-obliterated the last drawn image for each subsequent frame for his films. This noise gives the illusion of movement on his final artwork. The resulting film plays at a speed, which captures each new image in a frame, but loses clarity in selected frames to give the illusion of traces of movement.

Similar criteria exist in creating illusions of movement or ‘noise’ in abstract visual representations in computation. Techniques for computer imagery may begin with artist’s renderings of shapes without wireframes or hard lines, creating visual illusions of energy, objects in flight or any movement. Image editing programmes such as Photoshop, PowerPoint, Eudora, Navigator, RealPlayer can automatically improve contrast ranges and remove noise (Manovich 2002: 39). However, they also come with filters that can modify an image using textures and filters, which might also be thought of as noise. Noise could be considered as either over- or underexposure, saturation, levels of various thresholds and pasteurisation for the presumed purpose of creating spatio-visual illusions. In Photoshop image filters may be used to add noise to an image. It reads in the image file pixel by pixel, adding a randomly generated number to the value of each pixel, and writes out a new image file (Manovich 2002: 127). Any overly exaggerated noise on a television or computer screen will distort or obliterate forms or images altogether. This is commonly known as ‘snowing’ (Bryson 2005). Another consequence of snow or snowing, aligns to concealing one’s true motives to cover up, hide, interfere or obscure something.

5.6.4 NOISE IN TAXI LANDSCAPES

In marked contrast to how a sighted person identifies noise in the environment, noise is an essential location tool for blind people, who have been known to have

¹¹³ See Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude descending a staircase* (1912), where a movement is enhanced by noise in repletion and effects of ‘scumbling’ with brush strokes. Oil on Canvas shows his interest in *Cubism*, which led to the use of fragmentation of the surface to effect movement similar to the Italian Futuristic aesthetic (Eimert et al 2010:155).

the ability to perceive objects well before they touch them (*Science Daily* 2011). Investigations in the Karl Dallenbach's lab at Cornell University substantiated that humans could echolocate. Echolocating (or Flash Sonar) relies on echoes and sound waves emanated from clicking sounds to help individuals to perceive and navigate their environment. As far back as 1794 French philosopher Denis Diderot theorised that "it had something to do with vibrations against the skin of the face" (Finkel 2011). Daniel Kish who has been sightless since the age of two makes clicking sounds with his tongue and he has learned to identify and locate the position of every object around him allowing him to function efficiently as would a sighted person. Finkel explains how:

every car, person, dog, stroller, and bicycle makes a sound. So do gusts of wind, bits of blowing garbage, and rustling leaves ... what Kish calls urban furniture: benches, traffic signs, telephone poles, postal boxes, fire hydrants, light posts, parked vehicles. Kish hears the sonic reflections from his click, even in a place teeming with ambient noise (Finkel 2011).

This ability to use noise is adopted by some sightless people for acoustic way-finding or navigating within their environment using auditory rather than visual cues. Following Von Uexküll's term *Umwelt*, which was coined to describe the perceptual world (Rüting 2004,¹¹⁴ Shettleworth 1998¹¹⁵), many other studies have addressed this type of sound, one of the best-known examples of echolocation systems being that of bats, beluga whales, dolphins, cetaceans, rodents, frogs and insects, who all use echolocation to communicate and navigate (Ratcliffe 2005: 4698).

Although echolocation as a 'clicking' technique is still 'new' and must be learned formally, many blind people in South Africa, who may not have access to this particular training, learn very similar techniques from institutions for the visually

¹¹⁴ Rüting provide insights into the developments that contributed to the significance of the work of Jakob von Uexküll.

¹¹⁵ Canadian experimental psychologist and zoologist, Shettleworth's work includes the study of animal cognition, adaptive specialisations of learning and the evolution of cognition. Available online: <http://www.amazon.com/sara-j.-shettleworth/e/b001iz2m0m>, accessed on 02/10/2013.

impaired. It is true that many blind people from the townships of Gauteng must necessarily hail a taxi and they often do so on their own once they have been taught how to locate so-called 'permanent outdoor furniture' like pavements, roads and poles. They must also know the taxi hand sign to go to their preferred destination.

As part of my research for this thesis, I arranged to film a blind man using a taxi hand sign to hail a taxi. Excerpts from this recording are incorporated into the film *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi hand signs, blind in the landscape of little mice*. It is described in more detail in Chapter 6 and may be viewed on the DVD provided with the written thesis.

Pike has been blind since birth; yet every weekday he can be seen walking from his home in Dobsonville along a busy road, signing for a taxi. Using the correct taxi hand sign to the busy 'Khwezi' train station, the taxi driver stops to give him a lift to the station and one of the passengers call out to him. Pike, using his own version of acoustic way finding, will judge the direction and distance of the voice calling out to him and walk towards the taxi. He uses his tapping cane to 'listen' and feel what is ahead in order to climb the two stairs and find a seat in the taxi. Pike stepped out of the taxi onto the crowded pavement opposite the Khwezi station. While he was standing amidst the chaos of taxis arriving and leaving he must disregard the shouting, hooting and engine noises. Everyday a stranger will take Pike's arm and lead him across the road to the swing doors of the station. Pike makes his way to the platform guided by his recognition of familiar 'urban furniture' of walls, rails, benches, fire hydrants. Although he relies on other people at certain points along the way to the station, it is through techniques similar to echolocation that he recognises structures, steps, and the surrounding noises and echoes guided by his tapping cane, which helps him to navigate. In an interview with Pike, he explained his reasons why he prefers taking the train daily, even though he first needs to hail a minibus taxi to take him directly to the station. Although his destination, of the blind association in Mayfair where he works, is close to his home in Dobsonville, Pike explained his reasons for not taking a taxi all the way:

I would take the taxis to Mayfair, where I am working, but the problem is that the taxi drivers don't seem to be familiar with the [train] stations [where I need to be dropped off]. I think there must be a similarity more especially in Langlaagte, Grosvenor and Mayfair. Because it has happened many times that I say 'look guys I am getting off at Mayfair' [Station] and they have dropped me in off at Langlaagte... So since I came to Johannesburg from the Eastern Cape I have been walking to hail a taxi that goes directly to the Khwezi train station because when I am dropped off at the wrong station, on the other side it loses me too much time and I have to find my way back.

It is evident here that the minibus taxi drivers have over the years not taken care to see Pike off at the correct place, causing him to change mode of transport by using the train more often. This kind of lack of customer care is again the noise of inhospitality, seen in the way that Pike's needs are ignored by more than one taxi driver over time. Aspects of noise interfere with the entire operation of the transport system, irresponsible taxi driving or excessive traffic, distances to travel, low profit margins and the informal manner of the taxi operating system. However, it is evident that most people actually do manage to arrive at work or home on time even though a certain percentage of commuters like Pike often make other arrangements to avoid disappointment. Listening is an essential tool for a blind person to develop in becoming mobile. Noise is essential to orientate and navigate in the environment, teaching proximity to immobile objects and time and distance in the approaching motor vehicles.

5.6.5 NOISE IN LITERATURE, SILENCE AND POWER

In this final section of the chapter, I examine how messages between commuters, as signifiers and taxi drivers as addressees are affected by noise. Certain types of noise aid or inhibit the meaning of the messages proposed by taxi hand signs. The basic principles pertaining to technical problems, which affect the flow or transition from the 'cause to effect' process in technology provided many insights into the semiosis of all manner of gesture. Noise – visual, auditory, connected to emotion, place, people or environment – may affect communication. The physical presence of commuters signalling within the city similarly evokes questions of

effectiveness of criteria that may delay, impede or otherwise influence the gestural message. For this reason noise prevails in taxi signification processes. I examine how, when and why communication is interrupted during the occurrence of taxi and passenger transport.

I first address where emotion makes a difference to taxi gesturing and then show which other aspects of noise play a role in the message exchange between the taxi signifier and the driver addressee. The hand sign and the rest of the body are part of the Gestalt in communicating semiotically, ergodically and emotionally. Emotion in human communication is a mode for 'modulating' the semiotic content, such as in emphasising or highlighting a need. This expression of emotion during ergodic motion, adds some semiotic content to the actions by means of gestures being visually interpreted by an observer. An obvious correlation with taxi hand signs can be seen when a commuter's conscious or unconscious behaviour may exaggerate the movement of the hand sign. For instance, when an anxious commuter, perhaps late for work, urgently tries to wave down a taxi, he or she may exaggerate the gesture in his/her urgency to communicate. Hence, a persistent signalling may be amplified by the slightest deliberate movement of the hand/head/body, back and forth and within the limited space/distance of the total sign. The driver may recognise this urgency in the gestural expression and respond quickly to give the anxious commuter a lift. Hence any movement brought about by an expressive performance or emotion linked to a taxi gesture may also be an additional sign in eliciting a response from a minibus taxi driver.

Minibus taxi drivers, in general, have power over the commuters, which may result in a lack of hospitality amounting to acts of aggression and such noise inhibits the easy movement of people from one place to the next. Minibus taxi drivers and passengers experience noise in terms of waiting. A taxi driver may park and wait at a taxi rank or pick-up point, rather than drive off with any unoccupied seats. This is a cause of much anxiety amongst passengers who are

usually too afraid to ask the driver to drive on because of the generally aggressive response from many taxi drivers. This kind of inhospitality¹¹⁶ is a form of noise because commuters are prevented from timeously achieving their goal of completing a taxi journey within the time frame desired. It seems evident that inhospitality is a form of noise that has particular resonance in the informal transport sector. A commuter who remains waiting in the taxi and accepts the consequences of being late might be inconvenienced for a variety of reasons: late for work, miss a connecting train or bus ride, miss an appointment, be late to collect a child from school, *et cetera*. On such occasions the noise is the consequence of the taxi drivers' decisions. A former minibus taxi driver and chairman of several taxi associations in Tshwane, Tsebe explains the difficulties that passengers have in confronting the drivers if they are inhospitable:

Well, it all depends on the behaviour of drivers, maybe people (are) a little bit afraid to ask a number of questions. Like "Hey this taxi is late today, what's up? Because sometimes when they ask the driver, they are a bit down on their customer care issues. They need to be educated on that, so once the customer asks they must give them the right answer ... Yes, this still needs to be worked on (Tsebe Interview: 2011).

Tsebe explains that treating customers well is all about education. The question of noise pertains to the effectiveness of taxi hand signs given the circumstances and the environment in which they function. Taxi gestures are employed by any commuter trying to hail a taxi. Even those people who may not be familiar with any of the languages spoken in South Africa appear to become easily familiar with the taxi hand signs they need to know for their destinations. Taxis, except when stationary in the designated taxi ranks, are usually on the move. Another aspect of noise in the taxi hand signification process is the distance (spatial proximity) from the commuter who is signalling while waiting for the taxi to come into view (optical). A commuter may not know in advance when a taxi will

¹¹⁶ Many people do not have a bus or train service within walking distance from where they live. Many are reliant on taxis for a lift. Some drivers are known to take advantage of commuters because of this. Taxi drivers are therefore in a position of power and may be 'hospitable' or not, as they choose.

arrive, how fast it will be going, or at what distance there will be eye contact. The noise being experienced by the minibus taxi driver may include the noise of traffic, his own hooting, music he is playing and the chattering of his passengers (auditory).

There are three types of noise that may not apply to other cities abroad and is unique to minibus taxi drivers in Gauteng. First, the system of waving down a taxi is different because different minibus taxis are only operating to and from a particular destination. Taxis arriving, leaving, parking everywhere, commuter commotion in the city streets before work, after work, day and night, all these add up to incalculable variables of different kinds of noise. Hence, congested traffic and crowds are a common hindrance to successful commuting.

Second, the noise of overcrowding is one of the most frequent obstacles at peak hours because with many people on the streets waiting for the right minibus taxi may mean a long wait. Depending on where and when the signing takes place, a commuter trying to flag down the correct taxi with a hand sign is more likely to have difficulty communicating to a taxi driver in a highly congested built-up business district as opposed to a taxi leaving from out of town where there is less traffic and consequently less visual and auditory noise.

Third, interference or noise transpires when the taxi hand sign or code cannot be recognised by the driver. Poor visibility, dawn or twilight lighting, unfavourable weather conditions, especially rain or fog, darkness, heat or other hazards that prevent the driver from receiving, interpreting and responding to a taxi hand sign in a clear and timely fashion may impede the successful completion of the transport process and are each part of what constitutes noise. Taxi ranks are usually equipped with overhead roofing, which protects people from rain and sun. However, considering that most commuters who perform taxi hand signs every day do so in an informal environment out on the streets, the chances of all three areas of noise inhibiting travel in one way or another, or the signification message sometimes being lost between commuter and driver, is an accepted part of the experience of taking a taxi in Gauteng.

Preventing or denying noise is about exercising power and taking control over a situation, no less in the political, historical and semiotic or arts arena. The restriction of noise could mean limitations, censorship and control over voices of dissent. Noise in terms of behaviour and hospitality concern taxi hand signs and the taxi transport environment. It is predominantly the balance of power played out by the taxi operators, the government and society.

Noises interfere with the intelligibility of signals. However, noises are “under-appreciated and under-utilised in their ability to reveal technology around us” (Nunes 2011: 28). He argues that by allowing errors to *communicate*, “we gain a perspective that makes invisible technologies all the more visible” (Nunes 2011: 28). In some instances noise may be an advantage. Taxi drivers, for instance, use noise as a communication device by hooting in patterned sequences to customers to attract attention especially when there are many taxis in the streets. This may become an extreme irritant to other motorists who do not know the hooting code and are bothered by constant loud repetitive tooting noises. Nonetheless sound, in this instance, is productive, working with the message and not against it. The noise *is* the message! Frequent taxi users come to know taxi drivers’ hooting codes quite well, as hooting in the streets and just outside taxi ranks is a common occurrence. The repetitive hooting patterns are also beacons for a blind person familiar with taxi travel. At a multi-dimensional intensity, taxi hand signs are experienced in the city environment as a visual phenomenon where they are usefully employed and recognised by millions of commuters across the city.

5.7 CONCLUSION

I have presented aspects of the more structured category of gesture in which taxi hand signs fall comfortably into place and have discussed how they share common features with icons, emblems, gesticulations, pantomime, emblems and beats. Taxi hand signs are also distinguished by their own unique modality and are subject to informal South African cultural norms.

Four semiotic stages delineate the continuum in taxi hand signing. Stage One addressed issues of speech. This is the only time in the four-stage process of taxi

hand signification from the place 'referent' the hand signing, message, meaning, recognition and response that the spoken word is useful in the taxi hand sign process. What has been established as well is that speech merely plays an informative/interactive role in Stage One because this is a way of inquiring from another commuter the correct taxi hand sign for a person's selected destination. Stage Two focused on the signification to a place with the correct taxi hand sign. Extracts were drawn from three different semi-structured interviews, where informants told stories about personal incidents. Stage Three pertained to the continuum in time and space and the path that the message takes to be understood. The possible noises/disruptions in the process between signing, recognition and response, between the signifier and the signified were explored. Stage Four defined how the minibus taxi driver is involved in the signification process and plays an active role in anticipating the taxi hand sign.

I have discussed the link and a correlation between mathematical and technological processes that are useful in explaining human hand gesturing. There are aspects of gesture recognition and technically significant areas of investigation in computerisation that parallel with taxi hand gestures. The context in which the taxi hand signs operate as a communication tool in the transport environment provides interesting correlations from a time, movement and spatial perspective.

Dual recognition between the user and the computer or cellphone correspond to the interpretation of spatiality, where the space between the spectator of an artwork or the artist at work is considered part of the meaning for the work. Echolocation shows that noise can be a positive device for blind or partially sighted people to navigate their environment, while at the same time noise in various ways inhibits communication for sighted people. Further to this I have concluded that noise is used in politics, as an aggressive tool to implement censorship and that restriction of noise may be a type of suppression, a way of imposing power over others.

The facet of noise for taxi hand signs in the form of restrictive laws imposed on the taxis during the apartheid era are complex and in many ways are of concern

even today. Laws that were restrictive or constitute noise were more comprehensively addressed in the background to the taxi industry in Chapter 3. The taxi hand signs have succeeded in functioning well as a sign language to reach a desired destination, despite the fact that commuters are subject to noises that impede or advance communication between the signifier and the minibus taxi driver.

Taxi hand gestures and signification are subject to unpredictability and change yet they remain a unique communicative phenomenon in the symbolic landscapes of public culture in Gauteng. The introduction and study of semiotics and deconstruction in understanding signification and language in taxi hand signing has opened a new perspective on the taxi hand signs and how they function and can be understood at a deeper level.

CHAPTER 6: DRAWING, DECONSTRUCTION AND ART

6.1 INTRODUCTION

If taxi hand signs and their value are to be understood to the fullest extent in relation to Gauteng then the thoughts behind notions of art and deconstruction deepens the investigation of the signs in symbolic landscapes. Derrida's multiple significations and unrelenting analysis of the language system that constitutes text deepens the investigation into taxi hand signs through artistic means. Philosophies of deconstruction are a way of expressing in words that which one already knows is intuitively employed in the practices of art. Creativity through art, in its unrestricted and expressive ways, has been the means by which the taxi hand sign language can be viewed as much more than a gestural transport tool. Taxi hand signs and all the histories, narratives and visual significations that bind them to Gauteng are investigated and deepened through the art. Deconstruction contains expressive terms, which I use to draw out some of those meanings. Derrida's exploration of textual matters in language through deconstruction in many ways reveals the most relevant parallel to art making by artists who expose South African socio-political concerns.

The most profound Derridian values of deconstruction in my research are Derrida's rejection of a fixity of meaning, the concept of a 'centered' structure and the significance of 'presence' and 'ethics'. In section 6.2.3 the principles of 'open-endedness', 'contradictions', 'impossibilities' and 'difference' deepen the understanding of textual matters. The argument is then advanced to examine the undecidable dualisms of the deconstructive notions of 'inside/outside' in 6.2.5, where I address spatiality in art even though in deconstruction 'inside/outside' are not spatial concepts. Finally in section 6.2.6 I examine the potential of 'nothingness', where the unexplainable or deceptive finality of 'no meaning' or nothing that Derrida claims is deconstruction's final analysis, is shown to be an important component to spatial and emotional content in art terms.

This philosophical framework is relevant in the study of Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo's art, where the contradictory concepts of 'inside/outside'

or ‘open-endedness’ are evident in the selected works discussed with each work. The artists, in different ways and for different reasons address aspects of ‘hospitality’ especially when relating to the impossibility of ‘finding a consistently ethical position’ when they are unable to be inclusive of all ‘others’

Derridean notions inform, disrupt and enhance art interpretations as if they were the very textual examples that Derrida describes yet refuses to pin down to one fixed meaning. This thinking inspires a deepening of a ‘schema’ for the processing of a hypothesis, encouraging new and diverse applications of ‘ideas’ and ‘processes’. Here one may see the artist’s imaginative resolutions through their work where divergent concepts respond to deconstructive descriptions in powerful ways. There is a movement towards a certain correspondence with ‘others’ particularly through the use of language in the conception of the four artists’ works (Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo). It is, therefore, significant that they demonstrate different ways of responding conceptually and with critical awareness to the South African condition, with its pre- and post-apartheid history and narratives. This I argue applies equally to Derrida in his critical response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Aspects of the deconstructive terms ‘presence’, ‘trace’ and ‘space’ are addressed in the artworks to be discussed in this chapter. Derrida’s explanations with regard to the relevant structures, operations or circumstances relating to textual matters translate in art terms for the process of taxi signification in this thesis. This dualism, this connectedness and the ways that artists express conditions of communication, history, politics and the world, are expressive also of the thinking of Derrida’s terms of reference. In the case of each artist and my artwork creative lenses overlap and challenge the viewer visually with diversity and abstractions that mark space but leave meaning open to fresh interpretations.

The art rendition in section 6.3, titled SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*, Derrida’s ‘trace’ as “the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence” and his claims that the ‘trace’ is “constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance” (Derrida 1996: 370) resonates in the conceptual aspect of my art. What is argued

is that ‘traces’, marks and other symbolic and conceptual imagery in SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* derive from notions of fleeting moments in time, place and space where signification and messages transfer and taxi hand gestures echo. The symbolic and conceptual imagery in this artwork shows that there is coherence and incoherence, common and uncommon grounds shared by art, deconstructive philosophies and textual matters. Deconstruction, as a ‘schema’ for processing the hypothesis presented in this thesis, suggests a certain assembling of ‘concepts and actions’ that may knowingly confuse or shape aesthetic interpretations. Therefore, it is argued that it is through creative lenses that one can begin to comprehend where aspects of art and deconstruction and where elements of ‘presence’ and ‘ethics’ converge. This type of abstract and conceptual approach correlates with the very different range of art projects completed for this thesis as well.

Further, conflicting imagery in the spatial landscape of the work harks back to deconstructive notions and are likewise applicable in the thesis art exhibition which takes its title TAXI HAND SIGNS: *Symbolic Landscapes of Public Culture*, from this thesis. It took place from 12 June–14 July 2013 at the WAM. Every assemblage of the various art projects is discussed separately in Chapter 11. They include abstract notions drawn from the blind shape-language, translated in basic forms on the galley floor in light, the painted taxi hand sign gloves, the pictorial *Dictionary Grid*, the tactile shape- language designed for blind people, the documentary art films and the art work SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*.

6.2 ART THROUGH DECONSTRUCTIVE EYES

Certain strategies reveal ways of reversing contradictions and attempt to corrupt the dichotomies themselves; these are recognisable in the four selected artist’s installations, drawings and performances (Reynolds 2002: 1). Furthermore the artist’s individual renditions parallel with Derrida in their manner of seeking ways to create wider metaphors for the country. In challenging ideas of language and ethics through art, the contradictions and notions of reconciliation may be heard. For instance, in art there are ethical implications for signification through the drawing of a line. The line, in suggesting a pathway by leaving a trace or streak on

a surface and in securing a location, a limit or a direction anticipates an address. The address records elements of place and time. Through this linear language, the aforementioned artists are facilitating the redrawing of the lines of the post-apartheid landscape:

[E]thical implications [...] arise in the artist's attempt to redraw the lines of South Africa's post-apartheid cultural and political landscapes. In reconfiguring the lines that trace out patterns of meaning and paths of communication, the arts play a transformative role in calibrating the socio-political space of reconciliation (Clarkson 2008: 2).

By implication, politics and the paradoxes that the possibility of communication lays bare, are addressed and reflected in the diversity of the works represented in the different artistic expressions of the contemporary South African artists' work selected for analysis this chapter. Narratives and events are often the motivation, which inspires the shape and form of individual taxi hand signs. Derridean concepts of 'presence' exists only as 'trace', while the abstractions of 'inside/outside' apply to the thinking and application of Kentridge's work. Aspects of 'ethics', notions of 'language', 'the other', 'responsibility', 'reconciliation' and 'forgiving', 'mourning' and 'hospitality' inhere in deconstructive notions and further translate through art in surprising ways. The particular vocabulary of deconstruction both challenges and supports the language of taxi hand signification expressed through art. In what may be distinctly different creative applications, each of the deconstructive terms in section 6.2 are evident in my art and in the four artists' work. These are addressed where applicable with reference to each artist.

Derrida rejects the structuralists' view of a finite meaning; he claims that there can be no ultimate fixed meaning to a text, that at the very 'centre' point where meaning may reside, it breaks down:

The 'trick' to a deconstructive defiance of this etiologizing effect, however, is to insert oneself within the openings of the system, at the periphery, its margins, where its 'center' breaks down, where it fissures and cracks, welcomes heterogeneity and difference (Derrida and Trofonas 2002: 93).

Derrida's theory of deconstruction and of discourse challenges the idea of a set structure and expands on the notion that there is no univocal meaning. Hence, "nothing would be more antithetical to deconstruction's stated intent" than attempting to define deconstruction itself or to pin down fixed meanings (Reynolds 2002: 2). The resultant assurance of uncertainty may be applied to artwork where a fixed meaning is neither necessary nor true. Deconstruction describes this uncertainty as "an involuntary process because of the intrinsically fragmentary nature of the signifier" where meaning can never be mastered (Cantor 1988: 360). Responding to Peter Brunette and David Wills in *The spatial arts: an interview with Jacques Derrida*, Derrida explains that an artwork (sculpture or construction) has relevance in its existence, even if there is no ostensible meaning.¹¹⁷

[F]or every spatial or visual work of art, which is finally nothing other than its own existence, its 'thereness,' its nonpresent existence, that of the work as remainder. This means that one can repeat it, review it, walk around it: It's there ... even if it doesn't mean anything, even if it isn't exhausted by the analysis of its meaning, by its thematics and semantics, it is there in addition to all that it means. And this excess obviously provokes a discourse ad-infinitum ... that is what critical discourse consists of. A work is always inexhaustible from that point of view (Derrida 1990, Brunette and Wills interview).

Insisting on an interpretation of an artwork may destroy the personal experiential reality that an artwork might render. It is with the deconstructive application of an open 'centre' that all of the art selected for this thesis will be examined.

Derridian values of 'presence', 'ethics' and 'trace', followed by notions of 'movement', 'time' and 'spatiality' are conceptualised in the selected artworks, yet in different and extraordinary ways. I first examine the 'trace' from a

¹¹⁷ Derrida has described a personal incident after the Critical Inquiry's invitation to engage him in a reflection or debate about apartheid. He requested that the written text of this oral communication was to be delivered to the *Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française* before the meeting. Derrida considered their failure to do this unethical. He suggested that the dispatch be signed in the following way: "Which I do, and counterfeit, here. Where? There. J.D.) J. DERRIDA" (Derrida 1972: 21). This provocative signature by Derrida invited much discussion and criticism.

Derridean perspective, then explain how these concepts arise as ‘traces’ in the selected artists’ works and in the conception of SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*. What may be established then is how the ‘mark’ or ‘graphic’ application represents the ‘trace’ and interferes with space in the artworks. It may in some ways be likened to the understanding of the notion of writing that defies any description of anything fixed, unmovable or unchangeable or that which Derrida refers to as ‘arche-writing’. Arche-writing suggests the difference between what is meant to be conveyed to that which may be conveyed. In writing a certain absence is necessary to reflect “spatial differing and temporal deferring” (Reynolds 2002: 6). The ‘trace’, as arche-writing, suggests at first “the possibility of the spoken word, then of the ‘graphie’ (Derrida 1997: 70).¹¹⁸ It interrupts space and creates a direction and a site that may perpetuate illusions of time and movement, which in turn advances signification and communication, whether it be through lines, smudges or marks.

My argument embraces the contradictions and imaginings that elements of ‘trace’ represent, which is openness at the core of meaning, where apparently assured meanings of texts have the potential to be dissolved and perpetually re-evaluated. Derrida’s argument in *Speech and Phenomena* is that ‘presence’, a ‘now’ moment, is perceived to be so brief that it could not have been experienced (Reynolds 2004: 56). Further, “every so-called ‘present’ or ‘now’ point is always already compromised by a ‘trace’ or a residue of a previous experience that precludes us ever being in a self-contained ‘now’ moment” (Reynolds 2004: 56).

The conceptual vocabulary deployed by Derrida may illuminate some of the ethical issues raised by Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo, whose works I discuss in this chapter, together with the ethics in my own artworks and writing for this project. An example of ethical conduct is the use of language in relation to

¹¹⁸ See Derrida on the graphic or textural mark. The ‘graphie’ or written form, is implicit in “the framework of the instituted ‘trace’, as the possibility common to all systems of signification” (Derrida 1997: 46). When correlated with the ‘graphie’ the ‘trace’ can be seen as a ‘gram’ or letter. Derridean concepts of ‘trace’ are integral to conceptual art practices in the way that a ‘trace’ or ‘graphie’ alters the content of an artwork from the moment it is applied (Derrida 1997: 46).

‘others’. The words of a language force a limit upon the speaker – one can only speak about that which one can describe in words. Herein lies a dichotomy that Derrida explores – one must speak a common language to communicate with others even if the language has limits. Even though French is his native tongue, Derrida offers that speaking English¹¹⁹ is a way of enhancing communication as it is an international language understood by many people and, speaking it as a way of reaching out to others, is being ‘hospitable’. Derrida stresses the value of recognising with respect the existence of an ‘other’:

It conditions the *respect* for other *as what it is*: other. Without this acknowledgement, which is not a knowledge, or let us say without this ‘letting be’ of an existent (Other) as something existing outside me in the essence of what it is (first in its alterity), no ethics would be possible ... Without this, no letting be would be possible, and first of all, the letting be of respect and of ethical commitment addressing itself to freedom (Derrida 1978: 138).

Consequently, Derrida uses ‘language’ to be ‘hospitable’ toward ‘the other’. Derrida states that ethics is not possible without the ‘letting be’, this recognition of an ‘other’. Since the 1970s, language has been seen as a means of moving from form and image-based works to a more theoretical and conceptual artistic discourse. This shift, away from the image and towards text saw “images translated to symbols and symbols to text. It has meant that text – rather than image – becomes a basis for art production, which in turn has meant the appearance of art as idea (Boshoff 2009: 1).¹²⁰ Making clear his conviction that the deconstructive model may be applied to art, Derrida states that. “The most effective deconstruction is that which is not limited to discursive texts and certainly not to philosophical texts ... one that deals with the nondiscursive” (Derrida 1990: 14). Derrida adds that there is text as soon as deconstruction is

¹¹⁹ Derrida asserts that English has been selected as the world’s common language (Derrida and Trifonas 2002: 93).

¹²⁰ Boshoff states that conceptual artists have critiqued the underlying assumptions of modern painting and sculpture, formalist processes, art practices, production and criticism (2009: 1).

engaged in fields said to be artistic, visual or spatial, and that:

There is text because there is always a little discourse somewhere in the visual arts, and also because even if there is no discourse, the effect of spacing already implies a textualization ... So the works of art that are the most overwhelmingly silent cannot help but be caught within a network of differences and references that give them a textual structure (Derrida 1990: 15).

Derrida uses 'language' to be 'hospitable' toward 'the other'. He draws from the word 'pit' which forms part of the word 'hospitality' and means 'power', and it may be concluded that it encapsulates an environment such as where commuters using taxi hand signs operate. Derrida exemplifies the host having power over a guest. *Of Hospitality* speaks of a reciprocal arrangement where hospitality is demanded by 'foreigners' who have expectations to be included or invited in (Derrida 2002: 110). The concept of hospitality overall is that there should be an awareness of the 'other', a kind of pact between two strangers. However, as O'Gormon puts it in summarising Derrida's position:

[H]ospitality is conditional in the sense that the outsider or foreigner has to meet the criteria of the a priori 'other', implying that hospitality is not given to a guest who is absolutely unknown or anonymous because the host has no idea of how they will respond (2006: 52).

This brief explanation of Derrida's notions regarding hospitality is used as a way to engage with the question of how 'the other' relates in the four artists' works. By drawing from the deconstructive notion of the ethical consideration of the 'other', I discuss the question of asking other people for the correct taxi hand sign to use. This brings to the fore the inherent 'limitations' of hospitality that are mediated by the taxi hand signs because they are exclusive to commuters who know them. For those who may be unfamiliar with the sign system as a whole or who may not know the sign that is appropriate for a particular route, hospitality is perhaps an 'impossibility'. This applies to all languages; a person may resort to any manner of gesturing when trying to communicate with someone who does not understand their language. Not being able to communicate with someone who speaks a foreign language is frustrating and there must be many people who need

transport who find themselves excluded if they do not know the sign required for their destination.

Derrida's 'différance' is a notion that combines two meanings – "...the word combines in neither the active nor the passive voice the coincidence of meanings in the verb differ: to differ (in space) and to defer (to put off in time, to postpone presence)" (Derrida, McDonald and Lévesque 1988: xii). To explain, 'presence' as discussed above only exists to us in its 'trace'. It, therefore, only exists afterward in time. 'Presence' is deferred in time but not space because it occurred somewhere. 'Presence' needed to exist before its 'trace' to prompt its recognition (Derrida 1978: 203). Derrida clarifies by saying about 'presence' that "Life must be thought of as trace before Being may be determined as presence" (Derrida: 1978: 203).

To explain 'deferral' in terms of taxi hand signs, one can identify a place or referent (a denotative signification that exists in space) as 'presence', while narrative arising from memories and complex histories create 'traces' through time (deferred because narratives happen over time), regarding the place and its name. These connotative narratives eventually result in an intangible identity for place, time being distinguished from space itself because it is part of a deferred collective, constructed memory, impossible to arrest or fix.

Deconstruction is used to elicit contradictions within words or dichotomies. One explanation that Derrida gives of 'undecidability' is that metaphysics enables 'dualistic oppositions'; for example, presence/absence, speech/writing, which creates a certain "hierarchy that unfortunately privileges one term of each dichotomy", usually the first one, for example, 'presence before absence' and 'speech before writing' (Reynolds 2002: 1). The deconstructive strategy is to reverse the dichotomies in order to reveal 'undecidables', such as, only if something is absent can one notice its presence and vice versa, which balances the hierarchy and begets a lack of decision regarding which is more important. This notion is interpreted and translated in Chapter 8, where the development of the graphic and tactile shape-language for blind people is described. What is absent or

left out becomes as revealing as that which is present in a very tangible way.

A particularly useful paradoxical term of ‘opposition’ that Derrida applies in order to tease out such assumptions is found in an application that both challenges and applies to art, namely ‘inside/outside’ (‘interior/exterior’). These complementary terms have significant correlations to ‘trace’ and ‘space’ (as well as to ‘language’ and ‘other’) in textual matters and in signification. Through deconstructive eyes, a mark exists simultaneously with signification in the form of a ‘trace’, existing in space as an ‘exterior’ element, Derrida states that “If the trace [...] belongs to the very movement of signification, then signification is *a priori* written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a ‘sensible’ and ‘spatial’ element that is called ‘exterior’” (Derrida 1997: 70).

Derrida considers ‘movement’ and ‘trace’ as immediately part of the message that the sign initiates. The ‘trace’ is also a disruption of the text when there are conflicting forces within the text itself, which invariably dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meanings into an indefinite array of multiplex incompatible and ‘undecidable’ possibilities (Abrams 1993: 224). For instance, Derrida’s description of textual spacing suggests that there is a disruption of presence in the mark, which for him becomes the written word and in turn the ‘trace’ (Derrida 1995: 19).¹²¹ Derrida confronts the reader with the concept that both non-exteriority and exteriority are fundamental to language and that in them inhere both spatial and non-spatial elements. He speaks about a place where even something that is written and erased still exists in space:

[T]he wound and finitude of birth ... without which one could not even open language, one would not even have a true or false exteriority to speak of ... true exteriority is nonexteriority without being interiority,

¹²¹ Derrida proposes that “writing extends the field and powers of a locutionary or gestural communication ... presupposing a kind of homogenous space of communication. [G]esture appears to encounter a factual limit here, an empirical boundary in the form of space and time; and writing, within the same time, within the same space, manages to loosen the limits, to open the same field to a much greater range ... Imagination then will represent but the same images that they had already expressed by actions and words, and which had, from the beginnings, made language figurative and metaphoric” (Derrida 1971: 4).

and one can write by crossing out, for what already has been crossed out: for crossing out writes, still draws on space (Derrida 1987: 112).

Spatiality is assured, he says because the site from which a mark was crossed out (even if erased and no longer legible) existed as a trace as it once occupied that space. I argue in section 6.3 that one can apply the logic of ‘inside/outside’ to Boshoff, Papageorge and Kentridge even though the concept is expressed so differently in each. Derrida states, however, that when associated with text, ‘inside/outside’ are not spatial terms and that meaning can never be present.¹²² He claims in *Of Grammatology* that, “there is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (Derrida 1997: 158). Yet significantly he insists that one may also not separate language and space. Nor, states Derrida, can one claim “the infinite exteriority of the other *is not* spatial, is *non-exteriority* and *non-interiority* ... [therefore] not to acknowledge that the infinite (also designated negatively in its current positivity: in-finite) cannot be stated” (Derrida 1978: 113). In his book *Writing and Differance* (1978), Derrida explains Levinas’s view on ‘inside/outside’ as something that goes beyond words, from the argument that it inheres not only in words but in ideas:

[F]or the meanings which radiate from Inside-Outside ... do not only inhabit the proscribed words; they are embedded, in person or vicariously, at the very heart of conceptuality itself. This is because they do not signify an immersion in space (Derrida 1978: 113).

I demonstrate that Derridian concepts of ‘inside/outside’ and dualisms of language

¹²² Reynolds writes in ‘Jacques Derrida 1930–2004’, “[W]e cannot simply ask Derrida to explain exactly what he meant by propounding that enigmatic sentiment that has been translated as ‘there is nothing outside of the text’ (Derrida 1998:158). Any explanatory words that Derrida may offer would themselves require further explanation. [That said, it needs to be emphasised that Derrida’s point is not so much that everything is simply semiotic or linguistic – as this is something that he explicitly denies – but that the processes of differing and deferring found within linguistic representation are symptomatic of a more general situation that afflicts everything, including the body and the perceptual]. So, Derrida’s more generalised notion of writing and arche-writing refers to the way in which the written is possible only on account of this ‘originary’ deferral of meaning that ensures that meaning can never be definitively present. In conjunction with the differing aspect that we have already seen him associate with, and then extend beyond the traditional confines of writing, he will come to describe these two overlapping processes via that most famous of neologisms: *Differance*” (2002: 7).

and space apply to individual conceptual notions in the artworks of each of the selected artists and my conceptual art piece. I show equally that in art 'space' and 'volume' exists both 'inside' and 'outside' of the work in both a physical, spatial and experiential way. Just as language is integrated into the selected artworks that I will discuss in this chapter as a means of recognising others, so is spatiality manipulated 'inside' the artwork. 'Outside' space is both physically and mentally intersected by the artist, viewer or critic.

In *Form and Meaning* Derrida speaks of the 'undecidable' as a mode of writing may also be considered a 'non-choice', something that can be understood more succinctly in the form of an ellipse, where one should not have to select between two strands of thought. He explains that:

There is, then, probably no choice to be made between two lines of thought; our task is rather to reflect on the circularity which makes the one pass into the other indefinitely ... It is an ellipsis of both meaning and form; it is neither plenary speech nor perfectly circular ... (Derrida 1989: 6).

Here Derrida turns to a graphic mind image of an ellipse to illustrate his point. A decentred and distorted circle in the rationale of the 'undecidable' is that the point, line, space and time themselves are unhinged. In his book¹²³ on *Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, Derrida speaks of the folly of an assumed obligation to find definitive answers or make absolute choices; "That is why a thought of the trace [difference] can no more break with a transcendental phenomenology than be reduced to it" (Derrida 1989: 6). One can also not label Derrida by attempting to fit him neatly into one category because he may be "as much a phenomenologist as not" or he may be as much a structuralist as not (Derrida 1989: 6).

¹²³ Jacques Derrida's published an essay as an introduction to *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* in 1962. It is a "commentary-interpretation of the famous appendix to Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Derrida relates writing to such key concepts as differing, consciousness, presence, and historicity. Starting from Husserl's method of historical investigation, Derrida gradually unravels a deconstructive critique of phenomenology itself. This forms the foundation for his later criticism of Western metaphysics as a "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida 1989).

These paradoxes usher in the notion of ‘impossibility’, for they reveal the ultimate conditions of possibility and at the same time their conditions of impossibility within that deconstructed dichotomy or word (Reynolds 2002: 1). For example, Derrida’s ethical themes, particularly the premise of responsibility to one another, where he reiterates that responsibility is associated with a behaviour publicly and rationally justifiable by general principles of responsibility to the ‘other’, simultaneously states that this too is an impossible ideal (Reynolds 2002: 1).¹²⁴ At a point where all analysis and dichotomies are said to have been addressed in deconstruction, Derrida declares that there is ‘nothing’. Nothingness of space is intrinsic to conceptual art in that it offers the utmost potential for communication as revealed in SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* and specific artworks.

Nothingness¹²⁵ may be said to contain the value that it can be ‘anything’. In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Jack Reynolds declares “Deconstruction ... is the philosophy that says nothing” (Reynolds 2002: 2). At times nothingness may be connected to use of space, time, memory, noise and history. It may mean a place to make a beginning but again this is not something that can be essentially defined, rather it is something experienced when one is exposed to a mark or a trace in a specific context. Expressed visually or in art terms, empty spaces provide constant possibilities and encourage risk. The risk is in the adventure, presenting ‘strange’ ideas in unexplored places. One concept in working with space from an artistic perspective is to consider a volume as empty yet at the same time open to infinite possibilities. Such an entity can no longer be rationally tied

¹²⁴ Jack Reynolds writes that Derrida has a “...recurring tendency to resuscitate terms in different contexts”, saying “[T]he term undecidability returns in two discernible forms... [and] the condition of the possibility of mourning, giving, forgiving, and hospitality ... is at once also the condition of their impossibility... [In] these “possible-impossible” aporias, it becomes undecidable whether genuine giving, for example, is either a possible or an impossible ideal (2002: 2). To the extent that it can be suggested that Derrida’s concerns are often philosophical, they are clearly not phenomenological (he assures us that his work is to be read specifically against Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, nor are they ontological (Reynolds 2002: 3).

¹²⁵ Aristotle claimed that nothing (*nihil*) exists beyond the world. Otto von Guericke countered that when all of heaven and earth are made from ‘nothing’ it meant from the ‘uncreated something’ or something “whose beginning does not pre-exist; and Nothing contains all things ... Nothing always inspires ... Nothing is outside the world, Nothing is everywhere. They say the vacuum is Nothing; and they say that imaginary space-and space itself – is Nothing” (Grant 1981: 215).

to certain definitive interpretations. The creation and erasure of ‘presence’ can create ‘nothingness’ where before there was something, bringing the ‘opposition’ paradox of ‘something/nothing’ to the fore. To erase nothingness is to fill it with something; the erasure of the something leaves a nothingness with merely a memory of trace. Memory is given existence because of the specific time frame that the presence of something filled, the ‘once upon a time’ of myths and legends. When the memory of trace is forgotten, ‘nothingness’ still contains the potential for all it ever had and all it ever will have. The idea of the emptiness or nothingness as well as the conceptual space between the object and the viewer unlocks a physiological space accessible in different forms and significances. I argue that this is especially apparent in the fabric of works produced by Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo. I have equally tried to ensure that this accessibility can be experienced on the floor and walls of the taxi hand sign exhibition gallery space. This view of ‘nothingness’, advances my own conceptual renderings, for example as a ‘beginning point’ in suggesting traces of signification in the city, through an abstract application for my SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* artwork. When accessed through the eyes of deconstruction, what may be revealed is a more profound view of conceptual art values at their utmost potential of unpredictability, unrestrained imagination and potential for discovery.

Art when observed through a deconstructive eye may in turn be enhanced by it. Yet the deconstructive questions of ‘trace’, ‘ethics’, ‘difference’, ‘nothingness’ and concepts of ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’, which relate to textual matters mainly are the natural domain of the artist’s exploratory world.

6.3 BOUSTROPHY: LINE OF THE OX

Derrida, Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo

6.3.1 INTRODUCTION

The title of this section is derived from a word suggested by Boshoff. ‘Boustrophe’ expresses the lateral and vertical thinking and ingenuity prevalent in the art selected for discussion and as seen in Derridean concepts of textuality. The ancient Greeks originally began writing or making marks on a surface in a line

from left to right. The end of the line signalled continuance upside-down from right to left and on alternate lines in opposite directions. The word *boustrophe* is from the Greek *boustrophēdon* meaning “to turn like oxen [in plowing]”. Boshoff explains that:

The word *Boustrophedon*, *Boustrophedonic*: “A Greek bous is an ‘ox’, in this case, the ox as an animal that ploughs the land. Strophos is a ‘turning around’, and the Greeks consequently called the windlass on which a capstan runs, a stropheion. A boustrophedon figure, then, is the pattern, described by an ox as it turns back and forth on its tracks to ‘map out’ the furrows in the land it ploughs. The early Greeks applied the word to their prevailing attempt at writing and reading backwards and forwards in alternate lines (Boshoff 2002: 1).

This is a process of turning upside-down and mapping, creating new and seemingly provocative pathways, marking and tracing time, advancing to the next step. This same directional turn is used in weaving and is called *Textarea*, meaning text. My argument, in this chapter is specifically directed toward philosophies of artists who work with contemporary multi-dimensional and cross-disciplinary art initiatives in South Africa. At this point I begin the exploration of the significance of reading the artworks from a critical creative viewpoint and with alignment to the Derridean notions. My artwork SIGNIFICATION *Texterea* and the art of Kentridge, Boshoff, Papageorge and Hlobo have similarities to the ostensibly disparate characteristics of deconstructive textual analysis. The juxtaposing of elements of ‘presence’, the ‘trace’ and ‘ethical considerations’ in an analysis of an artwork using Derridean discourse impacts mutually.

6.4 WOOLF - SIGNIFICATION: *TEXTAREA*



Figure 1. SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*. 2013. Oil paint on composite board. (DVD B01)

Size: 4 Panel components 1 800cm x 100cm. Total length 7 200cm.
(See Figure I: SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* – DVD B01. Details DVD B03, B04, B05, B06] in Films on DVD No 1, 2, 3).



Figure 2. SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*. 2013. Detail. (DVD B05)
Detail of fourth panel.



Figure 3. SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*. 2013. Detail (DVD B02)
Detail of first panel.

6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* is an abstract work with a spontaneous brush application. The silence of spaces, city structures, landscapes, grids and signification, which may be at once symbolic and impossible are my subject. One can imagine people transferring across and within the city, walking and travelling. To invoke a city is to allow its 'voices' to be heard. Consider that "[t]o generate the voices of the city itself is to venture into the realm of sensory intimation" (Amin and Thrift 2003: 9). Taxi hand signs, performed by the 'presence' of millions of commuters over the years in Gauteng, are the 'trace', the silent voices that make the most visual noise, filling the 'nothingness' of time and space. The person responding to the taxi hand sign is the addressee or the driver. Hence, the Derridean 'trace' or 'graphie' which is the textual schema correspondingly read in art terms as the mark, image or object, sets up the visual scenario for signification and communication in the artwork.

Part of my approach for SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* stems from a vision of the interconnection between commuters, taxis, the province and taxi gestures. Paradoxically, the thousands of minibus taxi drivers collecting and offloading

passengers in Gauteng must rely on commuters' coded taxi hand signals to say where they want to go and to ensure each driver's livelihood. As much as taxi hand sign narratives are shaped by the city environment and narrative, so also are the spaces in the city altered by the presence of these shared and observable performances. Many commuters, pedestrians and motorists may have come to expect seeing taxi hand signing on the streets of Gauteng as an everyday occurrence. I am cognisant of the political, social and economic divide that exists in South Africa and the disparity of inequality, poverty and class because it is mostly the poor who do not have privately owned vehicles or personal transport and who utilise taxi signs to communicate. Taxi hand signs become beacons of communication read by the taxi drivers, in much the same way that De Certeau, Simone, Nuttall, Mbembe, Kurgan and Ractliffe claim that walking the city makes it legible. One is cognisant of the hand signs referral to place [as in Diepsloot and Orange Farm], their mythological link [as with Vereeniging and Marbastad], strategic link [as with the sign to Town, T Junction and Halfway or close by] and the political or social connotations [as with to Kliptown and Dudusa].

Consequently, over a period of nine years I have driven through and walked the streets around the city. I have explored taxi ranks and townships and engaged people to ask about the taxi hand signs. I have listened to the voices of commuters and taxi operators and interpreted the narratives of the taxi hand signs against the political and historical background of taxi transport in South Africa. I have heard the stories of the taxi hand signs, experienced the violence of this city, and listened to the experiences of others regarding transport and personal events. Coming from an 'outsider' perspective, one who has personal transport and for whom taxi hand signs were an unknown entity, it has been my aim to faithfully record and transcribe my interviews and interactions with others on the 'inside', ethically recording and translating all that I research with respect and accuracy toward 'language' and 'the other'. With this in mind it has been my conviction and I argue this point, that as a visual or participatory experience the artwork should speak for itself or 'stand alone' in the sense of being interpreted or appreciated from individual viewer or critic's perspective, whichever form the art takes. The title of the work may be used as the first link or 'trace', an important

component as it begins to tell the story of the intent for the work.

My own descriptions include the symbolism that encouraged the thinking behind the work even before the first mark was made. At no stage was or is there any attempt to use identifiable objects that may describe the abstract signs, codes and significations in the artwork.

6.4.2 SIGNIFICATION: *TEXTAREA* CONCEPT

My concept for SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* evolved out of an art/anthropological conception that taxi hand signs are prevalent in the symbolic and material landscapes of public culture in a way that affects the character of how Gauteng may be perceived or experienced.

The material work is essentially a two-dimensional format, seven metres wide by one metre in depth and consists of four panels, which are joined and read as one work. *Textarea* in the title is used to describe the return route when weaving thread across the weft of a loom. It also refers to a continuum because of the linear markings that suggest a progressive movement forward. *Textarea* also contains the word *Text*. Although there are no actual written texts to address signification in the artwork, the brush strokes or marks as the signifying elements create a narrative and to represent the taxi hand signs and the process of signification. The mark or code made on the surface of the artwork stands for the 'object' or taxi hand, which is signing. The taxi hand determines the shape of the sign depending on where it is referring, one may imagine the same of the brush stroke. Brushstrokes and smudges interrupt what at first begins with an expanse of uninterrupted space on the surface of the work, which essentially presupposes the existence of infinity and further informs the moment the first mark shatters that space, and the second mark creates an address.

However, if the brush stroke or 'representamen' according to Peirce, succeeds in representing the taxi hand sign, then the hand sign itself may not need to be visible as an object in the artwork. This premise, relied upon in *Peirce's Theory of*

Signs (Atkin 2010: 4),¹²⁶ enabled me to base the abstractions for my idea and demonstrate that the absence of recognisable taxi hand signs may be represented by marks, lines, smudges, dots and brush strokes that are in themselves like the places that taxi hand signs code for.

SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* artwork is therefore an abstraction where I use the 'trace' or 'graphie' to replace all representative or realistic images of taxi hand signs in order to express the effect of the taxi gesture as a means of communication. The marks stand for the referent, or the place, which the taxi hands are signing to. The taxi hand sign 'signifies' the 'place' to the 'addressee' and in the artwork this is evident in further marks and lines prompting the referral that suggests the transference of the message. The eye instinctively completes unfinished lines or connects two focus points simply by the act diverting a gaze across to the next point of reference; whereupon the act of signification may be understood to take place. The challenge in the artwork is to communicate this transferring of messages to an address or destination as taxi hand signs do when signifying. One may assume that a city is peopled with commuters doing taxi gestures, yet what is being expressed is the idea of signification, transference of messages and the process of communication that the actual taxi hand gestures evoke when the driver sees the commuter signing and responds by stopping to take the commuter to his or her indicated destination.

The artwork is based on the concept that a person's experiences in the city may somehow be changed by the visibility of the signs and the perception of many taxi hand signs being used to hail a taxi. The idea suggests these taxi hand signs, used so prolifically across Gauteng, may somehow leave evidence of having been there, even if only as simple traces of perception. Consequently, the many signs being performed across the city are there in one's minds, transient and evolving.

¹²⁶ I based my theory on an explanation of the sign in *Peirce's Theory of Signs* in The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. "The sign is the molehill, and the object of this sign is the mole. The mole determines the sign, in as much as, if the molehill is to succeed as a sign for the mole it must show the physical presence of the mole. For Peirce, the relationship between the object of a sign and the sign that represents, it is one of determination: the object determines the sign" (Atkin 2010 :4).

The fact of their prolific use by commuters and drivers and the narratives that have inspired their forms, differentiates them from other sign languages and changes the experience of Gauteng from other places. The notion is symbolic and the traces of innumerable indexical and fleeting hand signs may be left indiscernible, yet users of taxi transport know as they enter Gauteng that the practice of signing for taxis is part of the visible South African culture. The social and historical content, elevates taxi hand signs contextually to other perceived spaces. As do the movement and activity that catches glimpses of signs and codes, thoughts and messages transferring across areas of perceived spaces, of 'nothingness' and 'traces'. As Nuttall suggests, I "explore vocabularies of separation and connectedness that surface only to recede again" (Nuttall 2009: 30). Elements respond and vibrate, recalling linear elements of city structures and mappings of roads and highways, traffic and the taxis with the millions of passengers passing through. In *SIGNIFICATION: Textarea* I imagined aspect of time and the experience of 'presence' as perceived by Derrida especially aspects of the relevance of trace representing events over time and the fleeting present:

[T]he experience of the present is never a simple experience of something present ... there is always another agency there. Repeatability contains what has passed away and is no longer present and what is about to come and is not yet present (Derrida 2011: 12).

Derrida states that the very repetition of an event promotes yet another and another happening that one cannot hold still and call 'present' because it has already passed. Instead, he prefers to speak of a happening as a 'trace', which marks the notion of having been there in time. The 'trace', the graphic mark, remains a key element in the application of deconstructive notions in describing 'trace' in the artwork. It became significant from the moment that I accepted that no changes would be made to that first spontaneous mark. It began with the blank canvas, the nothing space where all new ideas start to germinate. This was where I sought an instinctive trace-and-sign to define the starting point and to alter the space that was my thinking for the art rendition. I began with thoughts related to movement, message, space, trace, presence and history. There were no preconceived plans about where the marks on the surface would lead. I imagined a

continuum of traces indicating a certain time lapse or energy between messages; signs communicating across a kind of electrical active field, disturbing the space, moving in an imaginary linear fashion and at some point returning or continuing. There are forces or distortions at play between the signifiers and receivers created by the traces or marks and depending on the proximity to 'the other' and where messages could probably travel if enough space is left open for that kind of play to evolve. All thoughts and intentions communicated by the art are in the final analysis enjoyed and interpreted by the viewer or participator.

In *Limited Inc.* Derrida asserts that the possibilities for interpretation may be so deep as to be immeasurable and that all language and all interpretation are problematic:

More than problematic even, which is to say, perhaps of an order other than problematicity? Isn't this also a stroke of luck? Otherwise why speak, why discuss? How else would what we call 'misunderstanding' be possible? That we may or may not be in agreement on this subject attests by itself to this more than problematic problematicity (Derrida 1977: 120).

The author or artist's interpretation is the catalyst that opens the idea to the viewer. In *SIGNIFICATION: Textarea*, such a suggestion as in presupposing the availability of further information is one of the basic understandings for projecting abstract notions of transferral of interpretation in a visual artwork.

The artist's interaction with a work in the process of creating it, as well as the critic's, viewer's or other's response to the artwork, is grounded within a Gestalt or a well-rounded pattern of understanding of spaces that give meaning to the artwork as a whole. These may be experienced as 'negative/positive' spaces, 'darkness/light' or the 'inside/outside' part of the art rendition. 'Inside' and 'outside' make up the organisation of any work of art, be it two-dimensional, sculptural or an installation. When something is all darkness or all light, the image is lost but in such 'nothingness' you still have your imagination. Blind people have been known to describe images experienced through their creative imaginings. Consequently, it can be argued that 'negative' spaces may be the

symbols or codes for that which is absent and silent.¹²⁷ The ‘nothingness’ here is concerned with opportunities to explore something beyond the visual interpretation, as with a transference of a message in signification. Transferral of interpretation as expressed in ‘negative’ or ‘outside’ spatial terms may be as expressive or even ambiguous as the positive marks, traces or lines depicted because space has been created for imagining and interpretation.

Movement is a part of the conceptual vision for the artwork and title. I refer to the eye scanning the artwork from one point in the work to the next. The movement of the eye across spaces of symbolic landscapes and reflections of structures and streets is equivalent to following a message as it transfers from signifier to addressee over time. Scanning an image is equivalent to reading text, except that the images direct the process by virtue of their distinctiveness, rather than the signs in the sentence.

The gloved hands, which I have used to represent the taxi hand signs for this work suggested that a straightforward translatability of a system of signification was possible, without recognising the impossibility of that project. The challenge was not to impose preconceived ideas of what messaging, signification, noise, gesture, indexicality and history ‘look like’, but to suggest the notion of what they represent in South African society and consider the idea *signification* as a type of receptacle – a ‘think tank’ where currents, electric-like, carry messages and are sent and received. On the surface of the work, traces, lines, noises, smudges, areas of darkness and light may suggest alternative ways of thinking about signification. Nothing is predetermined. Spontaneous painted applications, direct implied messages through the perceived voids, are part of the evolving conceptual artwork.

6.5 WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Of the many art exhibitions, films and performances that Kentridge has completed

¹²⁷ This may not be discernable in cases where the negative and positive spaces are merged.

since the 1980s most are a correlation of artwork, performance, film or opera. Kentridge uses linear projections and drawings of people, objects, structures and landscapes to encourage narratives and commentary critical of a narrow and objectively conceived history of apartheid. The series of personal and politically-motivated animated films and artworks are Kentridge's playing field.¹²⁸

By now Kentridge's process of "erasing, redrawing and photographing again, leaving a palimpsest of previous traces on the paper's surface" has been over-appraised and over-analysed (Hennlich 2011: 1).¹²⁹ However, it must be recognised from another perspective – for the significance that such a technique of 'trace' and 'erasure' represents in terms of deconstruction. The movement and marking of time achieved by drawing, erasing, filming and redrawing does not succeed in isolation. How do applied deconstructive notions succeed in giving insight to Kentridge's narratives as they evolve in horizontal or vertical tracks to 'map out' patterns of movement and time with figures, objects and landscapes constantly evolving and re-configuring into other figures, objects and landscapes?

Before the 'trace' and 'erasure' can exist 'inside', Kentridge begins 'outside' the canvas. From that moment, these notions could be seen to exist simultaneously. Kentridge's technique in creating the films overall involve a constant walking to

¹²⁸ Kentridge's experimentation with a variety of alternative materials and media has impacted on his way of translating his art, for instance, his close collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company used amongst other productions in *The Return of Ulysses*. Adrian Searle describes the opera as being "based on Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. Here ... three images are projected around the walls of the North Gallery. On the left, we see Eckstein, as Ulysses, in a hospital bed, slipping in and out of consciousness. On the right, Vitruvian nerve trees, ultrasound images, drawings of plants, landscapes, cities and an owl in flight flare up and are gone. On the central screen, liquid is pumped through a pipe into a hospital demi-john which endlessly fills and empties to a slow rhythm. Ulysses (or Eckstein) is lost in his coma, lost in South Africa, lost in his body. The hi-tech medical imaging scans look like bad faxes, charcoal rub-outs, negations of body and soul. And somewhere in all this is Monteverdi's operatic music, and the theme of diagnosis and healing - a return to the homeland of the body and to the uncertainties of South Africa itself." (Searle 1999)

¹²⁹ Kentridge's drawings for his films, where the individual images much like individual words joining to become a sentence, form sequential continuous ever-altering frames to tell the story through the illusion of motion, recalling a past well documented history of drawn animation. Kentridge here makes use of all the senses and a strange variety of materials to achieve the play and spatial texture of intertextuality and all possibilities its continuous associations may evoke.

and fro as the artist moves between the camera and his drawing. The practice of walking between the artwork on paper, drawing and returning to a position where he operates the camera in creating each new frame for a film is both a physical and a conceptual path created by the artist that transmutes the artwork or film in time sequences, one frame at a time. Kentridge's thought processes in his drawings for film making are a type of temporal meditation on reflective distance (Schnapp and Tiews 2006: 196), as he walks the path to and fro, between camera and canvas; recalling, perhaps, a measurable space between the object and the viewer that post structuralism may envision. He talks of being in the studio as "walking, thinking, stalking the image" (Wilkin 2011:1).¹³⁰

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Derrida recognises that in art there is always discourse and the effect of spacing in an artwork already suggests a textualisation. He is adamant that deconstruction should not confine itself to the analysis of the discursive text or be limited in terms of language only. Derrida confronts the reader with the concept that both non-exteriority and exteriority are fundamental to language and that in them inhere both spatial and non-spatial elements. He claims that this is:

[T]he wound and finitude of birth ... without which one could not even open language, one would not even have a true or false exteriority to speak of ... true exteriority is nonexteriority without being interiority, and one can write by crossing out, for what already has been crossed out: for crossing out writes, still draws on space (Derrida 1987: 112).

Spatiality is assured, he says, because the site from which a mark was crossed out (even if erased and no longer legible) existed as a trace as it once occupied that space. In terms of 'differance', the recognition of objects in time and periods of time shows that their 'presence' in space becomes indeterminable because it is

¹³⁰ Some of Kentridge's art and films include: 1989 Johannesburg: 2nd Greatest City After Paris; 1990 Monument; 1991 Mine; 1991 Sobriety; Obesity & growing old; 1994 Felix in Exile, 1996–97 Ubu Tells the Truth; 1996 History of the Main Complain; 1998 Weighing and Wanting; 1999. Stereoscope; 2001 Medicine Chest; 2003 Automatic Writing; 2003 Tide Table.

changing and evolving. As an original ‘presence’, it is unrecognisable; only the ‘trace’ of now reveals that it once was somewhere. Here, the ‘differance’ is about change and life is about change. “Life must be thought of as trace before Being may be determined as presence” (Derrida 1978: 203). Kentridge states that one should allow for uncertainty and the unknown:

We need the terrain of the half-solved and the half-solvable, of the distance between knowing and not knowing, of seeing the trace in the ground and being still somewhat uncertain of what is, of not having a clear label that tells us everything (Kentridge 2012: 1).

He describes how important it is for the creative path to be open to fleeting traces or suggestions.¹³¹ Such analogies can be found in the introduction to *The Truth in Painting* where Derrida states that he is “interested in the idiom in painting” and the notion of exchange between language ‘idiom’ and art, that he considers space between the viewer or the critic standing outside of the framework of the art, to be part of the artwork itself (Derrida 1987: 20). By pairing the actions of characters on stage with their perceptions, visions or memories projected on a screen behind them, Kentridge effectively dissolves the barriers between ‘inside/outside’ and ‘now/then’ (Ollman 1999: 8). During some exhibitions of his films Kentridge performs in front of the film while it is playing. He occupies the volume of space both ‘outside’ of the film and within it. Simultaneously, by the flashing of thought-provoking words on the screen, the audience must harness their concentration and mentally engage with the actors, the words and the art film, if they are to grasp what Kentridge is trying to communicate. The markings of evolving and retraced time in the narrative of Kentridge’s own life, ever submerged into his ancestry and childhood with unfolding landscapes of apartheid history, can be apprehended in Derrida’s notions of ‘presence’, which

¹³¹ Gerhard Schoeman explains Kentridge’s approach saying that the figure of the trace is materially present in Kentridge’s work. Kentridge is known to mark the paper he draws or prints on in a variety of ways. These include: rubbing, hitting the paper with rope, having his children and dogs walk over the paper before he runs it through the printing press, staining, brushing, etching, projecting, inscribing and erasing, imprinting and cancelling, adding and subtracting, signing and effacing as in a palimpsest. All relate to the Derridean trace before the trace, the Freudian mystic writing pad, and the Warburgian engram (2007: 91).

he claims is always being compromised by a trace. The trace is a remainder of a previous experience:

Every so-called 'present', or 'now' point, is always already compromised by a trace, or a residue of a previous experience, that precludes us ever being in a self-contained 'now' moment. Phenomenology is hence envisaged as nostalgically seeking the impossible: that is, coinciding with oneself in an immediate and pre-reflective spontaneity (Reynolds 2004: 56)

These evolving images recall moments of presence in the past that are told in the future. Derrida further suggests that objects or words are unstable as they are always evolving. This leads to the realms of 'impossibility'. He further describes the 'absolute past' as unstable as there is always a certain relationship to the future:

[If] the trace refers to an absolute past, it is because it obliges us to think a past that can no longer be understood in the form of a modified presence, as a present-past. Since past has always signified present-past, the absolute past that is retained in the trace no longer rigorously merits the name 'past'. Another name to erase especially since the strange movement of the trace proclaims as much as it recalls: difference- differs [differe]. With the same precaution and under the same erasure, it may be said that its passivity is also its relationship with the 'future' (Derrida 1998: 66)

In other words the significance of the past can only be appreciated from the future. Derrida refers to a future that will become present, a future that makes all 'presence' possible and also impossible (Reynolds 2002: 8). Therefore, by extension, one sees precisely the impossibility of Kentridge's attempt at both revealing, yet erasing of the past, his use of the film medium that in itself is a pattern of traces "rooted in the black and white materiality of South Africa" (Hennlich 2010: 121), has found expression in the deconstructive view of 'trace'. In Kentridge's *Ubu and the Truth Commission*¹³² or *Mine* (1991), for instance, the figures and objects in both drawings and film evolve vertically downwards in space. There is no time to be

¹³² *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is based on the 1996 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

arrested in 'presence'. 'Presence' is both materially, historically and psychologically erased as the artist alternates filming the image before rubbing out the previous mark or object and replacing it with another. What remains are 'traces' of movement in time, past and present advancing towards an uncertain future or shadowy past. So many other art/film/performance works reflect these notions, which are integral to Kentridge's thinking and exploration in each project. Some examples are: The film, *Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City After Paris* (1989); *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997); *Stereoscope* (1999); *Waiting for Godot* (from *The Refusal of Time* (2012)),¹³³ and *Practical Epistemology: A Life in the Studio* (2012).¹³⁴ The aforementioned dates and the dates of art works¹³⁵ recorded in this chapter represent the appearance of the first showings of art projects and may appear with a different date depending on where it was showing at that time. With Kentridge's art the same characters, albeit diverse in subject matter, technique and characterisation, each continue to be developed and reinvented through diverse mediums. The projects reappear in different galleries, theatres, institutions or other relevant venues, progressively over time all over the world. The subject matter and characters themselves evolve through different mediums and exhibitions, each time with a possible different evocation, trace, correlation, contest and communiqué. The character of Soho Eckstein, for example, in the 1989 film *Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City After Paris* is re-invented in several of Kentridges subsequent films. Eckstein, sometimes referred to simply as 'Soho' or just 'Eckstein' was portrayed in this film as a real estate developer and a mining magnate. Kentridge admitted that the more he worked with this character, the more he pictured him also as his

¹³³ William Kentridge and Peter Galison collaborated in *The Refusal of Time*, Kentridge's work for the international exhibition Documenta. Part of it is *Waiting for Godot*, a film performance.

¹³⁴ "Practical Epistemology: Life in the Studio" (2012) is the fourth of six lectures. See more at: Mahindra Humanities Centre Harvard. Available from www.mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/content/william-kentridge-drawing-lesson-four-practical-epistemology-life-studio, accessed 2013.

¹³⁵ Kentridge's Drawings for Projection series began 22 years ago with *Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City after Paris* (1989), and runs through *Monument* (1990), *Mine* (1991), *Sobriety, Obesity & Growing Old* (1991), *Felix in Exile* (1994), *History of the Main Complaint* (1996), *Weighing and Wanting* (1998), and *Stereoscope* (1999) and *Tide Table* (2003).

grandfather.¹³⁶

He could be seen as a contemporary embodiment of the original ‘Hoggenheimer’ or an ‘Oppenheimer’¹³⁷ character or as Kentridge himself. Kentridge’s *Mine* (1991), both a performance and film, is part of the *Five Themes* exhibit, which accompanied a retrospective exhibition touring North America and Europe through 2009–2010. It begins with a drawing of a South African mining magnate Soho Eckstein sitting at his office desk. Ollman describes Kentridge’s portrayal of one of Eckstein’s experiences:

Eckstein... looks at a framed photograph of his wife, it refuses to be still and reflect her fixed, ideal image. Instead, it shifts and changes, revealing to him the range of her betrayals and graphically illustrating his own fears. Permeable boundaries between the felt and the imagined, the seen, remembered and desired, are what give Kentridge's characters and narratives such daunting, convincing presence (Ollman 1999: 8).

Mine takes the viewer on an historical journey in place, space and time. The vertical channel is prevalent, as objects tumble downwards in a seemingly never-ending narrative of symbolic transmutations.

[U]pon which a French press coffeemaker appears. When the heavy-handed CEO depresses the coffeemaker’s plunger, he unwittingly initiates a journey to the ‘center’ of the earth: the plunger drills a deep shaft into the mine of the title, into the vast, shadowed realm that underlies our doing, our thinking, our aspiring (Bosch 2012:7).

The constantly transforming imagery engages the viewer and draws the past into the present in a way that is at once relevant and authentic. In the final analysis, the inferred vertical shaft of consciousness leads down to the image of a child,

¹³⁶ This is what Kentridge said at a lecture and film I attended in 2013 at The University of the Witwatersrand. The talk, *William Kentridge in conversation with Sarah Nuttall*, was held through The Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER).

¹³⁷ See, Andy Mason’s book *What’s so funny?: Under the skin of South African cartooning*. Mason writes that Kentridge has had “first hand experience of South African liberalism, and in his work these contradictions – sympathy for the liberation struggle on the one hand and a resigned enjoyment of the material comforts of his own privileged lifestyle on the other – are constantly in evidence. Kentridge’s Soho Eckstein breathes life into the Hoggenheimer (Oppenheimer) stereotype by humanising it” (Mason 2009: 47).

Kentridge himself, playing with the dualities of belonging being mine (belonging to himself) and the industrial mine (whose past one cannot escape). This is possibly a way of taking personal ownership or responsibility for South Africa's past or for his creative interpretation of it.

The vertical lines/shafts create an alternative spatial and symbolic dynamic that is at once personal and historical. They invoke the impassioned narrative connotations using movement perpendicularly from one point to the next, up and down, above and below, sky to sea, which evokes a transference of responsibility or despair, with the mine shaft as the conduit. This personal conflict is apparent when Kentridge, on looking back on this art film maintains that he had originally thought of Soho Eckstein as an 'other' based on images he had seen on "rapacious industrialists from Russia" and also influenced by "early futurist propaganda drawings, George Grosz and German Expressionism" (Dixon 2011: 140). Later he admitted that the figure of Eckstein that he created could be imagined as his paternal grandfather and so to a certain extent the character of Eckstein was closer to him than he had realised. Consequently, the image of himself as a boy at the end of the film may be an internalisation of himself, today, carrying on his shoulders the burden of the past.

Similarly Eckstein, the same evolving character sometimes resembling Kentridge himself, re-emerges for the eighth time in 1999 in Kentridge's animated film, *Stereoscope*, where the deconstructive term 'ethics' comes to the fore particularly because of its emphasis on 'the other' and 'reconciliation'. The exhibition was *Projects: William Kentridge at The Museum of Modern Art* (MoMA) in New York. Lillian Tone, when she interviewed Kentridge for the exhibition catalogue at MoMA, asked him about his incorporation of 'water' in his work. Water is a recurring theme throughout the series, but this time, water is filling up a room. Kentridge replied that he had also thought of this "not so much as a room filling with water but as an image of Eckstein leaking" (Tone 1999: 1). In this film Kentridge uses a personal interior space to confine Ekstein's sorrow; a room so small that, impossibly, Eckstein could fill it and drown in it with his own tears. Eckstein's emotions have filling up the space of the room, making the room a

receptacle of his pain. In a further use of space to tell his story, Kentridge creates solitary landscapes outside of this 'interior/exterior'. In a scene from the same film Eckstein is seen with his lover Nandi, the cause of his tears.



Figure 4. William Kentridge 1999. *Stereoscope*. "Soho in the flooding room". Charcoal and Pastel on Paper, 112.5x137.3 cm.

In the narrative Eckstein knows that Nandi is dying. Kentridge draws from a barren landscape with areas of apparent nothingness to project Eckstein's sense of 'mourning' and loss. What Kentridge creates is a sparse semi-desert and a small pool with only just enough water for the two characters to be submerged in. Kentridge plays with the disparities between both inestimable geographic and mental spaces, heightened by a dearth of plant growth and emptiness in the background, that speaks of separation and dying and confined personal spaces, suggesting the personal; a sense of loss, a palpable sadness, regret and loneliness. "At the end of Felix it is a blue pool of water where Nandi dies and eventually where Felix is found standing waist deep in the water" (Hennlich 2010: 121).

In this scene one sees the effect of inner and outer trauma of the body, an 'inside/outside' model which reveals to the viewer the suffering that is manifest. Sorrow too reflects from the red and blue markings on the landscape, moving between the surface exterior and suggestions of history buried beneath the landscape, once more recalling Derrida's work on 'reconciliation', 'mourning' and 'forgiveness' and the ethical concerns of both Derrida and Kentridge that are discussed further on in this section. Kentridge uses figures and objects in his drawings for his art films and uses space to enhance the personal and political narrative that he manipulates to generate the emotional content for his work. Derrida's notions of 'inside/outside' apply to Kentridge as this occurs not only through the 'trace' in the drawings themselves but through his technique of performing and utilising space materially 'outside' of the art/film. Derrida describes such a deconstructive environment as, "[T]he spatial pair inside-outside ... [which] gives life to the opposition of subject and object" (Reynolds 2002: 10). The deconstruction principle of 'undecidables', words with opposite meanings like 'inside/outside', can be applied to Eckstein where an outpouring of his emotions are leaking into the 'exterior', suggesting both a psychological and a spatial model in this instance. Derrida's notions of 'inside' and 'outside' are also applicable to Kentridge's artworks where spaces on a two-dimensional surface are both physical and psychological, with the manipulation of 'interior' and 'exterior' to draw the viewer into the narrative.

The film *Wit* was inspired by Derrida's series of lectures entitled *Archive Fever* on 'forgiveness' that included a week-long workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1998, which Kentridge attended (Verdoolaege 2008: 7). The lectures developed into an essay entitled *On Forgiveness* where Derrida argued that the 'pure forgiveness' anticipated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is an impossibility: "it can mete out a judgment but it cannot give forgiveness" because "once it is asked for it becomes impossible to give" (Hennlich 2010: 28). Derrida also stated in the *Archive Fever* lectures that "the very actions in which the TRC is shaped from the beginning is a linguistic intervention" (Derrida 2002: 66). This is the risk one takes in shifting from one language to another when the notion of what one wants to call repentance or

forgiveness may be otherwise conceived in the different African languages.

Both the critical and openly deconstructive thinking on issues being dealt with in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is evident in the outcome of Kentridge's work. The 'ethics' of the language of reconciliation as well as the 'impossibilities' of reconciliation, which incorporates both forgiving and mourning, are also seen through Kentridge's critical mind in the hand-crafted video renderings of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* inspired by the TRC official report (Gilbert 2002). Kentridge captures this dichotomy through his castings and imagery'. For instance he projects the soundlessness of the 'witnesses' against 'Ma' and 'Pa' Ubu¹³⁸ in the foreground, vociferously battling to see who will shred the records of atrocities and who will use them to buy amnesty. If the records are manipulated to reflect only the politically motivated crimes that the perpetrators choose to reveal, this would then make a mockery of amnesty, which requires complete and open transparency for amnesty to be given. Kentridge articulates the 'impossibility' of amnesty by explaining that as people confess more and more to what they have done, they are seen to be heightening their chances of receiving amnesty. However, the more they tell, the more insufferable it seems that they should be given amnesty (Gehring 2006: 27). Kentridge's justice is the questioning of 'truth' through the lens of his camera, which points to the TRC's obligation to reconcile but also to the desire to uncover everything by locating the bodies of those who have gone missing in "gross violations of human rights, as the Commission defines acts necessitating the appeal for amnesty" (Hennlich 2010: 61). The camera documents the commission of a crime, yet at the same time it also records loss and the impossibility of a full recovery (Hennlich 2010: 61). Through his art interpretations Kentridge provides a vocabulary to describe and question the impossibilities of forgiveness.

¹³⁸ Ma and Pa Ubu are modelled after Frenchman Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, their dialogue carrying echoes of his mannered and bombastic language, which is a parody of the 'grand' tradition of French classical tragedy "rampant greed and violence, lends itself well to adaptations of satire of a variety of dictatorial regimes" (Gilbert 2002:26). *Ubu Roi*'s with "archival testimony from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, recorded the experiences of witnesses of human rights violations under apartheid".

Derrida privileges ‘undecidability’ and the motif of the ‘impossible’ in relation to ‘justice’, which is not deconstructable. He calls justice ‘impossible’ because it is difficult to attain true justice when there are losses that can never be reclaimed and even after forgiveness there may be no possibility of forgetting (Kearney and Doodley 2002: 104).

In *Stereoscope* Kentridge ponders on Derrida’s paradox by translating ‘give’ and ‘forgive’ in Afrikaans, which offers a thought-provoking irony and contradiction:

[T]he word give comes from the Germanic root *gif* and knowing from Afrikaans, I don’t know from German but from Afrikaans the word *gif* means poison... there is a poison in the giving. And that acts of giving are acts of aggression and that the idea of forgiveness becomes very complicated (Hennlich 2010: 28).

To Kentridge, these terms expose a sense of irony that the TRC may engender, that to give ‘poisons one’. The recipient of the gift being the one who is poisoned because of the obligation behoven on that person to make an equivalent offer in return. Marcel Mauss’s classic essay ‘The Gift’, published first in 1950 addressed such indebtedness. Mauss writes of the “the power which enforces the repayment of a gift “ (Mauss 1966: 5). He delves into primitive or archaic types of society discussing the principle “whereby the gift received has to be repaid? What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?” (Mauss 1966: 1). He draws attention to the Maori custom where “the obligation attached to a gift itself is not inert. Even when abandoned by the giver, it still forms a part of him” (Mauss 1966: 9).¹³⁹ Kentridge witnesses the impossibilities and the burden that the gift of forgiveness requires and imposes within the expectations of

¹³⁹ See, the chapter titled ‘Gifts and Return Gifts’ in *The Gift* by Marcel Mauss, where he writes about the principles of gift giving and receiving. In the introduction, Evans-Prichard tells how Mauss writes in his Essays (*Essai sur le don*) that we have lost a great deal by “the substitution of a rational economic system for a system in which exchange of goods was not a mechanical but a moral transaction, bringing about and maintaining, human, personal, relationships between individuals and groups” (Mauss 1966: ix). Mauss, whose study is confined to Polynesia, Melanesia and North America, states that “[A] gift always looks for recompense.” (Mauss 1966: xiv). “The main enquiry is in primitive or archaic types of society, what is the principle whereby the gift received has to be repaid? What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?” (Mauss 1966: 1).

the TRC.

Kentridge's screen format is divided into two opposing narratives that run concurrently. Instead of achieving the illusion of three-dimensional spaces, which the stereoscope as an instrument accomplishes, the "split screen device can be seen to dismember three-dimensional reality into complementary but unsynchronized realities" (Tone 1999: 1). The use of the vertical separation is both psychological and physical. It requires that the viewer participate by attempting to follow either one or both narratives simultaneously. Kentridge concludes *Stereoscope* with the words in neon lights emblazoned *Give Forgive*. He invites the audience to consider the two deceptively similar words and worlds and what they may mean in terms of division and dealing with apartheid atrocities (Tone 1999: 7). One is left undecided about the outcome. Is there a question of forgiving or is it a matter of asking for forgiveness? There is ultimately the undesirability of fixed meanings, once more evoking the same in deconstructive philosophy, leaving the viewer to decide how to read and comprehend the two divided elements, whose narratives evolve separately on the film screen.

In another of the *Five Theme* lectures entitled *Waiting For Godot*, Kentridge demonstrates the significance of playing with alternative time and spatial elements in the film and on stage. In this instance physicality and spatiality are integrated into his performance lecture where the directive in large font *Leap Before You Look*, flashes across the screen behind him. Kentridge "has walked several laps backwards on the stage of Sanders Theatre, attempted to speak in reverse" (Kentridge 2012: 1). He selects a mental and physical interplay with 'inside' and 'outside' spaces involving artist, spectator and at the same time the video/artwork that is filming behind him. Not a word is spoken, only the text *Leap Before You Look* and the actor on stage with images moving in the animated film *Waiting For Godot*. In an endeavour to reflect the narration playing out in this film, with himself and a transforming coffeepot and a spaceship, Kentridge's reverse reflective performance displays a deceptively casual attitude:

[A]n air of breezy nonchalance barely conceals the fact that each lecture is a rigorously choreographed and elaborately rehearsed production.

Beckett-like contrivances such as a dialogue between his recorded self and his live, onstage self-flower into a seemingly endless garden of ideas about the nature and limits of artistic practice (Kentridge 2012: 1).

The type of planning, thinking and rigour¹⁴⁰ that inheres in Kentridge's art and work is at the heart of creativity.¹⁴¹ He emphasises the value of taking risks, challenging the impossible, allowing for making mistakes in the process of experimentation and discovery; being wrong "in pursuit of creative solutions, even if it involves sometimes starting off on the wrong foot" (Kentridge 2012: 2).

Fuse Feature: The Bad Backwards Walking, was performed in the fourth of Kentridge's Norton lectures (Bosch 2012).¹⁴² He executed a backward jump on the stage, in order to provide a visual and material representation of a word. By performing this action Kentridge demonstrated that language has failed to fully represent the word. One is reminded of the idea of *Boustrophy*, where in order to achieve what seems like an impossible solution, Kentridge confronted the audience with a physical act of going backwards and spoke of making sense of events that are impossible to come to terms with. Derrida's notion of 'opposition'

¹⁴⁰ Correspondingly, Derrida in 1994 at Villanova University was describing the type of rigour he expected of philosophy: Philosophy must be ex-posed, dis-located, ex-propriated and ex-patriated, made to understand that it cannot be wholly confined within the limits of a disciplinary specialization ... Philosophy must be audacious and made to 'cross borders' ... Philosophy cannot contain what it contains ... what horizons [it] has it should press to the limits, so that it constantly pushes to the limits beyond familiar objects, themes, and certitudes (Caputo 1997: 56).

¹⁴¹ Critic Lear Ollman describes Kentridge's rigour in the process and making of his art and observes that: "[F]luidity and contingency of drawing lie at the heart of all of Kentridge's art of the past 20 years, not just his work on paper. In the films, however, an unusual, reciprocal dynamic comes into play between the drawings that comprise the visual fabric of the films and the films themselves. Unlike conventional cell animation, which fuses thousands of drawings into a slick, seamlessly continuous whole, Kentridge's process is overtly raw and hand-wrought. For each film (all are under 10 minutes) Kentridge makes about 20 drawings, which undergo continual addition, permutation and erasure, the traces of which are plainly visible, yielding an impression of time and space as viscous, invariably altered by every arrival and departure" (Ollman 1999: 72).

¹⁴² See, William Kentridge's "Charles Eliot Norton Lectures" held in Sanders Theatre in Memorial Hall at Harvard University. Charles Norton Lectures, Drawing lesson four, Drawing Lessons, Practical Epistemology, Six Drawing Lessons. Kentridge. 1) *Fuse Feature: "The Riddle behind the Riddle"* — A Dispatch from William Kentridge's Fifth Norton Lecture. 2) *Fuse Feature: Vertical and Contingent* — A Dispatch from William Kentridge's Norton Lectures. 3) *"Anti-Entropy and Uncle Order"*: A Dispatch from William Kentridge's Sixth Norton Lectures. 4) *Fuse Dispatches: The Benefits of Doubt* — A Dispatch from the Second of William Kentridge's Norton Lectures. 5) *Fuse Dispatches: Lessons Drawn* — William Kentridge's "Six Drawing Lessons" (Bosch).

in the paradox 'forward/backward' can also bring clarity to the viewer, as it too shows the 'impossibility' of the situation, of the breakdown in language, in the 'impossibility' of which needs to be done first to create understanding. Only the actions together, each as important as the other, can facilitate this.

Kentridge's film the *History of the Main Complaint* was produced in 1998 at the time of the hearings for the TRC. He shaped fragments of memory unfolded through traces of the body of the character Soho. Kentridge recalls a car accident in South Africa that he was involved in as a child. One identifies with Soho who effectively becomes part of collective memory so that his car journey situates one in a specific bodily, social and political relationship to South Africa's recent past (Bennett 2005: 74). Kentridge's own presence is subsumed in Soho, a metaphorical 'other' and ultimately dissolves to make way for a view into the psyche.

Driving is Soho's primary method of encountering the landscape of South Africa in *History of the Main Complaint*. In three key driving sequences the car becomes a link between landscape (exterior) and the mental traumas of Soho (interior). This model of interior/exterior makes the car like the body, the protected interior of the car separate from the exterior. The accident is like the X-ray, a random chance that destroys the separation of outside from inside (Bennett 2005: 74).

When Kentridge uses the 'inside/outside' paradox in this artwork, he illustrates an exterior landscape and Soho's mental anguish in the interior of the car as he recalls the previous experience of the car accident. At the same time there is also the very real fear of losing something of one's self to the past, as already stated in the introduction of this chapter, where Derrida speaks of the 'trace' as the erasure of selfhood and of one's presence, which is threatened by the fear of its irreversible disappearance (Derrida 1995: 230). In deconstruction the 'trace' is more than what is left of a previous experience; the 'trace' both represents and yet is an abstraction and remnant of an idea or object (Reynolds 2002: 8). The disappearance of 'presence' is embodied in a concept of absence that both the

‘trace’ and the notion of presence presupposes (Derrida 1971: 5).¹⁴³ On the other hand, Derrida imagines that it is a way of tracing our thoughts, which he describes as “conserving the language of action, as that which could paint the most easily”. What is evident is that for every mark that Kentridge makes on paper and erases in the next step, the next frame of the film, one can find alignment in Derrida’s imaginings of different voices or gestures as they are bound up with evolving forms of space, time and writing. This is the effaced ‘trace’ that discerns the artwork as well as the artist’s work, his signature.

In *Weighing and Wanting* another production of the Soho and Felix films, Kentridge created rock forms and scales to symbolise burden or weight and to imply the ‘impossibility’ of moving around apartheid ideology within South Africa¹⁴⁴ (Hennlich 2010: 76). He shows his predilection for experimenting with movement, space¹⁴⁵ and time in a performance lecture *Practical Epistemology: A Life in the Studio*, where he draws from film history in the work of filmmaker

¹⁴³ Derrida explains Abbé de Condillac’s argument in relation to the trace in text where he argues that “to retrace” consists in travelling back, by way of analysis and continual breaking down, moving from the simple to the more complex representation. It means “to express,” “to represent,” “to recall,” and “to make present” (Derrida 1971: 5). Condillac’s focus was on the theory of perception, and to advance important and original views on our perception of spatial form (Falkenstein 2010: 1).

¹⁴⁴ Kentridge describes apartheid as a rock that necessitates at the very least oblique strategies of dealing with its attendant issues. Rosalind Krauss is interested in the implications of this metaphor in her essay on Kentridge and the history of animation’s development (Krauss 2000).

¹⁴⁵ An alternative interpretation for the concept of spatiality in a physical lived environment can be seen where ‘post modern art installations’ and ‘post modern architecture’ overlap. An art exhibition entitled *Andre, Buren, Irwin, Nordman: Space as Support* included the four aforementioned artists whose installations interacted with existing interior architectural spaces (Rosenthal 1980: 1). “Having disengaged themselves from the prevailing formalist conceptions of the 1950’s and 1960’s, these special experiments claimed to be a de-emphasis on the art object and a distancing from formal, self contained sculpture and were minimalistic with an emphasis on the “increased importance of context” (Rosenthal 1980: 4). Germano Celant explains “[A] contextual placement of the works determined the differences in the manner of signifying. This signification, solicited a sense of reciprocity ... where art creates an architectural environment to the same degree to which environment creates art” (Rosenthal 1980:11).

George Méliès¹⁴⁶ (1861–1938). In Kentridge’s theory “The early-nineteenth-century invention of photography turned time into stone” (Kentridge 2012: 2). For the performance, he unhinges what appears to be frozen in the past and imbues it with traces of three dimensionality, using patterns of play and movement, both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the film space. The words that appear on the film presentation screen behind Kentridge *Making a Safe Space for Stupidity* are typical of Kentridge’s ethical approach to making decisions about content in his art. In his film, Kentridge exemplifies the early history of film, which he says became a medium that captures moments in time as never achieved before. At this point in the lecture, the phrase *Making a Safe Space for Stupidity* materialised on the presentation screen. Kentridge states that in an effort to communicate with others, one should be prepared to reach out, make mistakes, perhaps allowing the ‘other’ to have the benefit of the doubt (Kentridge 2012: 2). One might argue that this is the ‘ethics’ of ‘language’ in Kentridge’s art, in that it shows the vulnerability of the characters, their humanity. In its attempt to communicate with others, no matter which language the viewer speaks, there is always another opinion, another movement at the ‘centre’ for anyone to find their own association, which gives Kentridge’s visual art language its universality.

The deconstructive concepts of ‘presence’, ‘ethics’, the paradoxes in ‘undecidability’, the centre in ‘open-endedness’, and ‘impossibilities’ are perspectives that all apply to Kentridge’s methodology and art and what has emerged from the examples are deconstructive terms that are more than a mere description and illustration or resemblance of the application of Derridean notions. Instead what is evident are new and expansive ways of thinking and communicating spatiality, memory and events. For instance, Derrida claims that

¹⁴⁶ See the Norton Lectures 2012: William Kentridge on "Drawing Lesson Four: Practical Epistemology - Life in the Studio" is the fourth of six lectures at the Sanders Theatre, Harvard University USA. Marie-Georges-Jean Méliès (1886-1938), was one of the most inventive filmmakers who led the development of a film language based on separate scenes edited together in chronological order. “Méliès best known film, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) was one of the longest and most elaborate of his trick film epics ... in terms of their film ‘language’, Méliès’ films from 1905 through 1912 were well behind the curve of the ground-breaking work of filmmakers like Edwin S. Porter and D.W. Griffith. (Larson 2006 and Ezre 2000). *George Méliès*. UK, Manchester University Press. Available from: www.numbertwentythree.com site.

the 'trace' represents elements that are no longer there and that 'presence' is consequently impossible. Similarly, but in a visual, graphic and more expansive way, Kentridge's forms in *Mine*, for instance, are neither static nor arrested in 'presence'. Instead Kentridge creates a vertical spatiality where 'traces' or residues of the past are lost in the erasure and overdrawing of the present and future. The characters or narratives of events are in constant flux and it is the ever-evolving landscapes and spaces that give context to the work.

This pertains to Kentridge's stage performances as well as his films. In *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, for instance, Kentridge expands the Derridian notion of both 'outside' and 'inside' and 'ethics' to a plane beyond the performance. Kentridge adopts and alters each stage performance as and when a new witness appears in front of the TRC, which was in progress concurrently with *Ubu and the Truth Commission* where 'justice' in art and language co-exist in an expression of acknowledgement of 'other'.

Consequently, even the camera that Kentridge uses to shoot his films is symbolically subject to scrutiny and interrogation in his drawings and resulting film. It is replicated as an instrument of ferocity whose fuse blows the apartheid victims' bodies to bits. Therefore, it is evident from the aforementioned examples of aspects of 'presence' and its sub-components, that one can apply Derridean values to Kentridge's reflections on 'forgiveness' and ethical considerations of 'other' and visa versa, despite the apparently divergent fields of reference between what is principally text and art.



Figure 5. William Kentridge, 1999. *Drawing for film Stereoscope*.
120 x 160 cm. Shown at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

6.6 WILLEM BOSHOF

Boshoff's works have been exhibited at galleries, museums and Biennales in cities all over the world, from Johannesburg to Havana, Atlanta, Venice and São Paulo to name a few. His solo exhibitions and permanent installations include *Blind Alphabet* (1990-); *Writing in the Sand* (2000); *32 000 Darling Little Nuisances* (2003); *Garden of Words* (2006); *Big Druid in his Cubicle* (2009–2011) *Tshidumbumukwe* (2010). He is known for his stone and textual installations and

is the author of more than seventeen dictionaries of 'unusual' words.¹⁴⁷

In a reversal of roles, South African writer Ivan Vladislavic (Murry 2006: 6)¹⁴⁸ has examined Boshoff as a conceptual artist and writer who uses language, concrete poetry, books and dictionaries to express his art and politics. He argues that Boshoff's conceptions are extended commentaries on his own writing and processes, and endeavours to "re-spatialise and expand forms of English words in local contexts, as if they possess all the materiality of sculptural entities" (Murry 2008: 1). Language is another aspect of doubling in Vladislavic's treatment of Boshoff's work. He describes Boshoff's treatment of the medium of Afrikaans as having "a double gesture of rejection and recovery" (Vladislavic 2005: 46), calling the language into being even as it is the mother-tongue through which he has been 'called up' to serve in the military, and in his "linguistic habitus" (Murry 2008: 7). Vladislavic appreciates that Boshoff appears to:

[O]bliterate, to smash the monolithic fantasy of the language and its lyrical tradition into so many splinters ... amid the ruins, showing just what intricate wonders can be reassembled from the fragments" (Vladislavic 2005: 46).

Boshoff's textual and visual applications speak of the act of:

[D]isqualifying the text, trying to dislocate or uproot it to show how

¹⁴⁷ Boshoff is both a linguist and a maker of art images and objects. A self-taught dendrologist, his work ranges widely across the fields of botany, literature and geography. He has made concrete poetry; he reads and makes dictionaries; he is a sculptor and makes installations; he is an inveterate seeker after words, names, plants, and objects both natural and synthetic, from which he constructs his sculptures and images. "One of his main aims," says the writer Ivan Vladislavic in the monograph *TAXI-11 Willem Boshoff*, "is recovery – of lost words, sated senses, family unities, broken maps" (Vladislavic 2005).

¹⁴⁸ See, Chris Murray (2006) On Ivan Vladislavic and Willem Boshoff, the notion of a creative 'doubling' in relation to Vladislavic and Boshoff, writing as a form of conceptual art. In his use of the term doubling, Vladislavic resorts to reversed conceptual categories; he writes of KykAfrikaans as 'typewriting straining to become brushstrokes' while Bangboek, so anxiously minute and self-disciplined, is understood to be "handwriting straining to be typewriting" (Murray 2006: 40). Thus, while Boshoff uses forms of written word, Vladislavic explains that he also wants to challenge the written word by means of text forms, which approximate to images. And if Vladislavic describes Willem Boshoff as an artist so fascinated with visual and verbal effects that he may be imagined as a writer, he also maintains that Boshoff is "lobbying on behalf of the image in the face of the word" (Murray 2006).

expectations of text or scripture are unrealistic” (Boshoff 2005: 106).

One sees Derridean notions demonstrated in Boshoff’s art in the way that all expectations of fixed solutions are constantly challenged. In an interview entitled *The Spatial Arts* in 1990, Derrida is seen to resonate with Boshoff’s reflection on the act of being blind in order to reach into the very depths of one’s self-expression. Derrida explains that:

I tried to show that the painter or the drawer is blind, that [when] she or he writes, draws, or paints ... that the hand that paints and draws is the hand of a blind person – it is an experience of blindness ... Thus the visual arts are also the art of the blind. For that reason I would speak of the spatial arts. It more conveniently allows me to link it with the notions of text, spacing, and so on. (Derrida 1990: 24).

Derrida’s notion of text and spacing that apply to art and blindness is echoed by Boshoff, who claims in his essay *Aesthetics of Touch* that art can teach us to see by rendering us blind. In order to survive, a blind person must find his own path, using all his or her senses and deepest imagination to visualise and make sense of his world. Boshoff finds equivalence to this blindness in the making of his art where he seeks that contemplative space, saying that:

We need to cloud the elements of finding and losing, of clarity and obscurity, of rediscovering our redemptive blindness (Boshoff 2005: 106).

As with the ‘impossibility’ in deconstruction’s notion of ‘forgiveness’, Boshoff claims that ‘truth’ is itself ‘impossible’. In *Nothing Is Always Right: I Know, You Know*, Boshoff explains that the artwork and the title are two statements that rely on ambiguity to be articulated, stating that:

Double meaning or multiple meanings render them thorns in linguistic sense and side-sense. I confess to an attraction for uncertainty and inconclusiveness (Boshoff 2004: 1)

*The Blind Alphabet ABC*¹⁴⁹ consists of three hundred and thirty eight carved wooden sculptures, mounted on plinths. Essentially this is a unique art ‘library’ installation, which can be defined as a dictionary of morphology with the terms remade into palpable sculpted shapes (Woolf 1996: 46). Viewers can walk between the rows of sculptures arranged in a grid formation. On the top of each black plinth is a sculpted ‘word’ hidden in a steel mesh box, which a sighted person cannot see through. On top of the lid of each steel mesh box is a dictionary explanation of the meaning of the word written in braille, in relief. It requires a blind ‘guide’ to read the braille, take out the sculpture and explain to sighted participants which word the sculpture represents and what the word means. Sighted viewers must rely on the blind guide to explain the sculpted word and its meaning because Boshoff chose dictionary words that are deliberately obscure. Words that are not part of every day vocabulary may not easily be recognisable or familiar by a sighted person. Boshoff’s small sculpted works are easily handled by a blind person. One example from the ‘A’ of *The Blind Alphabet ABC* on form is ‘Architecture’, a word often heard and imagined by a blind person. What Boshoff’s small sculpture offers here is a miniature representation for what a building may look like from the outside if one could not see.

In *The Blind Alphabet ABC* a paradoxical reverse of power is in play, as the blind

¹⁴⁹ See, Willem Boshoff website. *Blind Alphabet* also exhibited at the following venues in the world. *Blind Alphabet C* - 80 sculptures from the *South African Art to Atlanta: Common and Uncommon Ground* exhibition at City Gallery East (1996), 45 Sculptures from *Blind Alphabet B* shown at FNB Vita Art Now, Johannesburg Art Gallery; 45 sculptures of *Blind Alphabet B* shown at an exhibition of South African art entitled *Don’t Mess with Mister In-between*, held at Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal; *Blind Alphabet C*: 77 sculptures exhibited as the South African work at the 23rd International Biennale of Sao Paulo. BOSHOFF, W. (1995). *Blind Alphabet ABC* shown at the Johannesburg Art Gallery as part of *Outside Inside*, an exhibition curated by Julia Charlton for the *Africus Biennale* 1995; also selected for the *FNB Vita Art Now* exhibition, Johannesburg Art Gallery; *Bottled Hope*, selected for *Right to Hope*, an exhibition of international art touring various countries and commissioned by the United Nations; *Blind Alphabet B*: 90 sculptures exhibited at *Siyawela*, an exhibition of South African Art at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, England. 1998 Sanlam Centre, Cape Town BLIND ALPHABET C: 20 sculptures with Worcester School for the Blind; pieces concerning historical language made between 1977–1981 as part of *Dark Continent*, showing the work of four artists and curated by Clive Kellner; BLIND ALPHABET C: 77 sculptures placed on permanent exhibition at the National Library for the Blind, Birmingham, England; BANGBOEK (1977-1980) at an exhibition of South African/Angolan war memories organised by *Intimas Memorias Marcas*. Available from: <http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/exhibitions.html>, accessed on 06/11/2012.

person, instead of being dependent on a sighted person, takes control. Hence, there is a certain 'ethical' application where the dominant must relinquish power to the minority 'other' in order to participate in the art experience. The artwork thus insists on a collaborative reading between participant and the blind guide, fostering dialogue and possibly respect (Clarkson 2008: 22). Boshoff uses braille writing for the blind to create a reversal of authority. Even though the viewers and the blind guide both speak English, only the blind person reading braille could communicate the meaning of the words to the sighted people. In doing so he destabilises the power dynamics to the point of apparent exclusion of the majority of sighted people, those who would normally hold themselves responsible for the blind person's life and movements. At the same time the sighted person is invited to listen and learn from the blind guide and have the opportunity to build trust and dependence between them – a reversal of 'hospitality'. Since Derridean notions of 'hospitality' demands an exchange of giving between two people and suggests that there is inevitably an imbalance of violence and power, where the law is concerned, and particularly when hospitality is seen as a right, this sense of being cut off from one's own language and being completely reliant on 'the other' for help may be a new experience for many sighted viewers. They may, in their impatience for understanding and frustration of a lack of comprehension understand 'the other's' feelings of injustice regarding the sighted world, which is geared for sighted people.

A certain injustice, and even a certain perjury, begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality. This collusion between the violence of power or the force of law (*Gewalt*) on one side, and hospitality on the other, seems to depend, in an absolute radical way, on hospitality being inscribed in the form of a right (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 55)

In an act of 'hospitality' and a certain violence Boshoff takes control away from sighted people in *The Blind Alphabet ABC* and lays power in the hands of the normally dependent blind guide. Boshoff sees this as a way of reversing the 'hospitality' and creating a fair exchange and empowerment for blind people. Boshoff ethically considers the minority 'other'. He also encourages a respect

between all by encouraging a new dependency and ultimate fostering of communication. This ethical approach demonstrates his preparedness to use a written language – braille – to claim control from sighted people and afford the power to blind people in order to teach sighted people – who generally do not comprehend Braille – the words in *The Blind Alphabet*. It evidences a similar application to the ethical approach in the use of the language of ‘others’ that Derrida displayed in the colloquium *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Derrida chose to address the colloquium in English, rather than his native tongue French, as a way of extending his ‘hospitality’ to others attending the colloquium and to those not familiar with the French tongue (Caputo 1997: 4).



Figure 6. Willem Boshoff, 2003. *Writing in the Sand*.

Exhibited as part of *Dechirures de l'histoire*, an exhibition of international artists

at Musee departemental de la Haute-Saone Albert Demard, Champlitte, France. The first *Writing in the Sand* was made for the Havanna Biennale in 2000.¹⁵⁰

Boshoff's impermanent ephemeral exhibition *The Writing in the Sand* (2000)¹⁵¹ also uses language to draw parallels to the painful process of post-apartheid healing and the actions of the TRC (Boshoff 2005). It comprises a subset of the *Dictionary of Perplexing English* which lists words ending in “-ologies and -isms” connected to abstruse fields of learning (Vladislavic 2005: 64). Boshoff's installation of words are individual hand-set black letters pressed into white sand, with two “pages” of black sand and white letters suggesting the linear horizontal lines of a page of text. The headwords are written in English, but the definitions are written in South Africa's other official indigenous languages (Clarkson 2008: 23). They consist of eighteen obscure or confusing English terms. The rest are words in indigenous languages such as Sesotho, saLeboa, isiXhosa, isiZulu or Tshivenda. A reversal of power is seen in this use of language. In this way, words like *pognology* (the study of beards) or *bruxism* (the tendency to grind one's teeth) may only be understood by English speakers through dialogue with an indigenous speaker; thus these installations challenge dominant languages and scripts:

As an English speaker, one is obliged to defer to the expertise of speakers of these other languages in order to understand what is written. Once again, a shift in the balance of power is brought about, as the English speaker is unseated from his or her usual linguistic position of the-one-who-knows (Clarkson 2008: 23).

The idea is that those speaking English would have to rely on speakers of the indigenous languages to interpret the work for them, overturning the balance of power and promoting a sense of justice. Boshoff calls this artwork a tribute to African ‘survivor languages’ and at the same time it is a conversation piece

¹⁵⁰ After 2000, *The Writing in the Sand*, was remade several times in different years and at different venues.

¹⁵¹ *The Writing in the Sand* has been exhibited at the seventh Havana Biennale in Cuba (2000), at Den Frie Udstillings Bygning in Copenhagen (2001) and at Rand Afrikaans University (2001) (Clarkson 2008: 25).

(Vladislavic 2005: 64). The artwork seems to encourage conversation between spectators about the words, so that the spaces ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ of the work have significance. Sand was chosen as a medium because it is unstable, easily erased or disturbed and is as transient as language and meaning. Boshoff compares this to the silicone chip, which “as the basis of computer technology, is simply a more sophisticated version of the sand and like his installation “script on the computer can be easily deleted by the tap of a finger” (Boshoff 2005).

The *Writing in the Sand* has been exhibited, erased and re-created three times. Derrida’s act of erasure is recalled each time the artist effectively effaces the traces of history and text by literally sweeping up and obliterating content. This installation was further inspired by the gospel of John, 8: 3–11.¹⁵²

Each of Boshoff’s creative art and textual installations are unique. An art installation at the Standard Bank Art Gallery in 2011 entitled *Walking on Water* is one that is *anatropous* to the question of art and text. *Anatropous* refers to a plant ovule and means to completely invert, turn upside-down or turn back, 180 degrees. Boshoff explains that at the rate that the world is becoming polluted, we could soon run out of natural resources, water being the most important:

Walking on Water plays with technology as it intersects with the ‘word’ [WATER]. When we are gone all that will be left will be endless libraries of books, mountains of digital information and stockpiles of machines, quite incredibly designed, but defunct... (Boshoff 2011: 107).

¹⁵² It refers to the parable of Scribes and the Pharisees who wish to stone a woman for her unfaithfulness to her husband “When they seek Christ’s authorization, he replies that the one who has no sin should cast the first stone. He then kneels and begins to write in the sand. When he looks up, the angry accusers have fled, leaving the woman unharmed” (Boshoff 2005).

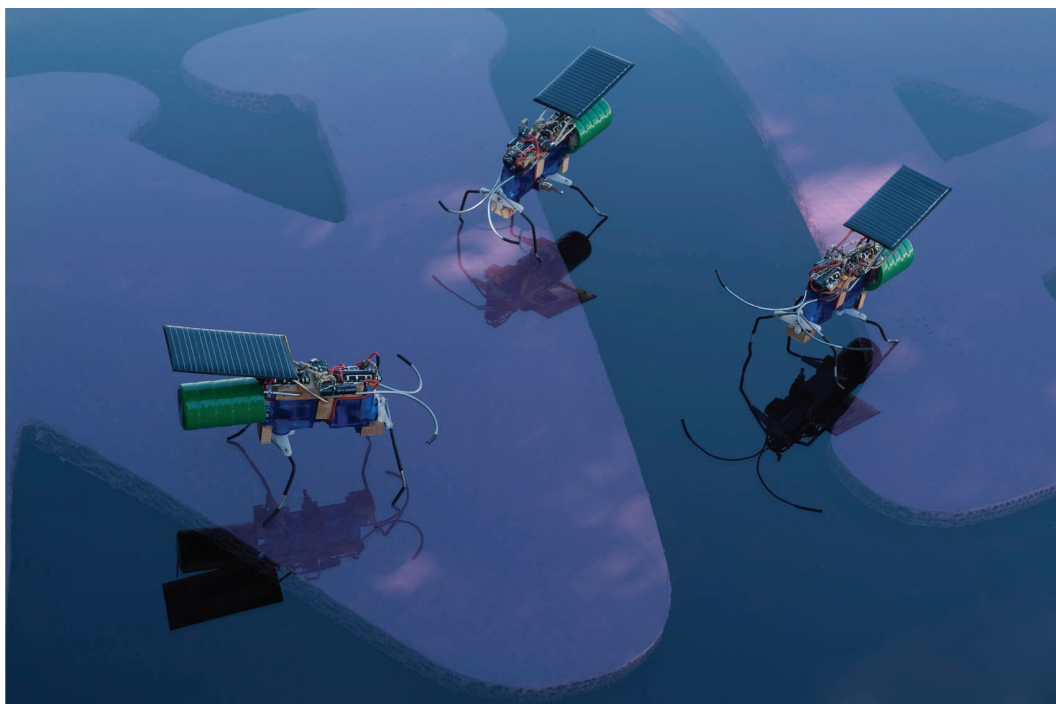


Figure 7. Willem Boshoff, 2011. *Walking on Water*.¹⁵³

Water, the [Delicate] Thread of Life, Standard Bank Art Gallery, Johannesburg.
Glass. 2 x 6mm adjoining panels each 245.5x110.9 cm.

The installation consists of white letters cut out to read the word WATER and placed across the floor under a plate of square glass several metres wide. Eleven tiny beaded ‘insect’ robots driven by solar energy run around on the glass surface, all ostensibly looking for the WATER, but there is no water. Only the word, the idea of water remains (Boshoff 2011: 107). The intention of the piece was to raise awareness of the importance of water for all living creatures and to show that although technology may survive longer, eventually natural resources will be exhausted, leaving nothing but ‘traces’ where ‘presence’ once reigned. What is

¹⁵³ Of his artwork title *Walking on Water* Willem Boshoff says that it is quite a simple task for water spiders or the little Jesus Christ lizard (*Basiliscus basiliscus*) to walk on water (Boshoff 2011). However, for human beings it is an impossible feat. The title expresses the impossibility of the situation. The planet is running out of water and without it there can be no life. We will have to walk on water, address the problem, take action and like Jesus Christ, perform miracles to save our planet (Boshoff 2011).

graphically indicated is that the text cannot be what it may represent. The sign that is 'WATER', in this specific context, may be at first understood to be a life giving thirst-quenching drink. However, as a metaphor the word, which is at the same time an entity or place and a referent, is signifying another meaning altogether. Even though it is made up of all the letters constituting the word WATER, the meaning of the 'trace' has changed because of the context of the text; there is no real water here, only 'nothingness' or the inaccessible.¹⁵⁴ Boshoff's installations are varied and his markings specific and indexical. *Water* projects a view of the future, a time when humanity may look back on a past when there was an abundance of fresh water in the world. Yet as one is catapulted into that future, every trace of the word *Water* and water itself is inaccessible. This is a time when even all advanced technology is redundant in the world because humanity cannot survive without water. 'Nothingness', 'ethics' and the 'trace' as instruments of deconstruction may be interpreted through Boshoff's diverse art works and methodologies.

Communication with others, recollections of violence and particular social and historical events in South Africa and the world are the cornerstones of Boshoff's art. There is a correlation to the Derridean notions that the concept is placed under erasure (Higgs 2002: 171) or "*sous rature*" (Derrida 1997: xxiv).¹⁵⁵ Boshoff's

¹⁵⁴ Boshoff explains his son's involvement and the educational value it engendered: "My younger son Willem finished school in 2010 and I got him to spend his holiday designing a clever system of getting spindly little robots to walk around on the word 'water'. He has been interested in robotics all of his high-school life and he devised the circuitry, mechanics and construction of these little critters. They must walk on 'water' for as long as they can, forever if possible – after all, they are driven by solar energy. I guess the fact that they will flounder and will have to be rebooted from time to time is indicative of the pathos of it all. We are all gone and all that is left are bits of crazy wire that somehow walk on water. The little waterbots walk around aimlessly on the letters of the word 'water' and when one of them comes to the edge of the field, it reverses itself and follows a new course. Ironically, Willem junior's design of the little waterbots became so exciting that many have expressed the wish that it would be great if the school syllabus could include a section on robotics. My elder son Martin and his engineer friend Carl at first watched from a distance, but after a while also got involved and soon a backyard waterbot industry began to flourish. The circuitry is quite complex and many of the electronic parts were ordered from overseas. I include some of Willem junior's notes" (Boshoff 2011: 107).

¹⁵⁵ Derrida stated that he printed both the word and the erased word to indicate that the word or signifier itself does not contain all possible meanings because the mark once made and then erased still leaves its trace of having been there (Derrida 1997: xxiv).

installation using the word 'Water' illustrates what Derrida himself was demonstrating when he erased and reprinted the word and the trace of it, signifying a specific time frame and an acknowledgement of what had been there before it was erased. It is evident from the art installation and word *WATER*, which makes up part of Boshoff's installation that it is applicable to the notion of 'trace' and 'erasure' in deconstruction, but in a way that turns upside-down the deconstructive application. Instead it expands on the aforementioned concept of 'time', 'memory' and 'trace' by displaying the word *WATER* to show that the word or signifier does not contain the full meaning and only the concept remains, concurring with deconstruction that a word may be read but it is not what it represents; the map is not the territory. Only a memory of real water remains with the original value of the water that sustained life, having been erased. Ethically Boshoff is alluding to his concern for the survival of humanity. Two conflicting elements inhere in the word *WATER*. 'Life' is present in the concept of water that is life giving and 'death' is the consequence of destroying the environment. The 'violence' implicit in this word demonstrates that even technology cannot survive after people are gone. Therefore, the contradictions seen in the Derridean model are exemplified in the *Water* installation, where 'water' (the word) is a material reality but cannot quench the thirst of a nation that has not preserved it.

'Differance' shows to what extent meaning is often deferred in Boshoff's work. For example, if the *ABC* sculptures stood for a period of time without a blind guide, they exist in space but a sighted viewer would not have access to the meaning of the work. The secrets of these words are delayed in time and if the viewer never meets the guide, the meanings are delayed indefinitely. Even if the boxes were opened, the works could be appreciated at a visual level but the actual word narrative cannot be understood unless the viewer is familiar with the meaning of the unusual word. The *Water* installation, analysed with 'differance', defers not meaning but the actual 'presence' of water itself, which never existed in space in this work to begin with. No amount of time can restore what was never there. The 'presence' is subtly deceptive because the artwork is a metaphor for the scarcities and vanishing of drinkable water worldwide. The metaphoric absent water in the artwork becomes a factual narrative – a deferred warning 'trace'

about genuine vanishings of real water in the actual ‘presence’ of our physical space. This narrative, deferred in time from what was to what is now, groups the growing losses and the resulting absence of that precious ‘presence’ in our global space. Deconstructing with ‘differance’ here redirects, with ‘trace’, from a non-existent overreaching metaphorical ‘presence’ to a space that exists not in narrative but in space – a reversal of ‘differance’ itself.

Boshoff uses art and ‘language and ‘vision’ in diverse ways to challenge and discomfit people who are at ease with their position of power. Some of his works simultaneously foster mutual engagement as with *Sand*, where he uses African minority languages to encourage interaction with English-speaking people, who must engage with the African ‘others’ to understand the artwork. The Blind Alphabet discomforts sighted people as they must rely on a blind guide to understand the ‘word’ Boshoff has sculpted. In *32 000 Darling Little Nuisances*, the discomforting is thorough. With this installation Boshoff refers to the 32,000 children who died in the concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War. He responds to the unethical refusal of the five British monarchs of the twentieth century to apologise for these unconscionable war crimes. The disquiet is clear and ‘Ethics’ takes on interesting and challenging turns as aspects of, ‘language’, ‘the other’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘reconciliation’ are applied in Boshoff’s art.

6.7 GEORGIA PAPAGEORGE

Georgia Papageorge lives and works from a studio in Pretoria, yet most of her acclaim has been from abroad.¹⁵⁶ Although the artist’s presence is recognised

¹⁵⁶ Papageorge is also represented in the collections of the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, the State Museum of North Dakota and in numerous corporate collections including Anglo American Corporation, Standard Bank Gallery, and Goldman Sachs International Art First Gallery (2001). Accessed 13/06/2012. Available from: www.artfirst.co.uk.

internationally,¹⁵⁷ Papageorge has had several exhibitions in small towns and cities in South Africa. In this section I begin with an overview of her work and describe how the art impacts on deconstructive ideas and these are significant in reading selected land art installations and films. Papageorge's work has been influenced greatly by the work and philosophy of Joseph Beuys, in particular, and also that of Anselm Kiefer,¹⁵⁸ whose art she saw at the 1982 Dokumenta in Kassel in Germany for the first time.¹⁵⁹

Papageorge's *Gondwanaland* Series began in 1994 and is a land-art work based in the Say Sowa Salt Pan, Botswana. She has worked in the Kalahari in Botswana to produce drawings and mixed media canvases. Kilimanjaro/Coldfire is the fourth in a series of her major African land art projects. Having climbed the mountain on four occasions and undertaken two crater flights in 1997 and 2007, she shows her integrity in knowing her subject matter as part of her lived experience. Papageorge considers her art on Kilimanjaro, in which she applies vertical striations of poured volcanic ash, as an irreparable loss that transforms into an iconic African symbol of mourning (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

¹⁵⁷ Georgia Papageorge 2001 'Africa Rifting - Lines of Fire, Namibia/Brazil', Film (2002/3). The video/film was first shown by the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington in 2004 on the exhibition *Insights* for 3 consecutive years. It was subsequently shown at the Fowler at UCLA in 2009, Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City 2007/8, and most recently at the Tang Museum, Skidmore College in New York State. 2011/2012. The video was also shown in Sao Paulo in Brazil through the Museum of the University of Sao Paulo in 2004. In South Africa the video has been shown at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in 2008 and the Pretoria Art Museum in 2009. Available from: www.sil.si.edu/DigitalCollections/Art-Design/.../vf_details.cfm?id=32722, accessed on 2013/09/19.

¹⁵⁸ Kiefer, whose philosophy is very strong in his work, is also an inspiration to Papageorge. In a catalogue describing Kiefer's art *Nuremberg*, Mark Rosenthal wrote "Kiefer expects his audience to be well versed in areas such as Norse myth, Wagnerian opera, Nazi war plans, theological and biblical history, and alchemy" (Rosenthal 1982:10).

¹⁵⁹ Papageorge explained what she saw at Documenta 1982. "Beuys's *7000 Eichen* project was on show [and] not only at the Dokumenta itself where quite literally thousands of huge sections of basalt lay heaped up on top of each other and spread right across one of the open squares outside the Friedericianum gallery space ... it was only later that I realised that Beuys had also planted oak trees all over the town of Kassel, each being accompanied with a section of carved basalt. Not carved into any shape, just a vertical rectangular shape. There were other works of his there of course, like the combi and the sled with all the rolls of felt, which linked to his plane crash and the rescue he was given by country people who saved his life by covering his burnt body with fat and felt" (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

Her exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum includes *I Stand Before The Rift: Third of Trilogiy of Kilimanjaro* in 2000 and *Through The Rifting Barrier* that same year. These demonstrate her sense of investigative research, personal involvement and courage that culminated in *Africa Rifting – Lines of Fire, Namibia/Brazil* (2001). She acknowledges the effect that Beuys had on her art and thinking:

I was right at the beginning of my artist's journey through life and more and more my art has taken on the kind of controversy he himself was involved with. Social justice/injustice, concerns with the environment on this damaged earth. His use of materials like felt and fat that had helped to save his life when he was shot down during World War 2. I hadn't used these but my red banners, the sand and grass I have used on works, mine dump sand, Gondwanaland beach sand (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

Beuys' engagement with language and his views were experienced as sculptural thought processes in themselves, as events; he described thinking, speaking and listening processes with others as living 'social sculpture' (Beuys 2004: 2). He stated that communication between people, generally, only occurs through the artwork of thinking and speech, provided one wishes to expand the concept of art (Beuys 2004: 70). Papageorge's sculptural, environmental and performative art is linked directly to this type of thinking as is seen in her art from the year 2000.¹⁶⁰

Markings or traces of history are central to Papageorge's two landscape art installations in June 2001 in Namibia, in Southern Africa and also in September 2001 in Torres, Brazil. These land art works took the form of two different installations in each country and exemplify intense, historical and geographical art with violence and disruption of meaning at its core, as will be explained further on in this chapter. The installations draw attention to the 135-million-year-old

¹⁶⁰ Papageorge wrote, "Joseph Beuys spoke to my heart and the way I saw things ... the way I launched myself into impossible projects and somehow came through them. I think he would have been so proud of me for my *Africa Rifting* projects. How he would have loved my [four] interactions with South African communities in 2005–2007 for the *Africa Rifting/Bloodlines* project ... for my 'Shepherd Principle Project' and trying to save great migrations. Caring enough to launch myself against the biggest thing I could think of China (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

Gondwanaland continental schism of South America from Africa. This was conceived with the idea of looking back on the connection between the two continents that were once co-joined. The source of the concept can be found in what Papageorge considers the turmoil of apartheid and the rifted consciousness it created (Papageorge 2013, personal communication). The films that resulted from the two installations in different continents were on show at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. from 2002 to 2004.

The first project took place on the coast of Namibia where long red banners were installed across the sand dunes of Namibia in quiet calm weather.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ All installations consisted of 20x3-metre wide red material banners on 4-metre tall poles.



Figure 8. Georgia Papageorge, 2001. *The Africa Rifting - Lines of Fire, Namibia/Brazil*.

Photograph, Namibia, Southern Africa. Film/Video shown at: The National Museum of African Art; Insights' Exhibition at National Museum of African Art (NMAFA); The Smithsonian in Washington from 2004–2007.

A symbolic cross (as in a 'capital X') but separated into two parts was envisaged for each country. First, the half cross with long red banners flying off 4-metre-high metal standards was installed in the Namibian dunes in June 2001 (Figure 8). After the half cross was filmed the banners were reused in a second installation. They were arranged in a 400 metre by 3 metre wide line across the dunes parallel

to the Atlantic Ocean and were left in place overnight. “[D]uring the night big winds came up and pulled the whole long line apart, dumping tons of sand on the cloth, creating a myriad of bleeding lines” (Papageorge 2013, personal communication). Parts of the cloth were visible emerging through the sand leaving traces of red indexical markings intermittently across the landscape.¹⁶² The wind had come up and displaced the sand left just enough for the eye to follow the suggested lineage of the banners. Traces of faint long lines or angry red streaks left by the half-buried red banners suggest traces of memory.

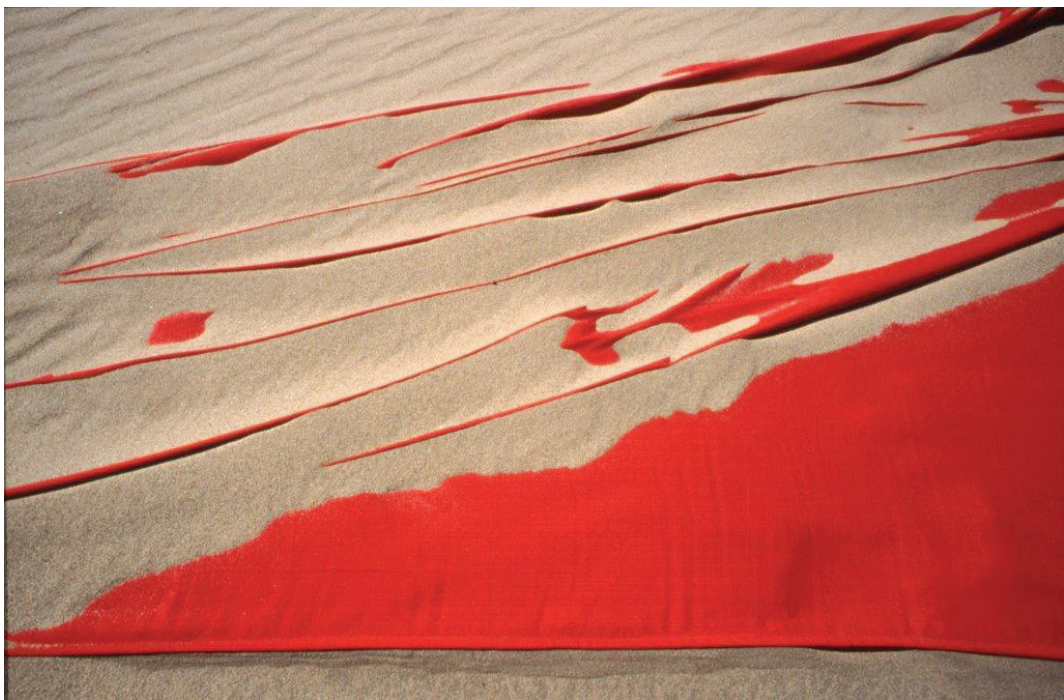


Figure 9. Georgia Papageorge, 2001. *The Africa Rifting - Lines of Fire, Namibia/Brazil*.

Photograph. Namibia, Southern Africa. Film/Video shown at: The National Museum of African Art; Insights’ Exhibition at National Museum of African Art (NMAFA); The Smithsonian in Washington from 2004–2007.

¹⁶² The *Africa Rifting/Bloodlines* installation, which had been set up in Namibia in 2001 was followed by four different ceremonial events in South Africa from 2005–2007. See Clark Buckner 2009.

A view of the installation taken from the plane revealed traces that may be interpreted as letters in the sand. Each letter, read in a line formation set out by the vertical poles of the banners, forms an illegible word joined in one's mind's eye. Three months later in September 2001, a corresponding long line of red banners was set up and captured on film, as they cascaded down and across the lava towers of Torres, Brazil, only this time they were subjected to gale force conditions. Papageorge recalls the difficulties encountered with keeping the installation upright and explained what happened with further filming of the installation in Torres:

It was the long line of banners down one of the two lava towers of Torres and then over the base of the second tower and then onto the Guarritas Beach¹⁶³ one kilometer outside the coastal town of Torres on the morning of 9/11. At that stage we were still able to fly over that installation with a fixed wing plane ... The plane flew to Torres from Porto Alegre – 200 kilometers South of Torres (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

During the flight over the lava towers of Torres in the late morning, the pilot was informed by a colleague in Porto Alegre that a plane had just flown into one of the World Trade Towers and that all airports in the USA had been closed and that no one knew what was going on. The installation continued as the line of banners were dismantled and taken to the main beach in front of the town of Torres to attempt to re-install the other half of the cross to correspond with Namibia. Papageorge's team had not been able to install the cross properly during the gale force winds that were starting to take hold. With the aerial shoot cancelled, part of the installation had to be filmed on the ground with lenses virtually being pummelled by wind and sand. Some of the banners that had been washed out to sea were sopping wet and heavy. Yet the poles remained upright and banners could be seen flying in the air from the sheer force of the gale. It was this footage in particular which was so poignant and powerful when used in the *Africa Rifting*

¹⁶³ Papageorge explained the significance of the beach, "This took place at the historical beach of Guarritas, ... Historical because this is the only beach on the East coast of South America where remnants of the Parana lava plateau are left standing right onto this beach and flanking the Atlantic Ocean (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

– *Lines of Fire, Namibia/Brazil 2001* project video.¹⁶⁴ On the following day after 9/11, they attempted to re-install the half cross. Although filmed on the ground and from the air, everything was stone dead and ultimately only one banner “hanging with blood red reflections” was used in the film. On 15 September another attempt was made on the same beach to complete the half cross. People from the town of Torres had come down to the beach to take part in the procession, which was also to commemorate the victims of the attacks in New York on 9/11.



Figure 10. Georgia Papageorge, 2001. *The Africa Rifting - Lines of Fire, Brazil*. Photograph. Torres beach, Brazil. Film/Video shown at: The National Museum of African Art; Insights' Exhibition at National Museum of African Art (NMAFA); The Smithsonian in Washington from 2004–2007.

¹⁶⁴ The video was only edited some years after 9/11. Papageorge explains: “I didn’t know how to handle this extremely sensitive subject matter for a long time, so it was 2003 before the footage was finally edited into the video which has been shown in many museums in the USA and in particular at the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian ... it was exhibited on the Insights’ Exhibition at the National Museum of African Art (NMAFA) at the Smithsonian for 3 consecutive years” 2004-2007 (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

Papageorge's intermittent banners remind one of Reynolds draws attention to Derrida's arguments in *Of Grammatology* (1997) where he explains how a sign references to the following sign and the next one and so on in perpetuity, stating "one can never reach a sign that refers only to itself"; it is a process of infinite referral (Reynolds 2002: 6). The installation demonstrates a critical aspect of referral: firstly, in the recurring banner-poles in the half cross installation and secondly, in the traces of banner-cloth, glimpsed intermittently through the sand in the two distinct landscapes. The view of the indexical marks and the violence and the stillness of the aftermath of the art event form the narrative located in both the past and present. The lines are as much about the red colour that is prominent in a landscape of taupe-coloured sand, as the absent line of meaning between points of reference. In the *Africa Rifting series in 2001* the present appears practically erased; only the traces of the red material banner installation that remained after the storm on the dunes of Namibia and the beach in Torres are evidence of something having been there in its historical and geographical past. Papageorge recreates symbolically that ancient line of fire along the rifting Southern African coastline from Antarctica 180 million years ago (Zilberg 2002:2). Her red half crosses, which were set up on two distant continents that eons ago were once one vast landmass, are reminiscent of Beuys, whose iconography included his use of the cross with its multivalent associations.¹⁶⁵

Janet Cherry in the exhibition opening address at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum in Port Elizabeth said that Papageorge's traces of red markings intermittently revealed across the landscapes, evoking history over time and the violence of the rifts, schisms and divisions of continents. Cherry discusses this act of breaking apart:

[T]he inconceivable geological divide between continents over millions

¹⁶⁵ Beuys admired qualities of the organic dimension of the beehive which he described as moving crosses and imbued the spiritually qualities of the (Christian) cross with the beehive. He was concerned with the divided states of the world, as evoked by the halved cross. The halved cross was to him a corrupted Eurasia which he described as a vast and uninterrupted land mass stretching from China to the Atlantic' that criss-crossed over millions of years by the movements of peoples as well as migratory animals (Rosenthal 2005: 37).

of years, to the schisms between two communities, Enon and Bersheba ... How did the continents ... South America and West Africa, Southern Africa and Antarctica ... come apart ... It is about the universal theme of rifts, of continents and communities torn apart. ... bloodlines, the crossed lines of sacrifice and the circle of unity, the ancient symbol of Kairos, and the crimson banners of suffering. It is about our common humanity, our bloodlines, the blood that flows from common ancestors (Cherry 2008).

Deconstruction may reflect such indeterminacy, when in the moment of creating new meaning, a certain paradox exists that is violent. Violent because in creativity there is always a type of novelty and a risk: “[I]t is violent because it is guaranteed by no previous rules” (Caputo 1997: 6).

The vastness of the installation across the Namibian dunes on the day after the storm in June 2001 had given way to an unnerving silence, interrupted only visually by the unexpected blood marks from the partially buried red banner in the sand in Namibia. The same kind of eerie silence was experienced the day after the terrible storm on the beach in Brazil only heightened by the intent to complete the half cross in that space. Again a parallel notion may be drawn when Derrida explains that a spatial work of art is mute, it doesn't speak. One may read or interpret such a work as potential discourse:

The silent work becomes an even more authoritarian discourse ... more powerful because it is silent, and that carries within it, as does an aphorism, a discursive virtuality that is infinitely authoritarian, in a sense theologically authoritarian. Thus it can be said that the greatest logocentric power resides in a work's silence, and liberation from this authority resides on the side of discourse ... It is that very authority ... the infinite power of a virtual discourse - and, in the second place, the effect of an untouchable, monumental, inaccessible presence - whether it is a question of sculpture, architecture, or painting (Brunette and Wills 1990: 12).

Derrida's view that silence intensifies the power and inaccessible presence in an artwork is experienced in an appreciable way when viewing Papageorge's artworks, which in tandem with the storms are inaccessible and can never be recaptured; except though the silence and evidence of bent and broken trees and the ensuing traces of red material traces once fleetingly part of that landscape.

Silence can be associated with the aftermath of violence and has evocations of the past and is “a silence essentially linked to an act of force and a prohibition which opened history and speech in general” (Derrida 1978: 54).

Events beyond her control shaped the outcome of Papageorge’s art installations and performances, yet history was being recorded and shaped at the moment that the making of the art began. Ultimately, all the violence of the geological past as alluded to in *Africa Rifting/Bloodlines*, mirrored by the actual force of environmental conditions that enabled the traces of red ‘blood’ on the landscapes, reside in the intensity of silence and presence implicit in the installation.

Papageorge’s ethical intentions are clear. This art brings to bear traces that refer to South Africa and Brazil’s once shared political, social and geological history. The violence relating to the monumental force of the schisms that caused the continental rifts of two disparate yet once merged continents. Ultimately, the weather conditions and the attack on the Twin Towers in New York shaped the temperament of Papageorge’s art and film. Papageorge had learned Portuguese¹⁶⁶ over a two-year period to be able to extend her ‘hospitality’ to the people of Torres and they reciprocated by participating in the ceremony to install the other half of the cross.

‘Differance’ is most evident geographically in the space of moving ‘presence’ and the time of metaphoric ‘trace’. Geographically, continental shapes show ‘traces’ of how the earth once was and how it can only be brought together again in that way through further eons of time and the physics of planetary workings or, in our lifetimes, through the artistic stitching of metaphoric narrative installations. Papageorge’s banners were beacons marking the landscape. As a result of the inclement weather, traces of red material covered mostly by beach sand became a metaphoric suturing together of two continents, separated by deferred time.

¹⁶⁶ Papageorge explained to me that she had learnt Portuguese to communicate with the people of Torres, few of whom speak English. Her mother had been born in Portugal of English-speaking parents. Her father’s family had been in Portugal for four generations before she was born (Papageorge 2013, personal communication).

However, the metaphoric stitching of the two spaces into one ‘presence’ became ‘traces’ that existed physically for a short time only. Reminiscent of the happenings during eons of geographic time, Papageorge’s artwork echoes those occurrences on a metaphorical scale. The art installations create a temporary physical narrative that survives now only through peoples’ memories of the event and on film. As a ‘trace’ of two lands that were once joined, the installations are a reminder of the great forces that tore the continent apart.

Papageorge could not have predicted the violence that the art was subjected to in the storm in Namibia or months later in Torres by weather or the prevailing social and political conditions, nor the response that the art would ultimately invoke. In the *Leonardo* review, Jonathan Zilberg observed:

I struggle for words. Where do I begin this visual story of a long red cloth making landscape and sadness breathe ... there is something unspoken here perhaps about the supernatural, history and grief (Zilberg 2010: 1).

6.8 NICHOLAS HLOBO

South African artist Nicholas Hlobo (b.1972), after winning the Tollman Award for the Visual Arts in 2006, exhibited at the third Guangzhou Triennial in China in 2008. He was selected as the Standard Bank Young Artist for Visual Art in 2009, during which year he went to the Havana Biennale in Cuba, then London. Hlobo was the recipient of the Rolex Visual Art Protégé award for 2010–2011, which afforded him the opportunity to work for a year under the guidance of the critically acclaimed British artist, Anish Kapoor. Since then he has exhibited in various cities, including the Tate Modern, the Liverpool and Venice Biennales and the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. He has achieved worldwide acclaim at a relatively young age.



Figure 11. Nicholas Hlobo, 2008. *Ingubo Yesizwe*.
Leather, rubber, gauze, ribbon, steel, found ball-and-claw chair leg, butcher's hook and chain. 150x260x3000cm.

Employing a deconstructive eye, I examine the significance of Hlobo's art and show how it applies to matters of 'ethics' in the TRC. Hlobo's choice epitomises the contradictions that Derrida speaks of in the word 'hospitality' that links to the impossibility of 'finding a consistently ethical position' when failing to be inclusive of all 'others'.

Narratives that may be read in Hlobo's art derive from social, gender and political issues in the South African context, similarly to the ways that taxi hand signs refer at times to names of places, apparently shaped by events in particular areas. The name KwaThema (see chapter 4), which translated means *rest in peace* and is suggestive of people who have passed away there, appears to have particular relevance to this artwork. Although gender equality remains part of a broader South African struggle, the township of KwaThema has been notable for acts of violence against woman and lesbians in particular. In 2010 Henriette Gunkel, who wrote *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*, discusses murders that took place in KwaThema in 2008 and 2009 (Gunkel 2010: 5); I have

referred to more recent incidences in Chapter 5. Gunkel and other writers like Susan Sontag¹⁶⁷ (2008: 64) and Prerryer (2007: 64) write about violence in photography, similar to the violence against lesbians portrayed in Zanele Muholi's (b 1972) photographic work¹⁶⁸. Andre van der Vlies in *Art as Archive: Queer Activism and Contemporary South African Visual Cultures* in 2012 compares Muholi's imagery, which bears witness to prejudice against Black queers, especially lesbians in South African society, to Hlobo's exploration of isiXhosa traditions and gender issues with an emphasis on gay men, masculinity and rituals (Perryer 2006). Van der Vlies suggests that Muholi and Hlobo's art, although expressed through diverse artistic mediums, constitute a different kind of gay and lesbian aesthetic activism. He states that they:

Speak to tensions between identity and performance, tradition and contemporaneity, in perhaps more dynamic ways that is allowed by a conventional understanding of archives or archiving [for example, of documents and narratives] (Van der Vlies 2012: 95).

Hlobo's art in its media and performances bear testament to this revealing dimension. One example, which I discuss here, is his *Ingubo Yesizwe* sculpture installation. A hook on the wall holds up a section of *Ingubo Yesizwe*, a large sculpted work 50cm x 260cm x 3000cm in size, which was exhibited at the Tate Modern in 2008.¹⁶⁹ It was created with black rubber, leather, organza and gauze, all of which were stitched together with ribbons and draped across the gallery

¹⁶⁷ See, Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor, 1989), 9, 23, 24. Sontag once believed that 'repeated exposure' to events through photographs make them become 'less real', but by 2003 she was no longer sure. She concluded that photographs may retain the power to shock and haunt, but that it is only narratives that 'can make us understand'. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 105, 89. See, Diana Wylie (2012). Documenting photography in South Africa. *Kronos* vol.38 no.1. Cape Town. Available from: http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S0259-01902012000100002&script=sci_arttext, accessed 26/10/2013

¹⁶⁸ See, See Marc Epprecht's review of photographs by Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni which provide 'public visibility to non-normative sexualities and gender identities among black people in South Africa'. Accessed 10/10/2013. Available from: http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S0259-01902012000100002&script=sci_arttext

¹⁶⁹ To be transported to and from galleries, *Ingubo Yesizwe* must be taken apart and dismembered into sections, then reassembled or 'zipped together and stuffed', before being installed.

floor. The moulded creation extends across the main space provided in the gallery, culminating in a corpulent mass of leather and rubber fragments, sewn together into an organic monstrous being; a hulking beast that is initially threatening in its sheer volume but also commands empathy as its snarled insides are revealed dripping out onto the floor. “Drawing on the centrality of cows – and, hence, leather – as socio-economic and spiritual cipher in his isiXhosa culture, as well as rubber in all its urban, sexual and industrial guises” (Halliday 2008: 1). Cows, in all aspects of African and South African society, are a measure of wealth. They are used for ‘bridewealth’,¹⁷⁰ for spiritual and festive reasons, for food, hides, fuel and fertilizer from manure, which is also used to smear the floors and walls of dwellings. Leather, ribbons, stitching and rubber materials are all significant in bringing to the fore attitudes towards gay men, gay fetishes and expected conservative norms usually associated with IsiXhosa traditions within the South African landscape.

Hlobo’s identification with his own isiXhosa language and oral histories led him to title his art in isiXhosa. In an interview with Tamara Warren in 2012, Hlobo explains that in language much is lost in translation that is essential to the density, variability and intricacy of his art (Warren 2012). The titles of his other artworks in isiXhosa speak to this, as Hlobo explained in an interview with Sue Williamson:

Through my works I attempt to create conversations that explore certain issues within my culture as a South African ... The conversations become a way of questioning people's perceptions around issues of masculinity, gender, race and ethnicity (Hlobo and Williamson 2008).

He secures his identity with South Africa and expects that people familiar with the language will draw people to communicate with others who can translate his titles. He draws attention to a language that holds little status in a worldwide

¹⁷⁰ ‘Bridewealth’ is the term now used as opposed to ‘Labola’. Eric Worby explains that “[I]s the accepted term now because it avoids the implication that lobola is the ‘price paid’ for a bride—a colonial era prejudice and misunderstanding of the significance and function of the practice” (Worby 2013: personal communication).

context but, like Boshoff's *Blind Alphabet*, delivers status and empowerment to a minority of isiXhosa speaking people who are able to translate to English. Hlobo's use of 'language' speaks also of his feelings towards IsiXhosa culture:

[A]bout 8 million South Africans are isiXhosa, including Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu ... [isiXhosa] is not respected as much as it deserves. Referencing the isiXhosa culture is a way of telling a story, a South African/human story that many have told before ... In doing so, I elevate the status of the language that many in the world are not familiar with (Kapoor and Hlobo 2010: Interview).

The oral histories, politics and narratives that are explicit in the artwork are authenticated in this way. Even if the isiXhosa titles are not instantaneously understood, it is also a way of questioning "the notion that art ... should solely exist within the constraints of the English language"¹⁷¹ (Kapoor and Hlobo 2010, Interview). Here he identifies with Boshoff's conviction in that it is a sign of 'hospitality' and a tribute to African 'survivor languages' and a way of promoting curiosity and conversation (Vladislavic 2005: 64). Hlobo's hospitality is towards those who speak his language; the viewer who does not understand the title must enjoy the artwork without knowing the meaning of the title. To a certain extent Hlobo is countering the violence that has been imposed on his own language always having to be translated into English, for example.¹⁷² Derrida's argument on hospitality recognises the difficult position of the 'foreigner' or by extension the person speaking a minority language. Derrida insists that the first act of violence is imposing translation from a minority language into the official language spoken (Derrida 2000: 15). I divert here to the TRC where although testifiers were encouraged to communicate in their own language, again it was English that was sometime preferred as the language of interaction (Verdoolaege 2008: 24). Derrida draws attention to certain English terms, which could not be

¹⁷¹ *Uhambo* - Nicholas Hlobo at the Level 2 Gallery, Tate Modern, London. An art installation on a similar topic can be seen in Susan Hiller's *Witness*, 2000. "Witness focuses on an elaborate construction of technologically manipulated verbal recordings" (Robinson 2006: 73).

¹⁷² Although one of the eleven official South African languages, isiXhosa is not one of the most widely accepted 'official' spoken languages in South Africa as is English.

easily translated or lacked a certain expressiveness in the other South African languages (Verdoolaege 2008: 24). For example, key terminologies like repentance, forgiveness or reconciliation (Derrida 2002: 66). Hlobo's isiXhosa titling of his art, is reactive to his personal ethical position, which risks discomfiting 'others' in order to validate his own linguistic dilemma.

Shaun O'Toole rearticulated the question of the isiXhosa titles in Frieze Magazine, giving his article the title *Phalluses, saddles and South Africa; handmade costumes and the isiXhosa language*. He argues that Hlobo's choice of titles in isiXhosa was notable from the point of view that:

Given apartheid's attempts to create a hollow pantomime of cultural memory and continuity, to lightly paraphrase Benjamin Buchloh, the reclamation implicit in Hlobo's methods, in particular his use of his native language to title his work, cannot be ignored – even if it sometimes misses those best equipped to understand his point, without being lectured to (O'Toole 2008: 1).

It is reminiscent of Boshoff who both encourages communication yet discomforts those who are in a position of power. Hlobo's art at first encourages conversation by revealing much about himself and the isiXhosa language through his surprising use of different qualities of objects and materials. *Ingubo Yesizwe* means 'blanket of the nation' in isiXhosa. O'Toole describes blankets of rubber and leather that have the quality of membrane and a suppleness and suggestiveness that is revealed in their folds and a "weightiness to create a tangible tension between surface and what may lie underneath" (O'Toole 2012: 88). Viewers who are not familiar with the isiXhosa translation may miss the opportunity to grasp the meaning from the narrative in the title, however the artwork projects its own socio-political perspective, which the notion of such a painfully harsh 'blanket' alludes to. I am reminded of Derrida's translation of Levinas's view on 'inside/outside, where he describes experiences that go beyond words and language, they resides in ideas. The meanings are not confined to the words that Hlobo uses instead they are embedded in the "heart of conceptuality itself" (Derrida 1978: 113).

Derridian concepts of ‘inside/outside’ and dualisms of language and space resonate with aspects of Hlobo’s perspectives which involve ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the work in both a conceptual, physical, spatial and experiential way. The artist is firstly embroiled mentally and physically in the making of the art installation and he becomes part of the work in his collaborative performances with the artworks. Visitors may traverse around or through or under the works. ‘Outside’/‘inside’ being something that people may experience both physically emotionally or intellectually.

One of Hlobo’s earliest performances and sculptures from 2006 is *Iggirha Lendlela*.¹⁷³ Hlobo describes the piece as being derived from the isiXhosa choral song “*Iggirha lendlela nguqongqothwane*”. Translated it means “The dung beetle is the doctor of the road” (Hlobo and Williamson 2006, Interview). Hlobo explains how the dung beetles move backwards to complete their tasks and instinctively know where they come from:

The dung beetles ... roll dung using their hind legs – they’d then make their way to their nests rolling the dung using backward movement ... To me, this says a lot about the courage and confidence they have. They are not intimidated by having to move things larger than their bodies. And this movement says nothing about having backward thinking. Instead it presents a lot of intelligence and knowing where they come from. The song is used to refer to those who are wise and educated [in various ways] and says that they are the ones who are enlightened and know the way forward (Hlobo and Williamson 2006, Interview).

Hlobo speaks of his performance, the artwork and the title of the song as a metaphor for South Africa and its cultures, in relationship to the burden of the past that South Africans must yet overcome (Hlobo and Williamson 2006, Interview). The body of the dung beetle in Hlobo’s art performance is fashioned

¹⁷³ Nicholas Hlobo. (2005). *Iggirha lendlela*. Leather Jacket, rubber inner tube, blouse, bust. 61 x 58 x 67cm. Used in a performance as part of the group exhibition ‘Olivida Quin Soy – Erase Me from Who I Am’ Centro Atlantico de Arte Moderno. Las Palmas in Catalogue of Standard Bank Young Artists Award. 2009. P 38. Michael Stevenson Gallery. Johannesburg Art Gallery collection.

with a black rubber jacket packed with a permanent built in hump.¹⁷⁴ Hlobo explains that the deformity of the hump is added to the garments so that it looks as though “it is part of the design and at the same time foreign” (Hlobo and Williamson 2006, Interview). The jacket or dung beetle’s body was made of rubber from inner tyre tubes, stitched together using red ribbon, all relating to materials used in his other artworks. The ribbon is sewn into the rubber sheeting and reads as continuous perforated lines or pathways. Hlobo states that:

I like using rubber, particularly the inner tube of tyres. They’re related to many aspects of culture and all sorts of references in human life. Rubber is protective, but it’s also stubborn and strong. Somehow it is an ambiguous material and relates to the human body and how men evolved when one thinks of industrialisation. In isiXhosa, an inner tyre tube is called *ithumbu lemoto* which translates as the intestine of the car (Kapoor and Hlobo 2010, Interview).

Hlobo’s animation of his sculptures and his corresponding performances infer the notion of body as he either takes on the form of his art objects or there is the actual insertion of himself into some of his works during a performance. Tracey Murinik writes in *Kaleidoscope* in 2005 that, “If these performances enhance the opacity of the works being animated, they also complicate their potential trajectory” (Murinik 2012: 6).

¹⁷⁴ Hlobo’s works invite the viewer to contemplate the materials he uses because “most cultures exhibit their evolution through materials” (Warren 2012: 1).



Figure 12. Nicholas Hlobo, 2012. *Tyaphaka* [detail].

Exhibited: Sydney Biennale 2012. Michael Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg 2013. Rubber, ribbon, hosepipe, packaging material, 300x400x40000cm.

The lines formed from the sewing together of Hlobo's sculpted installations suggest elements of the seam and 'trace' in process of their making and the journey of the artist's personal growth. "By articulating his sexual politics, sociohistorical positioning and ethnicity in the diverse worlds that his work inhabits, Hlobo explores desire, imagination and the very potential for transformation" (O Toole 2012: 79).

Working with rubber is labour intensive. The combination of material and technique metaphorically and visually produce the seam. The nature of the seam is to define the site of that which is co-joined, always evidenced by the mark of the suture whether an attempt has been made to hide it or not (De Kock 2002: 276). De Kock suggests that the seam is the site of both convergence and difference. It is the place where difference and sameness are hitched together.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ He argues that "Not only is the strain palpable in the many instances in which cultural inscription carries across its burden of crisis ... but the act of returning to the zone of the seam appears to be compulsive. It is the place where the divided culture must return time and time again, where the impossibility of origin and unity is staged repeatedly" (De Kock 2002: 277).

Hlobo's work suggests a metaphorical pathway of reclaiming the past and the present, which we know from what has been written by Hlobo himself is part of his journey. In the interview with O'Toole, he has told how he reclaims his isiXhosa origins in response to his upbringing by his aunt who tried to shield him from his own culture by disallowing him to participate in cultural events as a child (O'Toole 2012: 81). Seen in the tactile stitching and threading of ribbon, which creates fragmented pathways, are images of scarring and healing on the outside. A scar on a human body is also a sign of emotional trauma that no doubt goes with the incident related to the scar that is hidden, but implicit. In much of his art, trails of many ribbons hold together the reams of rubber sheeting, the seams at times torn open to reveal the insides of the work as if revealing himself emotionally. Hlobo explains, "I am curious about who I am, my origins, the migratory origins of black South Africans, and the mosaic qualities of isiXhosa rituals" (O'Toole 2012: 81).

The artworks are very much about the process of their making where Hlobo explores desire, imagination and the potential for transformation in his artworks and accompanying performances (Van der Walt 2012: 79). Hlobo's choice of rubber as the body, skin and substance of his art installations is relevant to South Africa and the struggle against apartheid¹⁷⁶. Hlobo explains this point in an interview:

I use discarded objects that I put together and give new values. Of course, given the history of this country, the process of trying to rebuild a new culture gives the stitch a metaphorical quality. It's almost as if we are stitching bits and pieces of history together to build something new (O'Toole interview with Hlobo 2012: 83).

¹⁷⁶ The rubber industry had significance for industrial workers at the 'centre' of labour strikes, resistance against separation and unfair labour laws set by government at the height of apartheid. "In 1972, SACTU requested AATUF affiliates to send protest messages to the South African Minister of Justice against the trial of 318 African bus drivers employed by PUTCO who were charged with public disturbance after a labour strike. Two months later, four African employees of a plastic and rubber factory at Industria in Johannesburg were convicted and fined R100 or 50 days imprisonment each for engaging in a strike. In addition, African workers could be declared "undesirable Natives" and endorsed out of the urban areas to the Homelands" (Theron 2006: 223).

His painstaking stitching may further be interpreted rather as surgical suturing, both healing and scarring at the same time. In an abstract and ethical sense, healing and scarring are the emotional and material features equally representative of issues of language used in the TRC referring to the past and reflecting on the future by using specific ‘linguistic registers’ (Verdoolaege 2008: 90).

Hlobo also acknowledges his mother tongue, his isiXhosa heritage in the titles of his art. This may be to provoke enquiry by people who speak different languages. However, if Hlobo’s intent is to reveal a particular narrative through the title of the artwork, then his untranslated use of a title in isiXhosa may be viewed as alienating people not familiar with the language. “I feel I should not rob the viewer of the opportunity to create his or her own understanding of the work” (Hlobo 2012: 81), the person reading the title may then concentrate on the artwork because the artwork tells a story in itself. Knowing the story afterwards may detract from that experience (Hlobo 2012: 81). Murinik¹⁷⁷ explains that Hlobo’s unfailing usage of isiXhosa titles, which are usually not translated, are similar to the preference that artists often have in leaving their work untitled, presumably when they do not want to encourage direct interpretation (2012). Murinik argues that the choice of an isiXhosa title make these works culturally specific and reassert a central theme describing his body of work, which is about that of inclusion and exclusion (Murinik 2012:92).

Tyaphaka, exhibited in 2013, is a lumbering metaphor for a whale, more sprawling than *Ingubo Yesizwe* also painstakingly stitched, it is made from rubber tubing with visible seams and a necessary steel inner structure for support at its heaviest side. The ‘whale’ was submerged in water at Sydney Harbour when first exhibited. Khwezi Gule (2013) draws attention to the use of isiXhosa titles saying that:

The titles often refer, subtly, to body parts, cultural practices or sexual

¹⁷⁷ See Murinik “Nicholas Hlobo. The subversive stich” in *Kaleidoscope* magazine. Interview: Shaun o’Toole. Essay: Tracy Murinik; Focus: Lisa van der Walt. Issue 15, 2012.

acts. Thus the act of thinking through Hlobo's work involves prying apart the aesthetic, historical and conceptual from the biographical. In this way Hlobo's work operates on both visual and linguistic levels.

For Gule this presents a problem; even when the title or narrative is explained there are often double meanings or complex histories that may be underlying. As with Boshoff, Hlobo may also be discomforting or chiding those who think that English is the only language that can be used for international art. The impact of language and metaphor in an audacious, oppositional, impossible, open-ended and, sometimes violent conceptual realm are constantly manipulated in Hlobo's expressive playing field.

6.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have established that notions of deconstruction, particularly the terms of 'presence' and 'ethics' and other ideas that both inform and contradict one another in Derridean concepts, are already inherent in the creative imaginings that art assumes and therefore provides a more succinct understanding of art and art thinking. The four artists' work provides a way of understanding art operating in spaces that relate to 'traces' and 'ethics' in my own work. I consider the events and narratives in the context of South African history and the taxi hand sign landscape, and apply these to law and politics in Kentridge and his convergence with Derrida's *Force and Signification*.

In section 6.4.2 I have demonstrated how Kentridge's art – through his projection of lines, graphic renderings and theatre performances – impacts on how one thinks about 'trace' and the use of 'space' to evoke memory. Derrida's 'ethical' considerations regarding apartheid and the possibility or 'impossibility' of 'forgiveness' are shown to be expressed differently and in extraordinary ways in Kentridge's performances, art and films. With Boshoff, the questions of 'ethics' echo in Derrida's use of language to ethically communicate with 'the other'. The *Blind Alphabet* is an example of how Boshoff uses his art to challenge sighted people, denying them access to his library of sculpted words. They must rely on the guidance of a blind person. In the work of Papageorge, the 'trace' and 'ethics' are witnessed not in text, but from an aerial view of an expanse of desert with

traces of red banners, half covered by sand. The land art marked a space where many strangers joined in a procession in sympathy with people on another continent who lost their lives on 9/11, the same day that the installation was installed, similarly stretching Derrida's concept of traces of history to another expressive unrestricted plane.

Hlobo's use of isiXhosa in the titles of his artworks and performances may be alienating for some but, for Hlobo, identifying his work in his own language is important. His use of rubber material, steel, soft ribbon and stitching show an expressive resonance with his own identity and homosexuality. I have borrowed Derrida's description of spacing to suggest that the disruption of presence in the mark, which becomes the written word and in turn the 'trace' (Derrida, 1971: 16) may be applied to the four selected artists and my own artwork and have shown how this application informs, disrupts and enhances alternative art notions. What has been substantiated is that deconstruction as a 'schema' for processing the hypothesis presented in this thesis suggests a certain assembling of 'concepts and actions' that may knowingly confuse or shape aesthetic interpretations in my own art for this thesis.

I have drawn from these artists to highlight aspects of SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*, where I rely on spontaneous markings to capture the idea of 'trace', in the Derridean sense, of having been there, of messages and communications across aerial and conceptual spaces. Taxi hand signs are forces, present in the symbolic landscapes of public culture in Gauteng. Capturing the events and narratives that inhere in the signs, forever changes the way taxi hand signs in South Africa are understood by South African society. The symbolic and conceptual imagery in SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* were discussed showing that there is coherence and incoherence, common and uncommon grounds shared by art, deconstructive philosophies and textual matters. It is evident that these inhere principally in the artists' work that I have selected to examine, making use of the more three-dimensional abstract constructs and performances to demonstrate this. These conceptual artists' practices are directly or indirectly entrenched in their identification with South Africa and its pre- and post-apartheid history and stories.

Their works demonstrate different ways of responding conceptually and with critical awareness of the South African condition, which, I have revealed, equally applies to Derrida in his lectures on apartheid and the TRC. What is clear in section 6.4 is that the ethical aspects of deconstruction, especially the way of communicating through the use of a 'language', may be applied to each of the artists although their ethical focus varies in their art expressions. It is through creative lenses that one can begin to comprehend where aspects of art and deconstruction and where elements of 'trace' and 'ethics' converge. This has resulted in an understanding that such a conceptual approach correlates with the very different art projects studied.

I have addressed the motivation and application of the artwork SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*, the foundation of which is the research, art and literature aligned to the thesis. I acknowledge my dependence on the voices and expressions of others, of commuters and taxi operators who know and live daily with the issues of minibus taxi transit. These are the criteria integral to the entire taxi hand sign concept for the thesis and the art.

My work builds on the idea of signification transmission and reception of the addressee by recognising the value of 'nothingness' and the usefulness of interruption of space, to externalise the concept of transference of the messages being sent through the art. I decided to work with ideas of signifying elements that suggest points of reference that recall the addressee, the desired destination and the referent or place in the process of communication. The question of 'indexicality', 'movement', 'trace', 'time' and 'space' were visually addressed and introduced as the principle constituents of the work. I discussed the political and historical background that shaped the minibus taxi industry. The concept of the messaging system operating through the unique taxi hand signification language is core. 'Trace' as a means denoting the sign in time has specific significance for SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*.

One is conscious of the estimated thirty million commuters daily signifying with taxi hand signs, which change the city by 'having being there' in the past. The

servicibility of taxi hand signs are interesting and valuable in their own right. Culturally, their value lies in the minds and actions of the millions of people doing taxi hand signs in time gone by and to this day. To a single commuter or taxi driver who sees this constant stream of signs, it is part of their conscious and sub-conscious memory; memories constituting a gestural 'language' that communicates this part of our history currently within the landscape and city structures of Gauteng. The prolific performance of countless taxi hand signs in the city makes Gauteng legible and distinctive from other places. Being performed by so many commuters from across all language and cultural barriers and so frequently used and observed, taxi hand signs are present in a visual and visceral way in Gauteng.¹⁷⁸ The question of taxi hand signs changing a place by their existence in the city has been examined, not through Gauteng's living spaces, buildings and highways but through the people who know the city as walkers, drivers, visitors and residents.

Taxi hand signs can change and delineate a city in the same way that people walking in the city change its visual character. These insights into city spaces were valuable analogies. Taxi hand signs exemplify the symbolic traces of collaboration among transit commuters who are interacting across Gauteng. My artwork SIGNIFICATION: *Texterea* expressed the transference of information through millions of taxi hands signs, signifying in the city, so that there is always the idea of memories, signs and movement to be drawn on in the process of creating the artwork. The city, in other words, is defined by people walking and in transit through the city by taxis.

¹⁷⁸ I find an equivalence of this legibility by the way in which individuals come into our lives on a daily basis. I imagine that each person that we encounter, however briefly, leaves a trace of themselves somehow in our sub-conscious mind, especially if one has been aware of others doing taxi hand signs to get a lift in the environment one passes through. Such experiences may be thought of as having 'been there' and occupied an unconscious place in our lives. In a similar way, a hand dipped into a basin of water, displaces a transitory conceived space before the water pours in to fill the space where the hand has been.

There is a measure of ‘undecidability’ with the frequently evolving use taxi hand signs. The mix of citizens and migrants keep the culture of signification for taxis alive in Gauteng.

CHAPTER 7: SPACE AND SIGNIFICATION IN URBAN GAUTENG

The political, social and economic background to the taxi industry in Gauteng and the many restrictive and racist laws imposed over the years shaped the growth of the minibus taxi industry and the emergence of taxi hand signs. Gauteng's political background and the overall art and anthropological research has profoundly affected my thinking and abstract interpretation for my art as it provides deeper insights into the complexities of taxi hand signs. A city may be defined by pedestrians and commuters who inhabit it; by living, working within or transversing across it. In this section I argue that the visible presence of the taxi hand signification system has changed the observable and symbolic landscape of Gauteng and it is this concept of occupying space, of streets, city blocks, infrastructure and landscapes that affects the broad underlying location for the SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea* artwork discussed in Chapter 6.

AbdouMaliq Simone, in his ethnography of the inner-city of Johannesburg, describes how people in the community interact with others and display distinctive characteristics in different places: “[E]ach carries traces of past collaboration and an implicit willingness to interact with one another in ways that draw on multiple social positions” (Simone 2004: 408). The culture of performing taxi hand signs and the resulting informal interaction between people asking about the correct sign to use has contributed specifically to Gauteng through its collaborative quality, usefulness and visibility. Taxi hand sign practices encourage a differentiation of Gauteng from other provinces by their uniqueness, pertinence to history, event, direction and location. Gauteng has an estimated 70 to 100 or more signs, 50 of which are fully documented in this thesis. The number of different signs is difficult to calculate as they are continually being duplicated, invented or reinvented for new routes by taxis and potential passengers. However, it is their repetitiveness and frequency of use for transport by commuters that makes life and work possible and a socially synergistic, highly visible entity across Gauteng. Other provinces have considerably fewer signs. The same sign

used in another city in South Africa will have a different narrative or place associated with it. Taxi hand signs are the catalyst affecting the way Gauteng may be perceived. The culture of performing the signs, the language that belongs to any person who may take a minibus taxi in the province, define Gauteng's difference from other places in South Africa and they change the experience of Gauteng by virtue of their continual abundant use and visibility over time.

Derridan notions claim that all that is left of 'presence' is the 'now' and the 'trace' or effaced 'trace'. The city landscape is the most apt concept of deconstruction for metaphorically visualising taxi hand signs. Many different taxi hand signs, coding for the place they represent are performed and witnessed by millions of people daily. Paths of movement are mapped out as commuters walk to hail a taxi on the streets and in taxi ranks and converse with other passengers as they interact to learn the signs in the informal manner that this gestural system necessitates.

To argue this I draw from Michel de Certeau and various scholars who have followed his lead, including AbdouMaliq Simone, Sara Nuttall, Achille Mbembe, Terry Kurgan, Jo Ratcliffe, Kevin Lynch and Jonathan Hyslop in their observations of what it means to 'know' Gauteng through the experience of walking. One may deduce that aspects of 'ethics' in the Derridean model apply to the notion of city transport and spaces being designed in ways that encourage people to access a city through walking and how 'differance' as transferral adds to the understanding of walking and waiting in anticipation for taxi transport, being a condition of the bodily action in taxi hand signing. Taking into account the history and politics that defined South Africa and Gauteng one can begin to see why taxi hand signification developed into a critical method of communication. This is recognised as a vital function of transferral by taxis for millions of commuters. Different descriptions of Johannesburg as a city experienced by many people walking provide a view of this environment that nurtured the emergence of the taxi hand sign language.

In an essay titled 'People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg', AbdouMaliq Simone describes Johannesburg as on the one hand

one of the most developed and industrialised cities in Africa, yet one that may be seen as physically and morally compromised. He describes the city as:

[A] place of ruins—of ruined urbanization, the ruining of Africa by urbanization. But in these ruins, something else besides decay might be happening ... [t]he possibility that these ruins not only mask but also constitute a highly urbanized social infrastructure. This infrastructure is capable of facilitating the intersection of socialities so that expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to residents of limited means (Simone 2004: 407).

Simone's concepts are framed around the notion of people's activities in the city or 'people as infrastructure'. He challenges the methods used by researchers, policymakers, and urban activists who undertake the ethnography of inner city Johannesburg. He advocates a different practice concerning "ways of seeing and engaging urban spaces that are characterized simultaneously by regularity and provisionally" (Simone 2004: 2). Hence, instead of describing the infrastructure of a city by its highways, buildings, plumbing and connecting cables, he aligns with De Certeau's concept of experiencing the city through its inhabitants' practices of walking (De Certeau 1984: 91).

Nuttall defines walking in the city as being in an "always-moving space" and as a way of constantly revising the "inventory of a city, its tracking and a breaching of its historical construction", and a mode of conceptualising the contemporary city (Nuttall 2008: 215). Simone, De Certeau and Nuttall all emphasise the elements of indexical traces, peoples' experiences over time, interactions and histories, as having meaning in knowing a city. Rory Bester, in the book *A Moving City: Johannesburg Circa Now* depicts cities as "critical centers of meaning" and Johannesburg as "one of the defining metaphors of post apartheid South Africa" (2005: 10). Bester draws attention to a different view of the city as seen through the eyes of Kevin Lynch who states that city spaces should be read by being organised into coherent patterns (Lynch 1960: 158) and that a city can also be understood through re-production in the movements of the body in space. Therefore, the arrival of people, their duration of stay and departure, their behaviour and activities create patterns of movement, which express the city and

its value (Bester 2005: 10). Signs of their movements are transient so that:

Whilst the roads and pedestrian networks, signage and zonings are marks of continuing precinct prescription and predictability, the reinterpretation and meaning of places by walkers only lasts as long as people are present, visible and on the move (Bester 2005: 11).

The signage and structures remain in place and are predictable. When different people come and go in the city spaces, only then can meaning be assigned to these marks and beacons that make up city spaces. In understanding the separating of space and place, De Certeau describes the organised grid-like and discernible expanses, interspersed with contrasting transcendent spaces. He makes clear the distinction between strategies” and “tactics” in relation to urban space:

Strategies create places that are somehow ‘geometric’, located, visible, knowable and controllable, while tactics reinvigorate ‘Anthropological’ dislocated, invisible, unknowable space” (Bester 2005: 14).

To De Certeau “strategies” define places that are consciously structured, geometrically patterned and planned, they are visibly located and knowable spaces that vary across the city. With “tactics” he refers to experiencing urban spaces that are vigorously anthropological, unfixed, strange, anonymous and variable, even transcendental. It is this anthropological space that one may imagine traces of taxi gestures as part of a city’s everyday character, past and present. Translated symbolically, De Certeau’s conceptualisation of walking the city where pedestrians may become familiar with places and spaces known to them in the physical environment is described as “another spatiality [an ‘anthropological’, poetic and mythic experience of space], and ... an opaque and blind mobility characteristic of the bustling city” (De Certeau 1984: 93).

The redesign of taxi transport systems in Bogota¹⁷⁹ is used to exemplify this concept in a concrete way by encouraging a culture of walking in the inner city together with offering regularly available taxis and buses, it became an acknowledged practical solution for the taxi transport problem and closing the transport gap between the wealthy and the poor (Peñalosa 2008: 1).

Commuters doing taxi hand signs are commonly seen all around Gauteng. They are part of the familiar visual and definable characteristics of culture in South Africa. Like any province, Gauteng may be transformed by the people who inhabit it, the visitors who pass through it and the vehicles, taxis and buses that traverse across it. I have observed the phenomenon of taxi hand signification while walking the streets of Gauteng and have imagined the spontaneous imagery of gestures, the transferal of messages across Gauteng. The abstract and symbolic notions of the city have found a place of expression in the conceptualisation of my artwork.

At the same time I reflect on the fact that many blind people, particularly in the black community, live and work in Gauteng. Many blind people who walk to take minibus taxis into the city use taxi hand signs to alert the taxi driver as sighted people do. In Chapter 8 it is argued that the design of a taxi hand sign language for blind people assists them with orientation and mobility in the city.

¹⁷⁹ Enrique Peñalosa was mayor of Bogota, Colombia's capital from 1998 to 2001. Peñalosa describes the successful transport system of taxis and buses that changed the city of Bogota to a 'walking city'. He explained that he tried to "[M]ake the city for the most vulnerable people ... I think that in the 20th century we made a big mistake ... In Bogota, the real division is between those who have a car and those who don't ... We restricted car use in many ways. Here anything that you do in order to increase pedestrian space constructs equality. It's a powerful symbol, showing that citizens from all walks of life can participate in city life. Those who walk are equally important as those who have a car." (Peñalosa 2011: 1).

CHAPTER 8: PICTOGRAPHIC SHAPE-LANGUAGE FOR BLIND PEOPLE

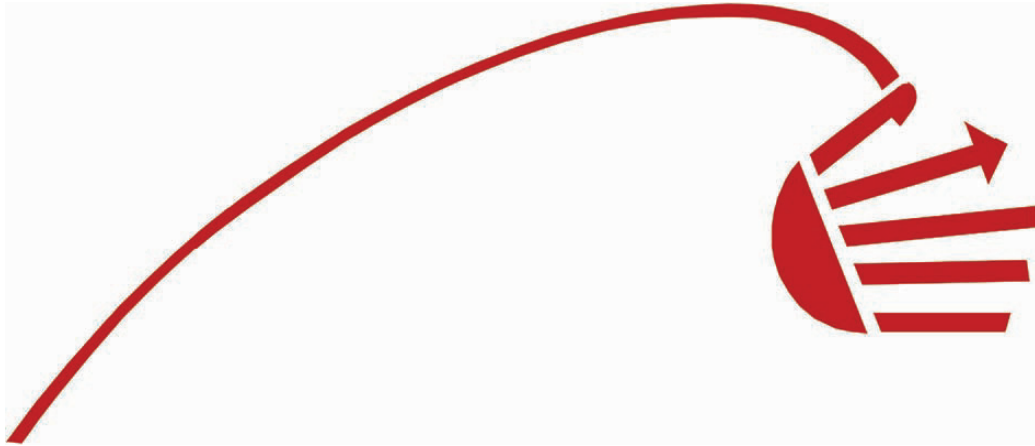


Figure 13. Blind shape-language on WAM wall. (DVD A01)
Vinyl, 3 metres length. (See DVD A01. Films: DVD. No 1, 2, 3)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

During the initial stage of my ‘sampling’ research in taxi ranks and on the streets of Gauteng, I became aware of the fact that blind people were also using taxi hand signs to hail taxis. The motivation to design a pictorial shape-language for blind people to provide access to information on taxi hand signs stemmed from my response to illustrations created for blind people in the form of pictorial outlines for blind learners. The question of a tactile shape-language for the blind came to me when paging through a book of illustrations for blind people at the South African Blind Workers Association (SABWA) in 2004, currently known as Blind SA. I was visiting Pike, who was the designated guide for Boshoff’s dictionary art installation *The Blind Alphabet ABC*.¹⁸⁰ I wondered if it was possible to combine

¹⁸⁰ As Project manager of the art exhibition *South African Art to Atlanta: Common and Uncommon Ground* (1996), the exhibition brought Pike to Atlanta’s City Gallery East to act as the guide for Boshoff’s *Blind ABC* art installation. Co-project manager Lesley Price organised visits to the gallery from 18 public schools and over 500 scholars listened and engaged with Pike as he explored the contours of Boshoff’s sculpted ‘words’ and explained the art ‘words’ to sighted students (Woolf 1996).

of a few basic shapes, to make up the various taxi hand signs, which could be read by blind people. These would be in the form of graphic shapes and textured dots accessed by touch. The *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* was published in 2009, before the equivalent booklet¹⁸¹ for sighted people was published. The different combinations of 14 graphic shapes form the individual taxi hand signs.¹⁸²



Figure 14. Booklet - *Taxi Hand Signs for the Blind*. (DVD A22)

The overall shape ‘alphabet’ for taxi hand signs and each of the forms are explained with an accompanying diagram, indicating how different combination of the shapes form many different hand signs, creating a language easily interpreted by a blind person.

During my research with blind people I continued to refine and re-evaluate the

¹⁸¹ The *Taxi Hand Sign* book published in 2007 had several tactile signs for blind people in it. It was too expensive to be widely distributed and was donated to some of the main public libraries in South Africa as a record of the first documentation in book form of the taxi hand sign language for sighted and blind people. The *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* was published in September 2009, with the pocket-size taxi hand sign booklet launched the following year in January 2010.

¹⁸² The books for the visually impaired were stocked at Blind SA and the National Council for the Blind and handed out to blind people. Left over books were returned and sold to collectors. Sighted people can assist a blind person with the shapes in the *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* to explain how to read the shapes initially. Knowledge of braille is a pre-requisite for reading the Index of Destinations.

shapes. I became interested in the idea of using these shape combinations for educational purposes for young people. Two semi-structured interviews recorded on film with a blind person, who is an orientation and mobility practitioner for blind scholars, Ian Hutton, led to my later participation in classes for blind children. In section 8.2.2.1, I describe my interaction with several of the young scholars and subsequent interviews with the school principal at Sibonile School, which was pivotal to my research. The research sought to establish two important points: first, the question of teaching the taxi hand signs as shape recognition for young learners and second, the stage at which older learners may learn taxi hand signs and what part would this play in orientation, a vital skill resulting in better independence outside of the school and home environment.¹⁸³

A series of artworks for the blind entitled *Touch Teasers* (from the *Taxi Hand Signs: Shape Lingo for Blind People*,) as well as a looped video on taxi hand signs, was exhibited at the MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art in New York) in 2011, at an exhibition on communication entitled *Talk to Me*. The blind shape-language is a tool to assist orientation, heighten communication and contribute towards independence. It demonstrates the development of a new and useful combination language for visually impaired commuters. The graphic blind language exhibited at MoMA in New York was simultaneously exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark* at Sci Bono in Newtown, Johannesburg. Both talk about communication and dialogue. *Dialogue in the Dark*, where sighted people are taken through pitch-dark, indoor and outdoor environments by a blind person, is frightening yet humbling for sighted people as it engenders a respect for people

¹⁸³ Hutton explained in the interview that he is the only blind practitioner in Gauteng: “There are only three of us anyway the other two are part-time. We employ five qualified, we call them practitioners, these days. And they do orientation and mobility training ... The mobility is about how to get around independently but there are other skills you can teach people as well independence training, like activities of daily living which can be anything from um...hundreds of different things that people need. From how to dial a telephone that you can’t see to how to use an ATM to how to cook or to how to sign your name now that you can’t see, how to recognise different coins and bank notes, you know what money handling and all sorts of things like that ... activities of daily living training and all generally called independence training ... Practitioners being expected to live away from home for a large part of the year, in communities rural and township, anywhere in the country ... and that’s the only way we can reach people who otherwise in their lifetime never have access to that training (Woolf and Hutton Interview: 2010).

who clearly have developed certain skills far more advanced than their own.

8.2 SHAPE-LANGUAGE FOR BLIND PEOPLE

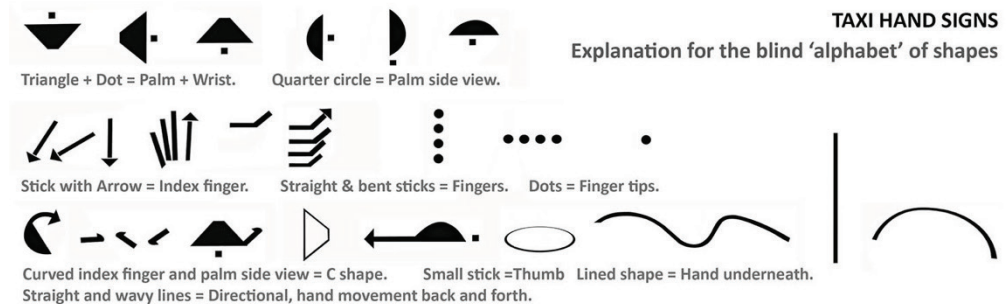


Figure 15. Explanation For the *Blind Alphabet of Shapes*. (DVD E07)

From 2004 through 2009, the taxi hand sign shape-language for the blind advanced in tandem with the research on taxi hand signs for sighted people. Its development into a readable touch language for blind people was aided by research that resulted in several semi-structured interviews with blind persons. During the developmental stage of designing the taxi hand signs, workshops were held with Pike and with Dube, one of his blind colleagues employed at Blind SA, for the purpose of discussing the taxi hand signs pictorial alphabet, in order to receive feedback from them on the readability of the tactile taxi hand sign shapes so that they were comprehensible from a blind person's perspective. These interactions took place at Blind SA from 2005 through to 2009. I also met with a group of blind musicians at their office in Yeoville who advised me. In 2007 I interviewed five blind teachers who were intending to start a school for blind people. During this period semi-structured interviews with selected informants took place, relying on 'participant observation' with different blind informants and, as stated later in this chapter, it included observations and periods of interaction with blind learners of school-going ages. The South African National Council for the Blind arranged for me to meet Dr Maguvhe and Philip Maibi to discuss the taxi hand sign graphic shapes for the blind. The tactile taxi hand sign shapes were designed as an alternative to the apparently 'realistic' outline drawings that I saw in the illustrated books at Blind SA. My intention was to

design a few very simple shapes, which coded for parts of a hand held in different positions, something that might easily be understood and learned. What resulted was a series of fourteen tactile textured shapes, puzzle-like in that they could be combined differently for each hand sign, requiring only a few standard guidelines. The shapes are triangular, circular and directional lines, which aid with the direction and movement of the sign. As the symbolic form language developed, it has been possible to simplify the shape of each sign. This visual shape-language evolves alongside new taxi hand signs emerging on the streets of Gauteng. They may be altered or simplified to accommodate a new graphic interpretation for the blind. The designs have continued to develop in this way since the book was published. As noted above in 2010, I interviewed Ian Hutton. He advised me on ways to make the taxi hand sign shapes more readable for blind people. This impacted on the further development and simplification of the shapes for blind pictorial language.¹⁸⁴ A second more in-depth semi-structured interview was recorded and captured on film in February 2011. The language for blind commuters consisted of thirteen simple basic shapes that could be read individually or combined in a variety of ways to read a taxi hand sign.

8.2.1 EXPLANATION: BLIND ‘ALPHABET’ OF SHAPES

1. The TRIANGLE co-joined with a DOT beneath it are one entity. The TRIANGLE represents the palm of the hand. The DOT represents the WRIST. The DOT is at the top of the triangle it means that the hand is pointing downwards. When the DOT is below the TRIANGLE the hand is pointing upwards. When the DOT is to the left or right of the TRIANGLE the hand is pointing sideways.
2. A QUARTER CIRCLE represents the side view or top of the hand.

¹⁸⁴ During the first interview with Hutton in 2010, he made suggestions on how to make the signs more readable for blind people. There were two shapes he felt could be made clearer. He found that having the half-moon shape representing the side view of the hand and as well as the top of the hand was confusing. The simplification of the sign meant retaining the Half Moon shape for the Side View of the palm but deleting it altogether for any hand sign orientated towards the front. (Woolf and Hutton Interview: 2010)

3. LONG RECTANGULAR STICKS are the number of fingers being used to sign [VISIBLE]. They point up, down, left and right. Fingers not used for a hand sign are simply not shown. Long stick shapes shown bent in the centre represent the fingers of a cupped hand; alternatively, one single bent finger may form a circle as it touches the thumb or another finger. Fingers that are shortened represent a fisted hand.
4. SHORTENED fingers represent fingers folded in forming a fist.
5. ARROW - The pointing/index finger always has a small triangular arrow tip. This arrow tip indicates which direction the hand is pointing. Sometimes when the arrow is slanted at an angle, it is pointing backwards.
6. DOT - A single dot standing alone represents one finger pointing forward.¹⁸⁵
7. FOUR, THREE OR TWO Horizontal DOTS represent the forward pointing hand, palm facing the floor. FOUR fingertips are felt as a horizontal row of FOUR dots in a ROW, horizontally and vertically.
8. FOUR Vertical DOTS represent the forward pointing hand, palm facing to the side, 4 fingertips making a Vertical row of dots in a line.
9. THUMB - A short rectangular shape with thickened end represents the Thumb tip.
10. CURVED or circular shape, showing the thumb and index finger meeting at the tips, has various alphabetic C indications, which changes when

¹⁸⁵ The sign of the DOT coding for a pointed finger was discussed with the blind assistants at Blind SA and with both Hutton and Dr Obert Maguvhe. In order to explain the sign Maguvhe was asked to point his index finger with his hand pointing forward. He was asked to touch the palm of his other hand with his pointed index finger and imagine making a dot on his palm. A tactile dot on a page could be imagined to be the taxi hand sign pointing forward. The same would apply if the four fingers pointed forward. Four horizontal dots could read as four fingers pointing forward. In a class situation, with direct individual interaction, touch or performance, taxi hand signs and the corresponding shape-language can be similarly taught in schools.

three, two or one fingers are combined.

11. Outlined objects such as the TRIANGULAR PALM shows the underneath hand.
12. Straight or wavy LINES are directional and indicate movement of the hand usually back and forth.
13. An elliptical outline indicates an area in the immediate vicinity.

Fingers hidden from view for a sighted person are left out in the tactile graphic hand signs as well.

8.2.2 RESEARCH AT SIBONILE SCHOOL

This section deviates in style from the rest of the thesis as I use a more informal prose drawn from my field notes to describe the findings so important to the question of value and usability of the taxi hand signs.

The primary objective for the design of the shape-language for blind people was to contribute towards orientation and mobility by providing blind commuters with the choice to know the signs and take taxis. Later it became clear that the combination of tactile shapes may have alternative educational value in both a primary and high school situation.

An in-depth anthropological and scientific investigation would need to be part of a further study beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it seemed imperative to use whatever information I could gather to recognise at this point who would benefit from this new pictorial shape-language and in what way the shapes and signs could be of educational value.

The investigation took place in 2010 where Hutton accompanied me to Sibonile School in Kliptown. My aim was to observe, participate, interview and teach blind and visually impaired children of different age groups in their various classes with the co-operation of the teachers. Specifically, I wanted find out if it would be useful for blind children who had already learned basic shapes of triangles, sticks

and circles as part of their curriculum to learn to recognise different hand signs by the combination of different two-dimensional tactile shapes. Once basic shapes are learned, combining them to create various hand signs is relevant to different patterns of cognition. The actual action required for making the signs could be learned at the same time, with the intention that this would ultimately help with mobility training and orientation¹⁸⁶ for teenagers who may want to use taxi transport.

On the subject of introducing the taxi shape-language into schools one of the principle teachers, Boshielo, commented that it was not simply a matter of teaching the hand signs:

It is not just learning a sign; it varies from children who have seen before and those who haven't. And then I suppose the practicality of using the signs outside the school. When they leave school ... For us as mobility instructors a particular interest would be ultimately the practical application of learning. So that's the narrow view and that's where our particular interest lies. I suppose that there is only one way of finding out about this and that's trying (Boshielo 2010: Interview).

He reiterated that apart from taking into consideration each child's 'blind' history it is usually a matter of trying various approaches, assuming the teacher's professional training. The teaching method thus would be different for each learner.

A controlled study over a period of time and with different age groups was not possible within the parametres of this research; however, in this period of observation and brief experience teaching at the school, certain facts became clear which may help shape the research approach of similar studies attempted in the future. For this reason I describe briefly the research experience in the school overall, the lesson given to 12-year-old boys and what was concluded from

¹⁸⁶ Orientation refers to the ability to know where one is and where one is going, be it moving from one room to another or walking downtown for a shopping trip. Mobility refers to the ability to move safely, efficiently, and effectively from one place to another. To be able to walk without tripping or falling when crossing streets, or using public transportation (Woolf and Hutton 2010: Interview). Available from: <http://www.visionaware.org>

observing and recording on film the activities being taught in the different classes.¹⁸⁷ This investigation included semi-structured interviews with the teacher, the headmaster and two of their ‘brightest’ blind learners.¹⁸⁸

8.2.2.1 Haptic shape recognition and mobility

The experience at Sibonile School was a turning point in the focus of my research on the educational value of the taxi hand sign shapes as an educational tool for learners. I considered the fact that the taxi hand sign language could be taught as a performance as well as a touch or haptic experience. The following examples show some of the complexities considered in using a tactile shape-language as an education tool in school for blind learners. Some studies have suggested that children over four years seem to be more adept at recognising shapes than at a younger age. *In Language and Experience: Evidence from the Blind Child*, Landau and Gleitman suggest that blind children can count on their haptic capacities to give them information about the world that language encodes. They noticed how the word *look* was used by the child in their study, saying “Kelli understood the term *look* to apply to haptic explorations ... she commandeered the sighted term ... to encode haptic explorations (Landau and Gleitman 2009: 68). This has been emphasised in section 9.4.2 and in my short film *Isindlela Zamagundwane* for my exhibition at WAM, detailed in chapter 9. I likened the

¹⁸⁷ First lesson: Orientation. Location: School Hall. Observation: In the empty half of the school hall a group of about a dozen children of between 10 and 12 years of age were practicing ‘orientation’. Walking in pairs across the hall they were asked at various intervals to turn around or change places with their partners. Nombuso, their 28-year-old teacher was generous with her praise of each child, to which they responded to her encouragement. Relevance to learning taxi hand signs: These children are clearly too young to catch a taxi on their own, but the orientation classes are the very basis of what they should know to begin to learn to navigate their environment. Conclusion: This is the age group suitable for using the tactile taxi hand sign shapes to learn shape recognition. Very clearly though, it is only school-leaving teenagers who have experienced mobility and orientation training and so would appreciate knowing the taxi hand signs.

¹⁸⁸ The second lesson at Sibonile was Coin recognition, held in one of the school’s classrooms. The aim was to familiarise the learner with the size, texture and weight of the coins. The teacher, Nombuso Sibisi gathered six children of 10–12 years of age, around her large low table. Each learner had a chance to take the money from Nombuso’s hand to their own. Voice and touch are the main form of communication. Physical contact is a lifeline. A blind person’s world is bounded by their own immediate space yet unlimited imagination. The learners are taught first to determine the size and weight of the coins, and then use the textures to differentiate the coin.

observation to the blind person, Wellington, as recorded saying on film, that it is not easy for a blind person to *see* a taxi coming from a distance. Piaget and Inhelder explain the value of learning by touch and say that only later in development can haptic exploration be used as a ready substitute for visual search “when the child is forming correspondences between the visual and tactilo-kinesthetic sensations in order to extend imitation to the non-visible parts of his body” (Piaget and Inhelder 1969: 55). Teaching shape recognition through touch to blind children then requires that one work with children who are older than four and have developed the skills to differentiate textured shapes, in the way that reading begins for sighted children only at school-going age.

I was introduced to two 12-year-old boys who had been blind since birth. My first task was to ascertain that the boys were familiar with reading basic triangles, circles and rectangles made up of uniform raised dots. Time was spent introducing myself, talking to the boys to create a relaxed atmosphere, including questions about their experiences with taxi travel or knowledge of taxi hand signs. After establishing that the learners could recognise the basic textured shapes, the hand with the finger pointing upwards was explained. Next, the corresponding tactile shapes in the book were introduced. The taxi hand sign ‘to town’ was then described and shown to each learner (One finger pointing upwards). The boy’s hands were guided individually and were encouraged to feel the dot below the triangle, which is read as co-joined with the triangle (the wrist and palm). Lastly, the boys were able to feel their own index finger or palm to compare their hand to the graphic tactile form representing the sign. We discovered during the course of the session that physical practice was needed to achieve more confident physical expression with their hands and bodies.

Should a further study on the usefulness of combining basic shapes to read as gestures be undertaken, it appears that one would have to work with children who have already been taught basic two-dimensional textured shapes and who were at least six years old or older because the resulting combinations of shapes forming taxi hand signals are also a conceptual leap. Haptic shapes formally learned as triangular, circular or rectangular become a part of a combination of different

shapes, which read as one sign. The different gestures that result suggest different meanings. As codes for taxi hand signs, the content they point to may have reference to places, via their indicative, descriptive, geographic, historic or narrative connotations. In the *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* the shapes are a defined form consisting of a uniform texture of raised dots. The shapes are sized for a small or large hand. They have been formulated in sizes that make touching the shape comfortable enough for interpretation using one's fingers even if with a child-sized hand. The size of the graphic shapes inside the taxi hand sign book for blind learners had to be carefully considered so that they are easily interpreted when explored by touch. Schiff and Faulke in *Tactile Perception: A Sourcebook* suggest that graphic shapes be reduced in content (fewer texture variations) and in size so that "unessential" symbology is eliminated in order to reduce a display or shape to a comfortable size, which is physically manageable for the hand and consequently for interpretation (Schiff and Faulke 1982: 366).

Landau and Gleitman's argument that haptic exploration seems to lead to "[C]onstruction of textual and density dimensions rather than dimensions relevant to shape" suggest perhaps that differentiations that make up textural shapes may obscure recognition of the shape (1985: 16). If one takes raised dots as a textural example for instance, if the angles, heights, sizes and proximity of the dots to each other vary haphazardly, one could understand that it may cause confusion in the process of trying to 'read' the overall shape accurately by touch. Schiff and Faulke quote studies by Merry that identify "factors that contribute to the legibility of tactile shapes" as well as studies on "discriminable symbols" on graphic displays. They further argue that when compared to an object/entity that is three-dimensional, "raised representations of two dimensional figures in relief were recognised far ahead of three-dimensional objects" (Schiff and Faulke 1982: 365). In other words, although training and verbal clues were shown to improve perceptions in both two- and three-dimensional figures, the child learned shapes better via the tactile two-dimensional modality as with tactile shapes in a book. Importantly, for the two-dimensional design of the blind taxi shapes, an essential principle from the beginning has been to leave out elements of the fingers, thumb or palm that do not make up the essential sign.

For older blind teenagers, teaching the taxi hand sign shape-language focuses on the contribution towards orientation and additional independence outside of the home and school environment, assisted by the information provided for the right taxi hand sign to use for taking a taxi to the destination of choice. This would contribute to orientation and mobility as part of blind schools training programme. In the interview with Hutton he describes activities of daily living training as “independence training”. Hutton explains what he set out to do over the years with blind orientation and mobility:

The original idea was that we have to be a totally outreach organisation and that our practitioners as they are now called ... being expected to live away from home for a large part of the year, in communities rural and township, anywhere in the country ... and that’s the only way we can reach people who otherwise in their lifetime never have access to that training (Hutton 2010: Interview).¹⁸⁹

Hutton describes the lack of government support at blind schools in urban areas:

And we found out that the government does not subsidise posts for O [Orientation] and M [Mobility] practitioners at schools, which is a form of madness, actually! So we just decided that we should start running programmes at schools for the blind, which we have done ever since ... There are about twenty odd schools for the blind throughout the country, and we can’t reach them all (Hutton 2010: Interview).

The individual needs for each blind person varies greatly. The most valuable lessons take place on a one-to-one basis, both in the home environment and in the classroom. With far too few teachers and very little available resources in the whole of South Africa, only a nominal section of blind children and adults in rural

¹⁸⁹ In the filmed interview, Hutton explained that practitioners go into rural areas “three months at a time. They only get one programme a year in their home area, whatever that might be. They run four programmes a year, each lasting about twelve weeks on average and one of those programmes will be in their home generally, and then, one in their home province or if they are lucky two in their home province. But still being away from home and the balance can be anywhere in the country. So they spend three quarters of the year away from home, moving to a new place every three months, so they are the real heroes... ‘of the peace’. The original aim was you train people in their home environment. It’s the best way to do this kind of training. It doesn’t work as well if you bring people to a centre and the send them home. So that’s how we originally set ourselves up ... but, there are children, you know, and there might even be pre-school children if you look in the community programmes” (Woolf and Hutton 2010: Interview).

areas are fortunate enough to be provided the assistance required.

8.3 CONCLUSION

What emerged from the exercise at Sibonile with two young blind learners is the conviction that there is a need for a blind child to participate in performance activities in order to encourage physical expression with hands and body. First, it was clear that the boys needed to become familiar with moving their arms and hands with more confidence in order to gesture or demonstrate the use taxi hand signs themselves.¹⁹⁰ Second, two-dimensional haptic shape recognition in its simplest form – triangles, circles and rectangles – are a prerequisite to learning the taxi hand signs, therefore what must be established is the point at which a learner would be ready to take shape recognition and combinations of shapes to a new level of perception. Third, teenagers at school-leaving age are likely to benefit the most from learning the taxi hand signs, particularly for mobility training and orientation, which increases the ability for a blind person to function in society and become more independent.

It is evident from research with blind employees at Blind SA, from Hutton's contribution to blind education and from the semi-structured interviews and research at Sibonile, that the proposal to introduce a conceptually rich shape recognition programme into the school curriculum for younger learners has educational value. The lessons, as part of the school curriculum, must be well planned, informed and imaginative. Providing taxi hand sign information as part of orientation and mobility training for school leavers is information that every person has a right to have access to in as much as a sighted person would too.

¹⁹⁰ I taught art to children for many years. Although these children were not blind, I have seen the benefits, including increased confidence and heightened creativity and learning, that such a manner of teaching engenders and could immediately recognise the need for a blind child to participate in drama in order to encourage physical expression with hands and body.

CHAPTER 9: CURATION OF ART EXHIBITION AT WAM - Art works, installations and books

The art exhibition at WAM was a correlation of the art and anthropology of taxi hand signs reflected through different media, which when presented simultaneously, built on many aspects of the theoretical content in the thesis. The art is the expression of all the interactions and research experiences, having begun nine years ago when the taxi hand sign art project was initiated. Each production, design of a language or body of artworks are projects over several years in their own right and have required a specific focus. They come together in the art exhibition to form that Gestalt required to make sense of what taxi hand signs mean in terms of signification, communication, location and history. The exhibition further suggests that taxi hand signs and minibus taxi transport, as performed by the millions of taxi commuters daily, create a uniqueness and an atmosphere of difference that defines the visual and experiential characteristics of Gauteng. Films on the DVD include: 1. WAM Exhibition Space 2013; 2. Public Interactions; 3. Walkabout Excerpts.

9.1 ILLUMINATING BLIND SHAPES

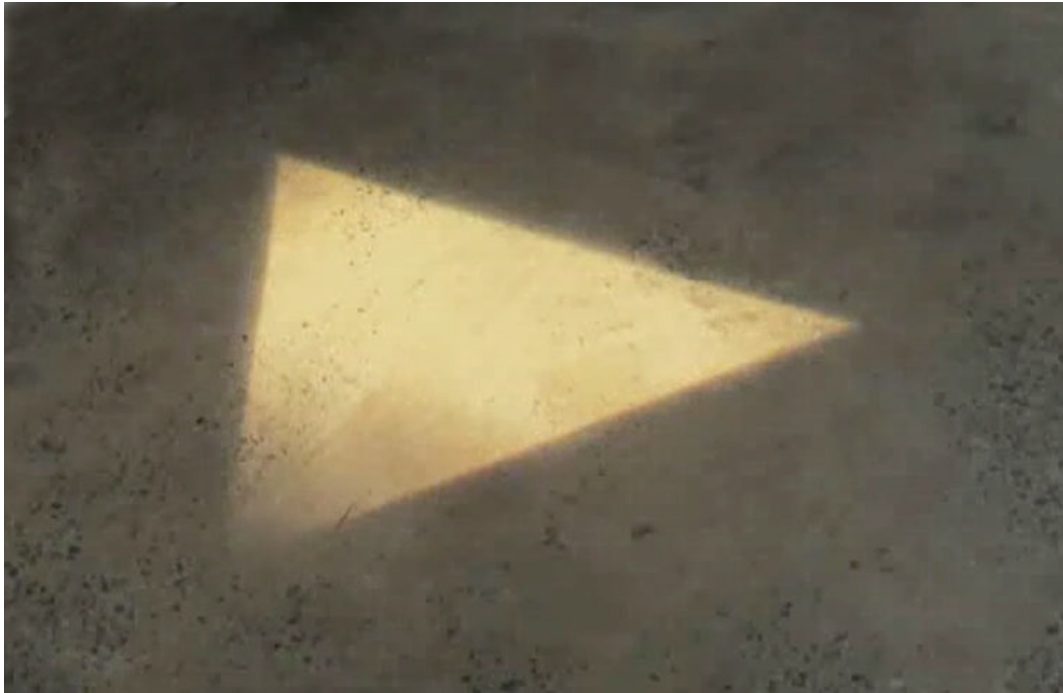


Figure 16. *Illuminating blind shape: Triangle = Palm.* (DVD A10)

Light projected onto gallery floor. 1m X 1m. (See FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).



Figure 17. *Illuminating blind shape: Rectangle = Finger pointing to the side.* (DVD A09)

Light projected onto gallery floor. 2m long (See FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).

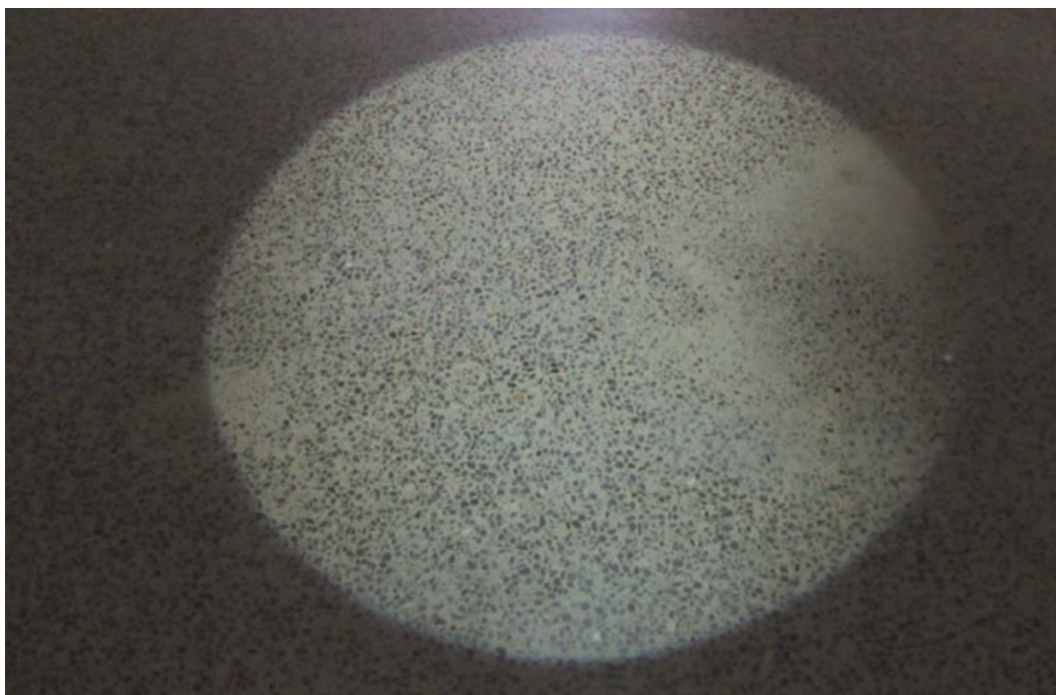


Figure 18. *Illuminating blind shape: Dot = Finger pointing forward.* (DVD A08) 1m Diameter (See FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).

I have introduced an abstract construct into the exhibition space, which creates a dialogue between all the various art projects. This is the element of intense focused light shining onto the floor of the gallery, the function of which is to represent the shapes of the taxi hand sign language for blind people. Light shapes projected on the gallery floor introduce a conversation between the representational taxi hand sign codes and the graphic blind coded language. However, herein lies a contradiction. One cannot see in pure light, which is in itself blindness. Moreover, darkness may be associated with blindness as much as light may be associated with seeing. It is the gradation of lightness and darkness through which one sees. The light shapes on the floor – a triangle, a rectangular shape and a circle – represent three of the principle shapes that make up the blind shape taxi hand sign language. The concept was that the blind shape-language could be represented by light. Although one needs light to see, extreme light is the opposite of darkness. It is somewhat paradoxical that a blind sign should be depicted through light.

For the blind shape-language addressed in Chapter 8 and consequently the

exhibition, the single black dot became the defining symbol, introducing the exhibition at the entrance, below the title and repeated once more on the darkroom outside wall. The large round black dot symbolises the essence of the taxi hand sign shape-language because it expresses the hand pointing directly forward with one finger. The dot stands alone but the message is clear. The notion of a symbolic language, gesture, text or sign evolving and simplifying to the point of clear recognition is the essence of communication. Through the process of erasing and leaving out that which does not add to understanding the sign, the taxi hand sign language for the blind simplifies and communicates more succinctly.

9.2 TACTILE BLIND LANGUAGE

The gallery space is a rectangular shape with a recessed area taking up one third of the length on the east wall side. There are two entrances on opposite sides of the white-walled, white-pillared gallery expanse and two introductory texts. The text on the wall of the north entrance introduces the exhibition:

TAXI HAND SIGNS: Symbolic Landscapes of Public Culture.

Taxi Hand Signs: Symbolic Landscapes of Public Culture is an inter-disciplinary exploration of the informal signification system relating to minibus taxi transport in Gauteng. This project began nine years ago with the desire to explore taxi hand sign language as a symbolic cultural landscape of aesthetic representation. It has since grown increasingly inclusive of socio-economic and political spectres that are evoked by this unique textured system of signification.

The art exhibition provides insights into a black-innovated and -utilised gestural taxi language common to low-income commuters. Yet it is little known amongst many white South African motorists. The exhibition forms part of a doctoral research project at the University of the Witwatersrand that seeks to find productive intersections between art and anthropology. As a result, the approach is multi-media; marking its central preoccupations through conceptual artwork, paintings, booklets, stamps and film. The exhibition utilizes the design of graphic and tactile symbolic forms of taxi hand signs for blind people allowing for a

visceral experience to unfold for both sighted and blind participants. This art was included as part of an exhibition titled *Talk to Me*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2011.

At this entrance, a well-defined *triangle* of light is projected onto the floor. At the main north entrance on the opposite side of the gallery is the second blind shape, a well-defined *circle* of light. As an alternative to the printed wall text is a framed *Dictionary Grid*, a visual explanation of the exhibition told through the paintings of the taxi hand signs and the corresponding blind shape-language.

9.2.1 DICTIONARY GRID

This limited edition print is a compilation of all the painted taxi hand signs and the equivalent blind signs. It is the result of all the research on the taxi hand signs, their destinations and meanings. Beneath the surface and transcribed in the thesis dictionary is the knowledge of the political and historical events, narratives and places that are told through the taxi hand signs and which made the visual dictionary possible. On the same South wall are eleven framed *Touch Teasers*.

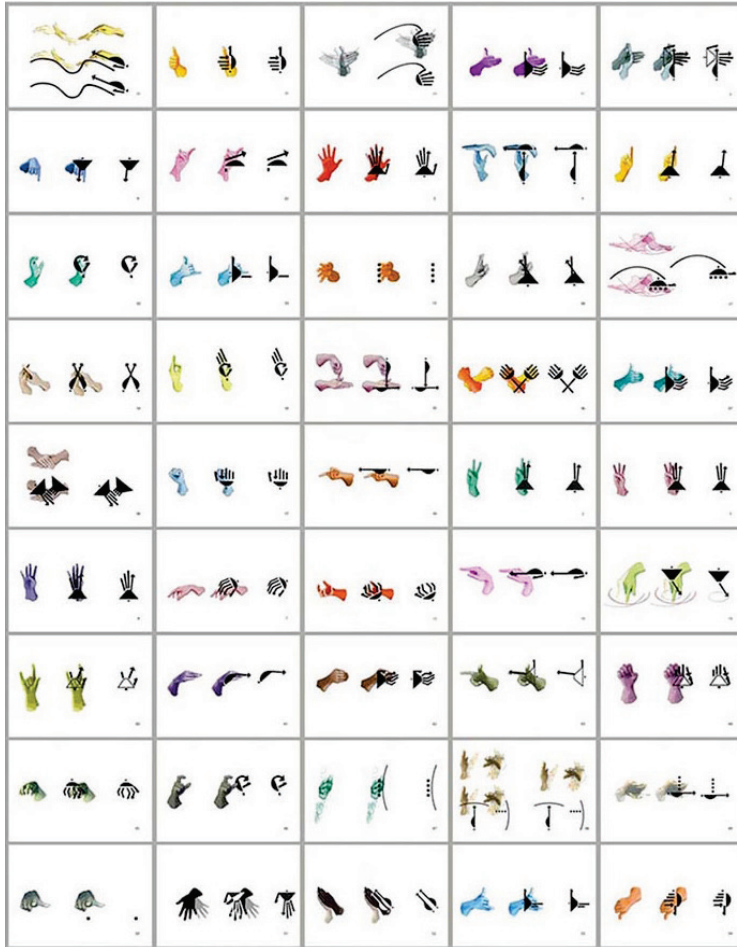


Figure 19. *Dictionary Grid*. (DVD A23)

Limited Edition of 10. Digital Inkjet Print on Hahnemuhle-German Etching paper. 96x123cm. (Figures on DVD 2. A-Blind No A-14 and FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).

9.2.2 TOUCH TEASERS

The aim to create a decipherable tactile taxi language on paper, using simple shapes that resonated when arranged with corresponding geometric elements, was a natural progression from my conceptual artwork over the last ten years. The shape-language for the blind and the resulting *Touch Teasers* are a logical extension of my three-dimensional sculpted 'shadow' projects. *Witness: Shadow of Ubuntu* is for an outdoor installation of abstract shapes that daily casts a shadow reading 'Ubuntu'. Another project that was exhibited prior to the taxi

hand signs endeavour, was the *Table of Contents*¹⁹¹ sculpture. Both artworks represent several important aspects of my art and thinking. These artworks and the blind shape-language reflect communication through ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ and also address tangible and intangible elements. There is a correlation to the earlier works as shadows play a part, as do letters, words or pictures. All reflect a visual geometric and abstract language. As individual art projects they encourage enquiry, discussion and an element of the unexpected.

To a blind person who has familiarised himself/herself with the explanation of the individual geometric shapes that make up the shape-language in the *Taxi Hand Signs for the Blind* book, there is a ‘presence’ in the shapes’ physical availability and simultaneously an ‘absence’ of sight and light. Their presence is experienced physically on fingertip contact with the simple tactile geometric elements. These can be compared to letters of the alphabet that form words. Instead though, the shapes form tactile pictures of taxi hand signs, that can be read and used by blind commuters to hail a taxi. Instead though, they form pictures of taxi hand signs that can be imagined/seen and practiced and have value and an important purpose in finding the way around.

The eleven *Touch Teasers* are a contradiction in terms. Anti-reflective glass is laid over the tactile shapes for blind people. The blind person cannot interpret the signs because they are not tactile, both sight and touch are denied. The sighted person is ‘blind’ to these signs as they are coded, having not learned the symbols and the symbols being difficult to see. There may be a temptation to feel the shapes, which, of course, is not possible. To sighted people, the blind shape-language requires recognition of elements of presence and absence. From a distance, the *Touch Teasers* look like blank paper, an ‘absence’ of the ‘presence’ that is expected in an artwork. Up close, through the glass, the shadows that form across the raised surfaces of the shapes on the paper - white on white - are almost imperceptible in their subtlety; but for a sighted person the shadows are enabling,

allowing shapes to be detected, moving from imperceptible to perceptible.

In an exhibition about communication, signification, sight and touch, ‘absence’ and ‘presence’, provides the paradox that things are often not as they appear to be. The discomfoting experience a sighted person may have when needing to rely on a blind person for guidance, when one is so used to the reverse, was inspired by Willem Boshoff’s artwork, *The Blind Alphabet*, detailed in Chapter 6.

9.2.3 STAMPS

At the end of the East wall were three proportionately long narrow frames – 20 cm by 120cm – displaying the taxi hand signs stamps and two *First Day Cover (FDC)* envelopes. The raised surface for the blind signs on the stamps is called thermography,¹⁹² (Gonnella and Navetta 2011: 269).

It is a process that uses sand to create the texture. The Post Office recommended using sand from an historical place in South Africa. My choice was Filadelfia in Soshanguve, a little known school for disabled and blind scholars, where sand from their rose garden on the school grounds was collected in a ceremony and used on the stamp.¹⁹³ The thermographic procedure, therefore, ensured that a particular ‘other’ from an little known geographic location could be recorded in history through a simple posting of a letter.

¹⁹² Thermography is a process whereby material powders such as sand are reduced to powder and used on the stamps. The printing technique employs heat to melt powder resin on the surface of a substrate. The melted resin creates a raised textured surface (Gonella and Navetta 2011: 269). It can also be used to print Braille text. The taxi hand sign stamps represent use of thermography for the first time as a process on a South African stamp, resulting in taxi hand signs shapes raised in relief on the stamp, for blind people to interpret without using braille relief processes.

¹⁹³ Dr Obert Maguhwe agreed that it would be a ‘real gift’ to have the sand taken from this school. The notion that a little bit of the school would ‘travel’ to over seventy countries in the world would be ‘rather beautiful’. Present at the ceremony on 23 November 2009, was a small group of people including the school Principle, Willem Van der Merve and Post Office director, Johan Van Wyk. Corpcinema photographers, Alicia Thomas-Woolf, Publisher and Susan Woolf.



Figure 20. *Taxi hand sign stamps for sighted and blind people 2010. (DVD D01)*
 South African National Commemorative Stamp 2010. (Figures on DVD 2. D-
Publications and FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).

9.2.4 BLIND GRAPHICS

On entering the gallery, a three and a half metre red vinyl taxi could be seen across the way on the South wall. Four framed graphic prints with the basic shapes making up the taxi hand sign ‘language’ for blind people, separated this graphic blind image from the expansive blind shape-language on the other side. The first two graphic print editions [44 cm x 44 cm, framed], showed the fourteen basic shapes, which, when raised in relief off a selected page in the *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind*, formed all the taxi hand signs for blind people to read. The third graphic print showed the taxi signs, which are a combination of selected tactile shapes. They were on the exhibition *Talk to Me* in the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) in New York, 19 July 2011 through to 07 Nov 2011 and exhibited concurrently in Johannesburg at Sci Bono in Newtown at *Dialogue in the Dark*. A fourth small artwork was the first *DICTIONARY GRID*, also on display at Sci Bono.

9.2.5 HAPTIC BLIND GRAPHIC WALL





Figure 21. *Blind shape-language on WAM wall.* (DVD A05)

30cm to 50cm vinyl cutouts x 8 metres long. (Figures on DVD A05 A-Blind No A-5 & 6 and FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).

A horizontal installation of black textured blind signs was applied in vinyl cut outs on the same South wall. This part of the thesis exhibition was documented on film. The film captured footage of blind people touching and exploring the taxi hand sign shapes on the wall and discussing what they represent and to where they indicate. Many sighted visitors were also captured on film as they try to imitate the various taxi hand signs. Some visitors recreated the hand enactments to relate these to the blind graphic shapes. This type of cross referencing, between sighted and blind people and correlation between the painted signs and the graphic images, signal the commencement of a whole new body of work, one that has already begun as shown on the taxi hand sign invitation, where painted and graphic signs combine to evoke political or social commentary on broader issues, perhaps relating at a different level to the landscape of South Africa.

9.2.6 SIGNIFICATION: *TEXTAREA*

A seven-metre-long artwork *SIGNIFICATION Textarea* occupied the entire Southern recessed wall. The artistic intent has been detailed in Chapter 6.

9.2.7 BLIND HIEROGLYPHICS: *ON THE FLOOR*

Leading to the darkroom entrance, on the floor space between the triangular light shape on the floor and the recess, a BLIND HIEROGLYPHICS of red vinyl cutouts representing all the basic graphic shapes was laid out.

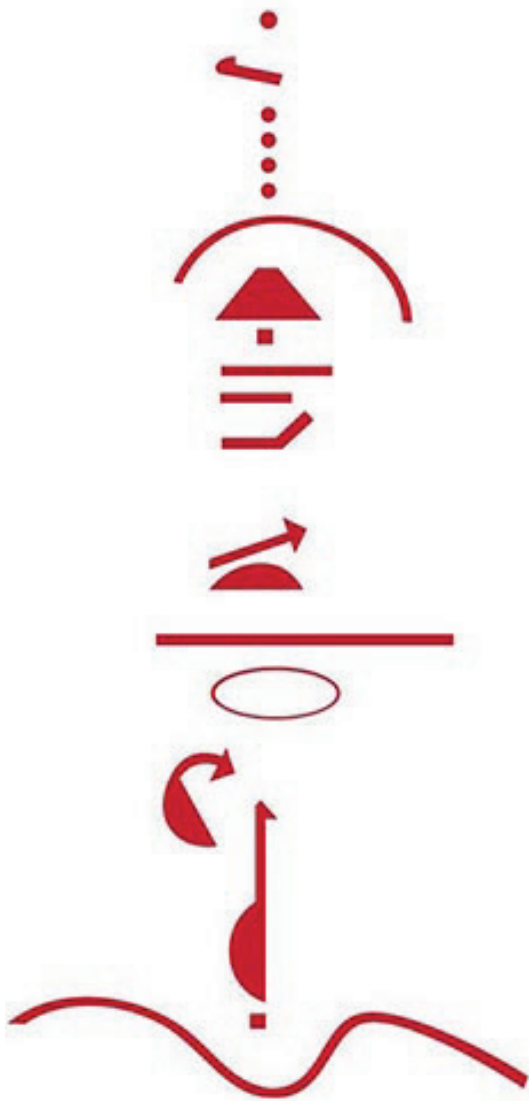


Figure 22. *Blind shapes on WAM floor.* (DVD A06)

Vinyl cutouts, 8 metres long. (FILMS on DVD No 1,2,3).

9.2.8 DARKROOM

Deep within the recess, a three metre by two metre wide darkroom was erected at the far end, opposite the second entrance. Here, blind guides were able to take

sighted and blind people into the dark space and direct them to feel the textured taxi shapes on the walls and read the taxi hand signs. When examining the role reversal and efforts to discomfort the sighted as seen in Boshoff's *Blind alphabet ABC* in Chapter 6, a similar relinquishing of power happened between the sighted and the blind person in the darkroom, when the blind person becomes the instructor and guide for a sighted person, who in the dark must accept guidance from the blind person and experience learning symbols the way a blind person must.

9.2.9 PAINTINGS



Figure 23. *Taxi hand sign gloves*. (DVD B09)

Collection from 2004–2013. Gouache on paper. Two sizes. Each work either 40 x 50 cm or 64 x 50 cm. (Figures on DVD B09, B-Painted No B-10).

All forty-eight paintings of gloved taxi hand signs were hung, one up against each other forming an apparently extended artwork on the long North wall. Some taxi hand signs show that movement that is part of the sign as explained in Chapter 5. The coloured glove is a way of providing a commuter with a colour to associate with a route. They cannot be associated with gender, age, social standing, place or culture. They are meant to be individually identifiable, nonetheless, pointing to the unique and innovative nature of the black people who conceptualised, designed and utilise this successful transport language, “and even though the gestures are silent, they are alive, awakening the imagination to the thousands of interactions and transactions that take place on roadsides every day” (Taitz 2013).

9.2.10 PUZZLE NARRATION



Figure 24. *Puzzle Narration*.

Collection 2013. Edition print on paper. Size 74 x 30 cm.

The combination of the concepts expressed in the *Touch Teasers*, *Light shapes*, *SIGNIFICATION: Textarea* and the *Dictionary Grid*, all brought together in this art exhibition, results in the juxtaposition of the blind shape-language and paintings of the taxi hand signs. The series of printed edition works called *Puzzle Narration* or ‘rebus’ is both the culmination and the way forward, as it extends the possibilities of an alternative pictorial language. Suddenly the blind symbols and taxi hand signs talk to each other in a new and expressive way, creating narratives and meanings in the context of South Africa’s social and political landscape.

9.3 JACOB'S LADDER

9.3.1 BACKGROUND AND CONCEPT

The *Jacob's Ladder* sculptures¹⁹⁴ are a body of sculpted works¹⁹⁵ resulting as a consequence of a commuter using the incorrect taxi hand sign to hail a taxi to town. It does happen that people occasionally use the wrong taxi sign. Since I was already painstakingly carving the incorrect taxi sign, I decide to create gesture artworks, an extension of this 'taxi sign', towards an exhibition titled *Jacob's Ladder*, at the Art Space Gallery in 2008. The theme using the original Jacaranda wood carving was inspired by an image and article in the newspaper showing Jacob Zuma's insulting gesture with the middle finger pointing upwards as he exited court during the rape trial (for which he was later acquitted). He raised his outstretched arm and made what is known as the 'finger sign'. This hand gesture was seen as a phallic machine gun symbol generally accompanied by the machine gun song *Umshini Wami*. Six other sculptures were cast in different silicone materials from the original hand sign carving. The contentious gestural sculptures each contained icons cut out of steel, which were personal to the life of each associated character. The hand sign represented the embodiment of six major controversial figures: Jacob Zuma (1942), Evita Bezuidenhout (Character created

¹⁹⁴ 1) Empty Vessel. Media: Shredded Zimbabwean Dollars and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 131cm.

2) Zuma. Media: Jacaranda wood and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 125cm.

3) Mugabe. Media: Black silicone and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 120cm.

4) Mugabe Blades. Media: Jacaranda wood and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 120cm.

5) PW. Media: Cream silicone and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 120cm.

6) All of us. Media: Painted silicone and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 126cm.

7) Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Media: Translucent silicone and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 127cm.

8) Evita. Media: Pink silicone and steel. Size: Width 30cm x Height 127cm.

¹⁹⁵ During 2008 I worked with two third-year students to cast the series of sculptures for *Jacob's Ladder* in the Tshwani University Theatrical Art Studio. The supervisor was Pieter Bezuidenhout and the students were Joey Van Wyk and Jurgens Potgieter. We worked from my Jacaranda wood carving. The six castings were each constructed using in different silicone materials, each having different properties which required various changes in timing and method. The entire process was documented towards final submissions for their diploma.

by Pieter Dirk Uys, [1945–],¹⁹⁶ Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (1936–), Robert Mugabe (1924–), P W Botha (1916–2006) and one sculpture called ‘*On the Other Hand*’, which represented the way people treat and judge each other.

9.3.2 THE TITLE

The well-known metaphor of Jacob’s ladder from Genesis gave me my title for the series of eight sculptures. Jacob’s dream of a ladder reaching between earth and heaven with angels ascending and descending has to do with his relationship with God, whom Jacob finds by his side on earth at the end of his dream. For my own purposes, what was important was the emphasis in the narrative of his relationship with others. The ladder itself is the conduit through which the divine plenty flows through a channel of mutual influence, which relies on relationships to open up and sustain life (Starr 2008: 116).¹⁹⁷ Jacob is the personification of this conduit as he represents the human capacity to move between different dimensions of being and levels of awareness of himself and of others. The search for the ‘other’¹⁹⁸ is the central motivational force that underlies human relatedness in the Kabbalah and that this is the basis of all existence (Starr 2011: 116). In the broader taxi hand signs context and in line with *Jacob’s Ladder*, it is perhaps the capacity of commuters and drivers in co-operating with the ‘other’, which has successfully sustained an informal transport system for millions of commuters in Gauteng. The commuter/driver relationship and shared sign language, albeit informally devised, continues to effectively define minibus taxi travel. Having

¹⁹⁶ Pieter-Dirk Uys has been in the theatre since the mid-1960s. A prolific actor and writer in many genres, Uys’s novel, *Trekking to Teema*, was South Africa’s first internet book in 2000, before being published. He wrote Evita Bezuidenhout’s biography, *A Part Hate A Part Love*, as well as a book based on his 12-part 1994, MNET television series, *Funigalore*, in which Evita Bezuidenhout, his most famous character, interviewed the new democratic government’s leaders, including Nelson Mandela. In 2003, Uys’s produced *Auditioning Angels* and published his memoirs *Elections* and *Erections* and *Between the Devil and the Deep* (2005). Available from: <http://www.evita.co.za/contact.html>, accessed on 19/06/2010.

¹⁹⁷ See, more on this text of the Zohar by Starr “The Kabbalah rapidly spread to Spain, where the Zohar, the central text of the Kabbalah, was ‘discovered’ by Moses de Leon in 1286” it was also attributed to Shimon bar Yohai, a rabbi of the 2nd century (Starr 2008: 5).

¹⁹⁸ The word Kabbalah means ‘received’ and/or ‘tradition’, reflecting the care that was taken to keep it secret and rooted in *Halacha*, Jewish law and practice (Starr 2008: 2).

travelled a path of social, political and legal injustices in the past and to an extent today, the transport solution has been sustained through collaboration with ‘others’. This is the achievement of the taxi gestural language despite the differences in values and objectives between drivers and commuters. Yet it is these disparate values that contribute to the very real dangers and violence in the taxi industry and not only commuters but the public as a whole are affected. The very informality and the absence of regulation that upholds and is commendable about the taxi hand sign system is what sustains some of the taxi industry’s most dangerous facets.

The sculpture representing ‘Evita’ uses imagination and wit through symbolism. The icons in the steel cutouts emphasises the courage that Pieter Dirk Uys had in exposing controversial issues, in deceptively ‘ordinary’ conversation with politicians during the height of the apartheid era. The character Evita Bezuidenhout is also known as ‘*Tannie Evita*’. He portrays her as an Afrikaner socialite, former South African ambassador to the fictional Babetikosweti, and self-proclaimed political activist. Dirk Uys explains:

[S]he was just meant to be an Afrikaner woman at a Broederbond party in Pretoria. Once a month a column would swirl round her perfumed intrigue as she whispered the latest political gossip into my ear” (Dirk Uys 2002: 32).

The sculpture of the pink silicon hand is satirical. It emphasises that Uys is hard hitting when taking on the persona of Evita because ‘she’ never minced her words. The pink lips, kisses and ribbon not only emphasise the humour Uys brings to political commentary but refer to his contribution to Aids awareness.

The sculpture titled “P.W. Botha” embodied the persona of the President of the Republic of South Africa (1984–1989). Pieter Willem Botha was commonly known as *Die Groot Krokodil*, Afrikaans for ‘The Big Crocodile’. Apart from an iconic ‘crocodile face’ wrapped around the rude finger of the hand, one of the other symbols is a wagon wheel, which is used to represent the *Ossewa*

Brandwag,¹⁹⁹ or ‘Oxwagon torch guard’. This was an organisation that Botha belonged to in 1941. P.W. Botha was an advocate of apartheid and as the leader of his government he was accused of crimes against ordinary South Africans. Yet there were those who agreed with his politics.

Two kinds of symbolic flames are used to represent Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.²⁰⁰ The hand holding the torch symbolises the hope and courage she brought to so many people, who regard her as ‘The Mother of the Nation’. Below the hand, there are more flames. This fire stands for the ‘necklacing’, which started around 1975, the terrible execution method that Winnie initiated. The sculpture embodies the persona of Winnie, with all the impossibilities of fixing essential moral qualities to her or to the other political figures represented by the crude gesture.

In one sculpture I dispensed with the hand doing the ‘single digit salute’ and replaced it with a broken vessel made of shredded, worthless Zimbabwean dollars. Millions of economic refugees have come from all over Africa to live and work in South Africa. I also used a steel cutout of the Zimbabwean National ‘Bateleur eagle’ (that had been a watermark found on the now-defunct Zimbabwean dollar on the sculpture. The actual raptor is a rare and beautiful bird that usually

¹⁹⁹ The Ossewa Brandwag movement from 1941 to 1943 was started in South Africa by Colonel J.C. Laas. “It was semi-military in its organisation and the more active group was represented by the *Stormjaers*. It appealed to Afrikaner sentiment, being strongly in favour of severing the tie with the British Empire and forming a Republic ... Their aim was to make Afrikaans the only official language and to have a benevolent dictatorship, rather on the lines of Nazi Germany.” Historical papers, record A726, Ossewa Brandwag 1949-1955. Available from www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventory.php?iid=6766, accessed on 18/02/2013.

²⁰⁰ See more on Ms Nomzamo Nomandla Winnifred Madikizela-Mandela. “Mother of the Nation. The black Evita. The Mohammed Ali of the ANC. Winnie and Nelson Mandela were separated for twenty-seven years. “[H]e has often said that, but for her support and her constant expressions of love, he would not have survived ... In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Winnie survived a catalogue of allegations - and criminal prosecutions - implicating her in torture, kidnappings and murder, only to be elected president of the ANC Women's League. Despite her beauty, bravery and charisma, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela has been accused of committed a string of criminal acts. She raised her fist in the anti-apartheid gesture of defiance and showed that she still had the spirit that saw her through the apartheid years. While those working for a new South Africa are hoping that this will be the end of Winnie the politician, out in the squalor of the townships the myth of Mother of the Nation survives” (Graham Boynton 2003).

represents flight and freedom. I have used the bird as a symbol for an aggressive function – throttling the opening to the unusable ‘vessel’ to show the ‘hungry tummies’ of a nation under the rule of Mugabe. The steel cut-out of this eagle is also seen in two more *Jacob’s Ladder* sculptures representing Mugabe, clasping the pointed finger of the sculpted hand. In one of the works, the use of the actual blades and cloth is a material translation of the pattern on the promotional shirts that are worn by Mugabe’s supporters as well as by himself.



Figure 25 *Jacob’s Ladder* 2008. (DVD C01-C03)

Series of 8 sculptures. Mixed media. Carved Jacaranda wood, steel, silicone, shredded Zimbabwean Dollars. 30x127cm. Ladder 80cm. (Figures on DVD. C- Sculptures No A-12, 3 and 4 (Powerpoint presentation)).

As the descriptions of art work show, the *Jacob’s Ladder* incorporates symbolic references to embody different incidences in the lives of ‘others’ who are ‘popular’ figures. Each sculpture has a symbolic ladder that reveals a certain

humanity no matter which stage of the ladder one is on. The emphasis in symbolising the various events and characterisations in the sculptures has to do with the consequences that result from the actions of others. At the same time the sculptures represents the person with all the possibilities for good and evil of humanity. The use of ladders have political connotations relating to each personality represented and the rungs of the ladders are straight or slanted according to the person's reputation. Slanted rungs are difficult to ascend. Ladders from the traditional children's game "Snakes and Ladders" are included in the symbolic objects that form part the series. They are metaphors for the consequences of actions and the profoundly moral dimensions of political life.

9.3.3 OTHER LADDERS

The ladder is a dynamic symbol of ascension and descent seen in many incidences in literature and art over time, from Dante Alighieri's levels of creation which are viewed as steps in the rungs of a ladder²⁰¹ (Durling 1996: 19) and Wittgenstein's metaphorical linguistic ladder,²⁰² to the many illusionary steps and ladders in the graphic work of Maurits Cornelis Escher, seen, for instance, in the 1958 lithograph *Belvedere*, where a ladder stands as a central image. Two people are busy climbing it. The ladder is indoors on the floor of the lower platform, "[b]ut as soon as they arrive a floor higher they are back in the open air and have to re-enter the building" (Escher 2001: VI).

Boshoff, Kentridge and Papageorge have all used the ladder for different purposes

²⁰¹ See more in Robert M. Durling *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 1: Inferno*. "That the various, hierarchically arranged levels of creation are viewed as a 'ladder' or (preferably) 'stairway' becomes explicit in the Paradiso, with Jacob's ladder - Dante specifies that it is 'golden' -which reaches from the sphere of Saturn to the Empyrean, beyond space and time, in Cantos 21 - 22. Thus all creation descends from G-d stepwise in a 'great chain of being'" (Durling 1996:19).

²⁰² The use of the ladder as a metaphor is seen in literary work of Wittgenstein where the origin and the end of the ladder is "as equivocal as its destination" (Perloff 1996: XIV). Wittgenstein refers in the final pages of his book *Tractatus* to a ladder that once climbed and explored from every angle must be discarded (Weeks 1993:237). He suggests that one can't climb the same ladder twice or perceive something the same, because one always has a new more informed or changed 'insight' the second time around. He also concludes that there are no special meanings beyond ordinary language (Wittgenstein 1921: 70).

in their art. Boshoff conceptual artwork from 1997, 'Letters To God' from the title *Tree Of Knowledge* series has a kinship with *Jacob's Ladder* in that the meaning is also derived from the book of Genesis. The work is created with thousands of bits of splintered wood. Here, though, the creation of a bridge or ladder refers to an alliance between the tree and the book. The ladder is climbed ultimately to reach knowledge or perfection, but in this work Boshoff is also mindful of the terrible cost of appropriating trees from our environment for making books. By contrast a ladder was created in Kentridge's drypoint etching *Casspirs Full of Love* in 1989.²⁰³ The artwork depicted shelves that made up the ladder rungs, containing seven severed male heads. This ladder is burdened by the weight of death reflecting the destructive essence of apartheid policies. Unlike Jacob's ladder there is no hope here, the rungs of the ladder are insurmountable. A different mood entirely is created in 2009 for *The Nose* from the installation *I am not me, the horse is not mine* (2008). The ladder evolves from a rickety wooden ladder into a carefully executed drawing of a ladder. When the ladder falls apart the man climbing it falls down but gets up and starts walking up the ladder again. Here I argue a certain parallel can be seen to the ladders in P W Botha, Winnie, Zuma or Mugabe because some of the rungs in the ladder are made at such an angle that they are difficult to climb. The ladder that is difficult to climb may metaphorically be the path of obstacles that resonate from the racial discrimination and morally equivocal politics and practices of urban experiences and transport; the necessities, possibilities and impossibilities of mobility that is the consequence of apartheid policies (Sekhonanyane and Dugard 2011). Ethically, the instability of signification may be seen in the rude pointed middle finger, which taken literally is the sign that the unregulated but now powerful 'mafia type' taxi industry as a whole may signify to 'others' and visa versa. Commuters claim that the most commonly used taxi hand sign to town, using the

²⁰³ "*Casspirs Full of Love* was inspired by a radio message in which a mother wished her son (who was serving in the South African army, on the border, in the 1970s) 'a good tour of duty' and 'a safe return', adding 'with Casspirs full of love'. The etching was one I took to the art exhibition *South African Art to Atlanta: Common and Uncommon Ground* for the Atlanta Olympics in 1996.

pointed index finger upwards has no meaning other than a lift to the CBD. However, visitors from the rest of Africa are said to be taken aback at the public visibility of the sign, which to many has the same insulting connotations as the middle upward pointed finger in *Jacob's Ladder*.

9.4 FILMS²⁰⁴

Since you must subjectively choose everything you show, your documentary can never be objective truth. Instead, it is a construct by which you convey the spirit of the truth (Rabiger 2009: 18).

9.4.1 BREE STREET METRO MALL

The film taken inside Bree Street Metro Mall (Film on DVD No 6) was projected onto the floor of the Wits Art Museum Gallery for the exhibition. The purpose of the film was to record the fieldwork during the sampling stage of the research design. The intention was to selectively shoot and record in the taxi rank in order to direct the audiences' attention to what was meaningful in terms of a vibrant functional South African taxi transport environment and to show the commuter's responses to engaging on the subject of taxi hand signs. The site of the film on the floor was intentionally chosen so that viewers could walk on the looping projection and, in a way, feel a part of the busy taxi rank.

The first scene of the film shows the co-researchers and myself having a discussion on how the respondents should be approached, our aims, ethics and aspects of obtaining permission before photographing or recording information. The photographers had positioned themselves out of sight and we were barely conscious of them being there. The film shows the respondents standing in many different queues for taxis going in different destinations and walking through the taxi rank. Reckless driving is evident even inside the taxi rank as drivers speed past. For a few seconds the viewer watching this film is able to witness a commotion amongst a small group of us, researchers and commuters alike, who

²⁰⁴ All the films are on the DVD in the pocket of the thesis book.

are virtually pushed off the small pavement we had gathered on, to avoid being run over.

One after the other, commuters offered their opinions about taxi signs and demonstrated the taxi hand signs they knew. An overview of the activities and general atmosphere in the taxi rank was captured making use of the imagery, metaphors and symbolisms that represent the vibrantly and densely peopled space of the Metro Mall (Rabiger 2009: 322). One of the scenes show a close-up of a group of people paging through the taxi hand sign book for blind people and talking about it amongst themselves. The photographer also films one of the co-researchers talking about her interest in the history of taxi signs and the importance of finding out the meanings of the taxi hand signs and their origins. The film shows countless African people in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment, coming into and going from the rank. The film shows the rank as it was at that moment in time, with no embellishment whatsoever. In the WAM gallery it was linked to replay so that viewers could watch the activities in Bree Street Metro Mall from any place at any stage as if one has just arrived and walked into the taxi rank.

9.4.1.1 TECHNIQUES USED FOR THE *BREE STREET METRO MALL* FILM

A narrative unfolds for the viewer of the film, first through the snapshots of taxi signs through a scene that shows the informality of taxi transport and the simplicity with which commuters can hail a taxi, which stops at any place when the driver spots or notices a potential passenger. The film shows how commuters across the city may stand at any place on the street or main road where taxi routes are 'known' and use a taxi hand sign to signify their destination. The film ends with a range of painted coloured gloves, intersecting and evolving to mimic the taxi hand sign language, to signal something casual but unique and successful as the signs reference to another destination with another sign. This language or motion is repeated. Most people only know the few taxi hand signs they need for their selected destinations. The painted taxi signs overlapping and flashing across the screen suggest that commuters use many different taxi hand signs all across the city.

9.4.2 TWO FILMS

The two four-minute films are a compilation of carefully selected footage drawn from all the documentary research films shot in the taxi ranks and during semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 10). Some semi-structured interviews took place in or outside of people's homes.

The footage for the film of the blind man walking to signal a taxi was taken in Dobsonville, Soweto and was the work of photographer Adolf Spangenberg. My cell phone was used to capture all the still photographs that I selected and adjusted for the film. I used a cell phone as a less obtrusive type of camera. Some of the footage for the two films that follow was taken from the *Bree Street Metro Mall* film. However, most of the interviews that I completed were filmed with my own video camera and some film footage was selected from these.

The two short films which resulted for the WAM art exhibition were titled: Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi hand signs, in the landscape of little mice and Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi hand signs, blind in the landscape of little mice. [Films on DVD No 4 and 5] They occupied the two and a half metres of the West wall space. The films may be viewed on the attached DVD. The titles of the films introduce the landscape or context within which taxi drivers and commuters operate. *In the Landscape of Little Mice* draws attention to the generally casual and spontaneous actions of minibus taxi drivers who deviate on the spur of the moment from planned routes (Woolf and Joubert 2012: 2). *Izindlela zamagundwane* suggests that taxis scurry "like little mice", along hidden routes, (Mthombeni 2012: Interview). The connotations of the expression are not always meant with affection, rather with a sense of disdain as some say taxi drivers are more like rats because they ignore the Taxi Operating License Certificate regulations which prescribe the specific route that they have been allocated (Woolf and Joubert 2012: 7). *Blind in the Landscape of Little Mice* shows a blind person, who like many blind people who do not have transport, using taxi hand signs to summon a taxi.

9.4.3 ISINDLELA ZAMAGUNDWANE. TAXI HAND SIGNS, IN THE LANDSCAPE OF LITTLE MICE.

Immediately after the title appears, amidst the sounds of taxis hooting, the viewer sees a close-up of three taxi hands signs, one after the other, being performed. In the background the hooting and taxi engines continue to be heard. A black screen comes up with a text in white font. These are the words taken from the forward of my Taxi Hand Sign booklet, where Dr Molefe Tsele²⁰⁵ wrote:

South Africa has eleven official languages but in reality, there are twelve. The Twelfth language is a sign language, which has been developed by millions of South Africans across townships and cities – The language of commuters (Woolf 2010: xxii).

The repeated black background with the white texts across the screen are a link or a connecting feature throughout the film and provide a certain contextual meaning. This quote introduces the viewer to taxi hand signs as a part of the eleven official languages in South Africa and points out that taxi signs exist for sighted and for blind people.

Taxis in the background can still be heard. Still cellphone camera images of different people doing various taxi signs follow. The photographs used have been adjusted and over exposed to exaggerate light and the lack of detail that any inexpensive cellphone with a photograph function may capture. This technique was used to suggest the informal aspect of the taxi hand sign culture and the fact that taxi hand signs are a most common observable occurrence in Gauteng. Thereafter, we see an indoor film showing only a woman's arm and her hand as she does a snake-like movement to show the way to the taxi rank in Kagiso. We move from the interior of a home in Kagiso to a view of a painted sketch of another snake-like hand movement, the taxi hand sign to Diepsloot. Next in the

²⁰⁵ Dr Molefe Tsele is South Africa's Ambassador to Jordan. Formally ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tsele was also the former General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches.

Bree Street Metro Mall, a young woman²⁰⁶ explains why people want to know the origins and history of taxi hand signs and know the reasons behind why a particular sign is agreed upon. Another hand appears, index finger pointing downwards to hail a taxi in the street. The camera pans across from the still shot of the hand, to the woman in the streets of Soweto, who is doing the taxi hand sign to call attention to a passing taxi. The taxi driver stops and the woman gets into the taxi and takes a seat. Suddenly another pedestrian, a young man, also indicating the same sign to the suburb appears. The same taxi stops momentarily but this time the driver opens the window on the passenger side and the man passes the driver something. Quite casually, still doing the sign and whistling, the man moves along the road on the kerb by the pavement. This is all unrehearsed on a street in Soweto. Next, when the voice of a taxi operator is heard describing how the taxi sign for a new route is decided upon, the viewer does not see his face immediately. Instead a set of still images of taxi drivers taken during an interview with the Faraday Taxi Association, showing the signs they use for their designated destination. When Zeblon Simelane's face does appear one can see he is in another taxi rank, amongst his colleagues, other taxi drivers who are looking at the map at the back of the *Taxi Hand Sign* booklet. Zeblon explains how in his taxi association, drivers arrange to meet people in the area to discuss the new taxi hand sign for the new route. He shows the three-finger sign as an example. As the music from the 'Dying Hyena'²⁰⁷ begins, the viewer sees the same three taxi hand signs at the beginning of the film, then an interchange of coloured outlined taxi hand signs, flash momentarily one into the other on the screen. The film finishes with another black screen and the words:

Tomorrow is the shadow and reflexability of our hands.

I used this quote from Derrida (1978) to end the first film and to reflect on taxi

²⁰⁶ This was a spontaneous interview with one of the co-researchers Zandeli Nthembu. It was a great shock to hear that this vibrant young woman had passed away a week after this film of her was taken. I was able to give her family the film footage with her in it (Bree Street 2011).

²⁰⁷ The music for both films is taken from Mathambo Music's *The Dying Hyena*. Composed by Sven Larsen, Marshall Harmse and Lindsay Burts.

hand signs and the primeval nature of the hand gesture.

9.4.3.1 *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi hand signs, blind in the landscape of little mice.*

The opening sequence for the second film begins with the words that Wellington spoke when we were setting up the film shoot:

With blind people it not easy to see a taxi coming from far.

To emphasise these thought-provoking words that appear in text on the screen, the audio of his voice can be heard two seconds after the words appear. The title of the film follows with the screen showing Wellington leaving through a security door at the entrance to his home in Dobsonville. The film focused on the road ahead, showing a close-up of the back of his shoes and trousers and the bottom of his white stick. A close-up shot emphasised the man's step the silence of a long road ahead. Despite his blindness Wellington is seen walking smartly along (he walks about four blocks) tapping his stick on the verge of the pavement and passing a queue of people waiting for a bus. The film is deliberately speeded up and Wellington appears to hurry along, crossing a road and coming to a standstill on the road with a big, grassed pavement behind him. Then he raises his arm and the camera captures a mid-shot of his pointed index finger, the taxi hand sign that signalled the taxi ride to the station. In the film the taxi stops, the taxi door opens and people stare out from inside the taxi. A woman passenger calls out for Wellington to climb into the taxi.

Sighted commuters create and learn taxi hand signs visually.

The same music from the first film is played as this text dissolves to show images of the apparent neon lit, coloured gloved taxi hand signs on the same black background until the next text appears, which reads:

**14 textured shapes combine in various ways to make taxi
hand signs visible to the blind.**

This time the neon lit coloured gloves merge one into the other, each seen with the

graphic blind shapes from the blind shape-language, next to them.

Wellington is then heard saying, “What you do is”

**You keep on pointing until the right taxi comes, until they
stop right in front of you.**

After the text comes up on screen, the camera returns the viewer to the empowered shot of Wellington doing the pointed finger taxi hand sign to the station. The taxi waits for Wellington who steps up into the taxi and sits down. The taxi drives off towards the station and the screen slowly fades to black as the film ends.

9.4.3.2 TECHNIQUES FOR THE FILMS

Texts

The repeated black background with the white texts give meaning and are a connecting feature throughout the film. In the first film they inform the viewer that taxi hand signs are a part of the eleven official languages in South Africa, the Twelfth language in fact.

On the one hand Tsele is saying that the taxi hand signs are a remarkable innovative and widely adopted feature of taxi travel that should be recognised by all and documented in history as such. Then he makes the point that it is a visual language that is continually evolving. My thesis is premised on the fact that taxi hand signs are informal and that this informality is its allure. The fact that it is unrecognised by the state and not an ‘official’ language as such, does not detract from its success and innovation as a triumph for so many South Africans whose transport needs have not been addressed adequately by the state.

The next quote indicates that sighted commuters create and learn taxi hand signs visually. The first and third quote by Wellington emphasises that blind people take taxis and need transport as is the case with any other sighted person. A blind person ‘sees’ through their ability to picture things in their ‘mind’s eye’ and they talk about seeing. They learn the taxi hand signs shape-language through touch

and they use sound or ‘noise’ to judge distance and direction as seen in the film, as Wellington is called to walk several metres towards the taxi on the main road. The use of noise for purposes of orientation is discussed in Chapter 5.

Sound

The music of the ‘Dying Hyena’ and ‘African Dawn’ are the tracks used for both films and taken from Mathambo Music’s *The Dying Hyena*. Composed by Sven Larsen, Marshall Harmse and Lindsay Burts, they are instrumental pieces layered with voices and untranslatable sounds that at first sounded to me like echos or messages; yet both pieces also have an upbeat ring and a primal feeling about them. This felt familiar to me specifically because, for as long as I can remember, every Sunday a gathering of congregants sing by the river bank near where I live. The way their voices reverberate is part of the sonic fabric of my life. I heard similarities to their voices in the layers within the music tracks, which felt local and authentic. The kind of traffic and hooting taxis recorded in the Bree Street Metro Mall were the only other sounds used for the documentary films. Driving in the streets of Gauteng, people know that the single, double or triple hooting sounds are different messages from taxi driver to commuters that can be heard wherever taxis gather. They immediately bring the taxi gestures and transport environment that is part of life in Gauteng to the fore.

Movement

Two kinds of movement were used in the films. The first was to speed up Wellington’s walk to the taxi. I was surprised by Wellington’s actual walk along the open road. It was a sure-footed and deliberate walk, not in any way tentative. I hoped this would create an element of surprise by suggesting that what one expects of others is not necessarily true. I created movement with the painted taxi signs by speeding up the image frames and having them merge one into the other. This also relates to the speed of signification and successful messaging the taxi hand gestures achieve in their movement across the city.

9.5 BOOKLET



Figure 26. *Taxi Hand Signs* Booklet 2010.

The *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet published in 2010 contains 26 taxi hand signs. Many books were laid out next to each other under glass in a cabinet so that each sign could be seen. On the opening night of the exhibition, attendees each received a booklet of their own as they entered the gallery. The booklet contains signs that are well established and their documentation has further entrenched them. It is unlikely that these signs, which are cognitively embedded and recognised by their users, will change. For core signs, the booklet will likely be relevant for as long as people travel to those places using taxis. However, taxi hand signs are periodically invented. For the booklet to be up-to-date, those signs will need to be included in future editions. Since 2010, I have discovered, confirmed and documented a further 24 signs, 22 of which could be seen along the wall of the gallery as mentioned in 9.2.5.

CHAPTER 10: LIST OF ARTWORKS AND PUBLICATIONS

Everything displayed on WAM exhibition, all the art and literature can be viewed by title on the DVD on the inside cover of the thesis.

The videos on the DVD show the exhibition space, the public's interactions and parts of the walkabouts that took place. The DVD also contains the three films and opening address by Willem Boshoff, the figures as well as the thesis in PDF and Word formats.

DVD

TAXI HAND SIGNS Symbolic landscapes of public culture

Susan Woolf

Exhibition at WAM. [Wits Art Museum]. June-July 2013



1. WAM Exhibition Space 2013.



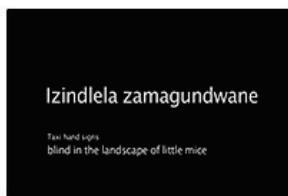
2. Public Interactions.



3. Walkabout Excerpts.



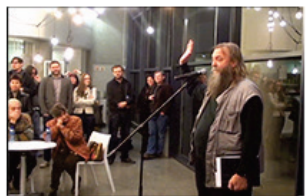
4. Izindlela Zamagundwane.



5. Izindlela Zamagundwane. Blind



6. Research in Bree Metro Mall



7. Opening speech Willem Boshoff

10.1 BOOKS

My book of the first twenty-six taxi hand signs and destinations recorded for Gauteng was published and distributed to all the main South African libraries. It was the first of three Taxi Hand Signs books and was for sighted and blind people. It included the earliest tactile shapes of taxi hand signs for blind commuters at the back. The forward was translated into seven African languages. The Taxi Hand Signs for Blind People was published and launched at Museum Africa in 2009. The second *Taxi Hand Sign* booklet, published in 2010, includes the first taxi destination map. It shows Gauteng taxi destinations and includes certain remote places that taxis go to. The coloured 'routes' match the same colour correct taxi sign for that route in the booklet. Distribution of this book has, for the most part, been confined to book stores and tourist shops, since initial attempts to sell the books at taxi ranks proved fruitless; people expected them for free. Nevertheless, some taxi associations have expressed an interest in selling them and this option will be explored in the future. Since 2010, taxis have taken on many more destinations and the thesis shows that the taxi hand signs have expanded significantly too. The story of the Taxi hand signs and stamps have been included as a work exercise in the *Platinum English First Additional English Grade 11*, South Africa in 2010 and reprint 2013, published by Maskew Miller Longman.

Taxi Hand Signs book for sighted and blind people (2007).

Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind, 30 September 2009. Exhibition and launch in Museum Africa.

Taxi Hand Signs booklet, launched at the Standard Bank Art Gallery (2010).

10.2 FILMS

Isindlela Zamagundwane. *Taxi Taxi Hand Signs, in the Landscape of Little Mice*. 2013

Isindlela Zamagundwane. *Taxi Hand Signs, Blind in the Landscape of Little Mice*. 2013

Bree Street Metro Mall. 2011

10.3 ARTBOOK

Taxi artbook. 2009. 22cm x 22cm. [Book in glass top box, contains two Graphic editions prints. Edition of 20]. German etching paper, tactile and braille pages. Edition of 7.

See figures on DVD A - Blind. Blind Art Book - A8.

10.4 MAP

Taxi hand sign Destination Taxi Map for Gauteng 2010.²⁰⁸ Routes are colour-coded to match the taxi hand signs in the booklet.

10.5 STAMPS

Taxi hand signs. South African National Commemorative Stamp (2010). Printed 2010 through to 2012. Launched on exhibition at the Standard Bank Art Gallery. Set of 10. W 140cm x H 16cm.

First Day Cover (FDC) Edition Envelopes with Taxi hand sign stamps. [1] W 140cm x H 16cm.

First Day Cover (FDC) Edition Envelopes with Taxi hand sign stamps. [2] W 140cm x H 16cm.

10.6 JOURNAL ARTICLE

Woolf & Joubert. (2013). 'A people-centred view on paratransit in South Africa.' *Cities*. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/>

²⁰⁸ Located on the inside back page of the taxi hand sign booklet, the colours on the map are linked to the coloured gloves inside the booklet. (Woolf in collaboration with Map Centre 2010). The user selects destination and flips to the suggested page number showing a coloured gloved taxi hand sign, representing all destinations which may be associated with it in the Table of Contents. To be able to document, detail, compare and understand different levels of meaning in as many taxi signs as possible, a reader can refer to the Taxi Hand Sign Dictionary at the end of the thesis.

10.7 ART

SIGNIFICATION: *Textarea*. 2013. Oil paint on composite board. 4 Panel components. Width 7m 800cm x 100cm. Length 7 m 200cm.

10.8 PUZZLE NARRATION

The *Puzzle Narration Series* [a],[b],[c],[d]. 2013. Hahnemühle Museum Etching Digital Fineart Paper. 30cm X 79cm. Edition of 10.

10.9 BLIND GRAPHICS

Taxi Hand Sign Blind Shape Lingo. 2009. Basic shapes for blind people [1]. German etching board. Sizes in frame: W 400cm x H 400cm. Edition of 30.

Taxi Hand Sign Blind Shape Lingo. 2009. Basic shapes for blind people [2]. German etching board. W 400cm x H 400cm. Edition of 30.

Taxi Hand Sign Combinations. 2009. Signs for blind people [3]. German etching board. W 400cm x H 400cm. Edition of 30.

Taxi Hand Sign Dictionary (small). 2011. Hahnemühle – German Etching paper and pencil.

Taxi Hand Sign Visual Dictionary. 2013. Hahnemühle – German Etching paper. W 96cm x H 123cm. Edition of 10.

Touch Teasers. 2009. Eleven framed works [German Shot Glass]. Haptic application, Camelot cartridge 135 gsm. Size in Frame: 300 mm x 300 mm.

Haptic Blind shapes. 2013. WAM exhibition TAXI HAND SIGNS: Symbolic landscapes of public culture. [See **DVD ART AND IMAGES** in, Shape Lingo for the Blind - Blind shapes on WAM wall - across 2 pages]

10.10 PAINTINGS

Taxi Hand Sign Gloves [46 artworks]. 2007–2013. Individual painted works. Gouache on Hammer board. Two sizes: W 64cm x H 50cm or W 64cm x H 50cm.

Gloved taxi hand signs. 2004–2013. Painted gouache on Hammer 4 board. W 710cm x H 495cm.

Mandela's Sign. 2013. Gouache and ink on Watercolour paper. W 710cm x H 495cm.

10.11 EDITIONS

Gloved taxi hand signs. 2008 – German etching board. 610mm x 495mm. Edition of 40.

MultipleTaxi hands. 2008. German etching board. 30cm x 30cm. Edition of 40.

Taxi Gloves Monoprint and pencil. 2009. Cotton Rag paper. 980cm x 1495cm.

Taxi Gloves Monoprint and pencil. 2010. Cotton Rag paper. 980cm x 1495cm.

Goal Posts. 2010. German etching board. [Collaboration Woolf and Jane Makhubele].

Animations. 2007–2013 Pencil, pastel and ink animated sketches for 2010 stamps and *Taxi hand sign* booklets. Finalised with computer graphic technique.

Mandela's Sign. 2013. Gouache and ink on watercolour paper.

10.12 JACOB'S LADDER

Zuma. 2008. Jacaranda wood carving and steel. W 30cm x H 125cm.

Evita. 2008. Silicone and steel. W 30cm x H 127cm.

All. 2008. Silicone and steel. W 30cm x H 126cm.

Magabe's Blades. 2008. Silicone and steel. W 30cm x H 120cm.

PW. 2008 Silicone and steel. W 30cm x H 120cm.

Magabe. 2008. Silicone and steel. W 30cm x H 120cm.

Winni. 2008. Silicone and steel. W 30cm x H 127cm

Vessel. 2008. Steel & Shredded Zim Dollars. W 30cm x H 125cm

50 Million Dollars buys one Tomato. 2008. Pencil, Rooibos, paint. W 67cm x H 64cm.

Shredded. 2008. W 22cm x H 22cm.

Mugabe's Game 2008. Collage with paper and computer graphic technique. Hahnemuhle –German Etching paper. Edition of 30.

Jacob's Game.2008. Collage with paper and computer graphic technique. Hahnemuhle –German Etching paper. Edition of 30.

10.13 EXHIBITIONS

The *Taxi Hand Signs* and hand gestures on *Jacob's Ladder* have been exhibited in several exhibitions spaces:

Jacob's Ladder. 2009. Solo exhibition. Art Space Gallery, Johannesburg.

Mandela @ 90. 2009. New Constitutional Court, Johannesburg.

Talk to Me. 2011. Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.

Mandela @ 94. 2012. Origins Centre, Johannesburg.

We love Mandela. July 2013. Peace Makers Museum and Stephan Weltz.

We love Mandela. Oct 2013–2014. South Africa House, London/Cape Town/Paris.

10.14 PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS ON TAXI HAND SIGNS.

Tedx Johannesburg. 2010. Johannesburg. Sandton Square Theatre. Available from www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GowsM9PSx0.

National Council of Woman. 2009. Houghton, Johannesburg.

National Council of Woman. 2010. Parktown North Methodist Church, Johannesburg.

National Council of Woman. 2010. Houghton, Johannesburg.

Second Innings. 2011. Our Parent's Home.

Kind David School Art Award. Talk and presentation. 2011.

Roeden School. Talk to school leavers. 2011.

10.15 RADIO AND TV INTERVIEWS

CNBCAfrica. March 2008.

BBC TV. *World News* interviewed in Randburg Taxi Rank 23/03/2010.

Chinese TV. Film by Corp Cinema aired 2011.

SABC TV *Morning Live*. 08/10/2009.

BBC World Service Radio. The Strand - BBC World Service's daily global arts and culture programme. 15/03/2010

Talk Radio 702, Jenny Crwys-Williams. 14/07/2011

ChaiFM. Radio 10/10/2010.

ChaiFM. Radio 20/03/2011.

DeafTV. 04/03/2012.

ChaiFM. Radio 30/06/2013.

Le Petit Journal. Capron. 29/01/2010

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUDING OVERVIEW

11.1 ETHICAL CONTEMPLATIONS

When considering the power of representation, disciplines of history and the production of knowledge, Ciraj Rassool (2009) argues that scholars should “seek ways of negotiating (historical and archaeological) knowledge in a direct relationship with communities and other publics as a means of empowerment, democratisation, access and critical engagement” (2009: 1). Conversely, Rassool draws attention to “relations of paternalism and a politics of atonement in which the concept of the public is limited to that of a passive grateful audience” (2009: 2). Research in any domain necessitates responsibility, respect and vigilance in the analysis of the subject being investigated. During my research into taxi hand signs, I have been conscious of my responsibilities as a researcher and aware of the issues of controversy that being an ‘outsider’ may bring.

The emergence of taxi hand signs as a unique widely used and accepted urban system of signification has been the domain of black commuters and taxi drivers since inception, with hardly any contribution from white people. As silent gestures, taxi hand signs are easily accessible, communicable across all languages and have been the disadvantaged black commuter’s essential means of access to the city in an urban landscape under the most difficult circumstances imposed by apartheid.

My contribution, as a white artist investigating taxi hand signs, in a mainly black domain, may be viewed negatively by some people who use taxis regularly or grew up knowing about taxi signs. Yet, still other ‘insiders’ have been encouraging and supportive. For this thesis I drew on the opinions and experiences of black commuters, driver taxis and operators in the taxi industry, people familiar with the taxi transport environment and those who know the various meanings of the taxi hand sign gestures with all their related and other significations. It is due to those who have shared their experiences with me with generosity that this thesis reveals significant new information.

Merleau-Ponty describes artists as those who have the capacity to observe what others fail to notice in ways that are profound, searching and unexpected. “The artist makes visible what others fail to see” (Merleau-Ponty in Elkins 2009: 54). An investigation such as this is a way of bringing to the fore a new view of taxi hand signs as a commuter language and culture. The research is a way of disquieting non-users of taxis from generalising and presuming to know ‘everything’ about taxi transport. Furthermore, with each new art interpretation and further anthropological investigation, which this thesis encourages, more may be learned about taxi hand signs and what they reveal for South Africa’s history and culture.

As I was investigating a transport system and taxi hand sign culture with which I was previously unfamiliar, the accompanying heightened awareness to the sensitivity of others ensured that my responsibility and focus has been, at all times, to document and provide well-researched information that may be used as a foundation, a catalyst on which others may build. In the end, as part ‘insider’ and part ‘outsider’, I have endeavoured to maintain the integrity of what the taxi hand signs mean for our society and history. During my investigation, I worked with taxi drivers and taxi operators who owe their livelihoods to the taxi industry and who are highly organised, professional and were generous in their dealings with me. Yet what persists is the dark side of what has become a particularly powerful and dangerous taxi transport industry with some negative impacts on Gauteng and the rest of South Africa.

Before 1987, black taxi operators were declined permits and denied the right to operate 16-seater minibuses as taxis, and transport was tightly controlled, highly regulated and racially motivated. That injustice was replaced in 1987 with the introduction of the White Paper on Transport, an unsupportive policy, which sanctioned complete and uncontrolled deregulation of the taxi industry. This led to an influx of many minibus taxi operators and widespread corruption in the official regulating bodies (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 15). Taxis are a dangerous mode of transport reflecting the violence inherent in the conditions of their origins – the structure of the apartheid urban political economy. The taxi vehicles are too

often unroadworthy and not all drivers have valid licences. Unequal conditions and unrealistic demands for drivers to make enough money is often conducive to speeding, ignoring the rules of the road, inhospitable behaviour towards passengers and a flagrant disregard for the general public. The taxi industry has been heavily embroiled in conflicts and thousands of lives have been claimed. More recently Taxi Operating Licences have quietened some of the disputes over routes. Taxi Recapitalisation is still embroiled in controversy and is in the last phases of implementation (see Chapter 3). Yet the present government and taxi industry still face many challenges. At the heart of the problem is the persistent struggle over control of this multi-billion rand industry that carries over 60% of South Africa's commuters (Sekhonyane and Dugard 2004: 1). The growth of the industry – the ways in which it has taken shape despite a host of legal and political restrictions and at the same time its very informality and the absence of regulation – is what sustains some of its most dangerous aspects. This makes even more remarkable the emergence of the taxi hand sign language, its silent gestural innovation and resulting intercommunication with all 'others' at every stage of the signification process.

11.2 FINAL CONCLUSION

I have shown that the practice of people performing hand signs to hail a taxi contribute towards South Africa's visual, auditory and experiential symbolic landscape. This is substantiated by the vast number of taxi hand signs and the many destinations they refer to in Gauteng, as presented in the index to the books, the dictionary, the map and the art produced. Whereas ten years ago one seldom heard motorists or non-users of taxis talking about taxi hand signs, or even less writing about them, what this thesis has demonstrated is that profound and creative research coupled with the production of the findings through literary and artistic output has brought about a new awareness of taxi hand signification. The Gestalt from knowledge gained in the arts and anthropological field and the creative research in apparently diverse areas of literature, history and politics have augmented new accurate and significant findings of the taxi hand sign language as a unique and revealing South African cultural phenomenon.

There are obvious intersections and parallels in the research on taxi hand signs and the anthropological and art investigation, which brings together and exposes diverse facets of taxi hand signs that would not have been possible without the demanding yet open perspective of both disciplines. Anthropological methodology and transcription provided a strong and precise framework for the research. This discipline expects the application of a profound and penetrating research ethic and thoroughness in collecting and transcribing data. The art was enhanced by, and achieved further depth of meaning through, the application of alternative, ethical yet unrestricted creative method and media to illustrate and emphasise the key concepts. New knowledge production has resulted in a greater awareness among operators and commuters in the taxi community of the advantages of the invention and use of a taxi hand sign language unique to South Africa. The interdisciplinary approach has crossed and stretched boundaries between disciplines and people.

As stated in section 11.1, South Africa's history of racial segregation and the damaging restrictive laws of apartheid affected the way in which the taxi transport industry developed. Persistent conflicts and often violence, between different taxi operators and associations themselves over ownership of routes, as well as the complexities in the multi-cultural and multi-lingual component of South African society, have shaped the taxi industry. This has easily overshadowed the innovation and achievement of minibus taxi drivers and millions of commuters who use taxi hand signs so successfully as a transport communication language. Far from the usage of taxi hand signing becoming less and less as the powerful taxi industry grew, it was exactly this context from which taxi hand signs emerged and the milieu in which that practical gestural transport language flourished. This thesis has documented over fifty taxi hand signs in Gauteng and shown that they have continued to be broadly adopted and expanded in a repertoire from the mid-twentieth century until today.

This investigation on taxi hand signs was analysed from a literary perspective in Chapter 5. The association to other silent languages in the category of gesture, such as gesticulation, beats and emblems showed that taxi hand signs belong

alongside or within other internationally known gestural categories.

The DICTIONARY of *taxi hand signs* in Chapter 12 shows that deaf language and taxi sign language share specific descriptive or directional gestures, despite having fundamentally different purposes. Taxi and signs depart from the more accomplished and structured deaf language because of their informal, continuously evolving nature. New taxi hand signs are devised as new routes are opened up. Whereas deaf sign languages are internationally recognised, used and well-documented, individual taxi hand signs are quite specific to place and area in Gauteng. They are not transferable either between cities and provinces within South Africa. So while the same hand sign may be seen in cities like Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Durban or Plettenberg Bay, the same hand sign used elsewhere will mean something different.

The narrative content in Chapter 4 and associative emergence from events and names of places that make up taxi hand sign language further align them to South Africa, where they represent a code for the place that the commuter has indicated, with the message directed at the taxi driver who traverses that route.

Initially there were no expectations that an idea for a tactile shape ‘language’ for a relatively small group of blind commuters would make any large contribution to my thesis. However, it was precisely the abstractions and coding in the design reduction and communication aspect of the new tactile shape-language I invented, of which essential features are analysed in Chapter 8, that signalled the correspondence to gesture signification in other spheres. In expanding the areas of investigation into other areas as discussed in Chapter 5, the research extended into communication and message formula in mathematical formulas. My research led further to the examination of the concept of gesture recognition and signification formulated by computer technologists, which has a correlation with the message rebound in the taxi hand signification procedure. Both these areas of exploration were enhanced by an exploration of semiotics and the concept of signification and codes whereby signs are generated for both signifier and signified. Formulae for systems of signification encouraged my conceptualisation of the four stages for

the taxi hand signification process, which confirmed the placement of taxi hands alongside other silent gestures. However, the narrative content in individual signs also set them apart in a way that aligned them to street language akin to the ‘Clever’ sign and in some ways to the language for the deaf.

The subject of noise has been extensively discussed. The identification of aspects noise was a central feature of the context out of which taxi hand sign phenomena emerged. Noise in politics and the law have shaped the taxi industry and affected the development of taxi hand sign language. Although noise is explored fully in the second part of Chapter 5, it was in Chapter 3 that I cited many instances that constituted political and transport-related noise in the course of presenting my research on the background to the industry. The noise of restrictive laws imposed to curb the taxi industry illustrated the difficulties and challenges faced by taxi entrepreneurs. I have examined noise in legislation that was promulgated to limit taxi licenses and restrict passengers to smaller vehicles and that resulted in many taxis operating illegally. There were and still remain many reasons for noise in the taxi industry. In Chapter 3 I referred to the competition for routes, which resulted in violent clashes between rival taxi associations. Blanket deregulation of taxis in the 1980s that led to overtrading in the taxi industry caused fierce competition for lucrative routes and escalated violence. At that time conflicts between local and long-distance taxi associations caused violent clashes. The issuing of operating licenses has been one of the factors that brought down the incidences of noise, but not completely. Some taxi associations supported²⁰⁹ the introduction of the BRT (Bus Rapid Transport System) but this has not necessarily quelled the taxi violence because essentially taxis are still not subsidised by government.

A lack of courtesy in the taxi industry is another type of noise that obstructs successful taxi signification. I demonstrated that although noise can present as a negative force, a certain type of noise such as lossy compression that underpins

²⁰⁹ The [Taxi Recapitalisation Programme] is central to the formalisation of the taxi industry. This is a joint intervention by the [taxi] industry and the government to address various challenges in the taxi industry (Fobosi 2013: 2).

computer culture is necessary and positive to enhance aspects of technology. I examined the advantages of noise to blind people, as they click and know their environment through 'echolocation'. This is attested to in the thesis and in my film, *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi Hand Signs, Blind in the Landscape of Little Mice*, where the viewer witnesses the blind man who takes advantage of the noise around him to navigate his way along the streets and walk towards the waiting taxi.

In Chapter 7, I draw from the fact that most commuters experience the city and find their taxi transportation through walking and gesturing to the taxis. I drew attention to the observable and imagined presence of taxi hand signs changed how people perceive and understand Gauteng, when so many millions of people are seen to be signing at one time and place or another.

Taxi hand signs as beacons of place, history, events and narrative have been discussed with reference to issues for both sighted and blind people. The codes of signifier and signified were dissected to provide formulas for signification. My conceptual interpretations of taxi hand signs as a South African phenomenon and the abstract thinking of other artists was presented in Chapter 6. I focused on uses of space and elements of time, trace and the ethical aspects of representation.

I then dealt with my art, both graphic and installation art exhibited at WAM. In designing the exhibition I was drawn to Kentridge's narratives that evolve in horizontal or vertical tracks and multiple perspective landscapes to 'map out' traces of movement. He engages with space and time as elements of process as much physically outside of his media, as inside of it, illustrating Derrida's experiential perspectives on engaging art from the material outside and spatiality to emphasis a social, historical, architectural and geographical time zone inside the art as such.

My construction of light shapes on the floor of the gallery were materially and conceptually a means of linking to the gestural language of taxi hands seen in the *Graphic blind shapes* and the *Taxi hand sign* paintings that occur together in the *Dictionary Grid*. The three graphics – the triangle, rectangle and circle – that

make up the basic language in *Structuring Light shapes* challenged the notion that sighted people could represent a blind shape-language with light. This has a distinctive correlation to Boshoff's *The Blind Alphabet ABC* and his sculptures *Words in the Sand* where Boshoff seeks to question and discomfort those [sighted people] who have power over others.

With the eleven *Touch Teasers* on exhibition I sought to further surprise and challenge both sighted and blind people by not allowing access to the haptic experience of the blind shape-language. A few metres away on five metres of wall space, I created a haptic *Blind Graphic Wall*, a horizontal installation with all the enlarged blind tactile shapes. Here sighted people and blind people could touch and read the blind shapes. See the *Exhibition Films* on the DVD and watch *Public Interactions* where one blind person at the exhibition was captured explaining the blind graphic shapes to another blind person. Other visitors to the exhibition are also seen interacting with the exhibits.

Similarly, in the *Darkroom* created in the exhibition space, blind guides were empowered with the task of explaining the tactile shapes on the wall to sighted people. I enlarged and pasted cutouts of red textured vinyl, onto seven metres of the floor leading into the *Darkroom*. These were the original blind shapes that formed the blind language. At first glance the shapes could have been some secret codes or an alternative game of Hop Scotch for children. Indeed, I say that because, now and then, visitors to the exhibition were seen hopping between the triangles, dots and dashes.

With the *Puzzle Narration* or 'rebus' that was on the invitation, I created a combination of painted and blind graphics that extend the possibilities of an alternative pictorial language. I have shown that the blind taxi hand sign language should be taught to learners of school leaving age during orientation and mobility training. The *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* has contributed towards sighted people's awareness that access to transport is a right for blind persons as much as for sighted people. The combination shapes have been found to be useful for the second stage of shape recognition for learning in schools for the blind. This is still

at an early stage of the research process. Meanwhile, the blind shapes and taxi hand signs on the stamps have been used, since 2010, in a literature exercise textbook for Grade 11 learners in South Africa.

The two *Isindlela Zamagundwane* films and the *Bree Street Metro Mall* film on the floor of the gallery together with all the artworks, books and stamps on the exhibition expanded to a greater degree on the idea of taxi hand signification and communication for blind and sighted alike. I have documented the art exhibition *TAXI HAND SIGNS: Symbolic landscapes of public culture* on film to demonstrate the extent to which the disciplines of anthropology and art and philosophy have together impacted in a material and vital way on the research and findings of the taxi hand sign phenomena.

The thesis, which provided opportunities of interaction with others through a multi-disciplinary approach of art, anthropology and philosophy, has opened up many different avenues of interest that present the innovation of taxi hand signs as a rich, unique and accessible cultural phenomenon deserving of further exploration. It provides a solid base from which experienced ethnographic researchers and artists may investigate taxi hand signs in South Africa and further afield, as a language in their own right. A highlight for me was the *Blind Art*, film loop and *Touch Teasers* being included in the exhibition titled *Talk To Me*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2011. The blind sign language is an extension of my sculptural and installation art over the years where I have used abstract shapes to be read as coded languages such as ‘shorthand’ in shadow. This includes my construction of light shapes on the floor of the gallery and the combination rebus of painted and blind graphics, which extend the possibilities of developing an alternative visual language.

CHAPTER 12: DICTIONARY OF TAXI HAND SIGNS

[Pukuntsu] [Isichazamazwi / Izichazamazwi]

This concise dictionary is a summary of the taxi hand signs documented so far for Gauteng. The individual hand signs are categorised to the extent that it may be possible to reasonably establish the taxi hand signs for sighted and blind persons, even though they are an informal evolving form of communication. Information extends to descriptions of places, historical connections, social situations or the relationships to narratives or events. Categorisation includes: imitative signs, indicative signs, initial letter handshape signs, ordinal signs and unknown/arbitrary signs. Each taxi hand sign concludes with a table of destinations to which additional destinations may be added. The dictionary, therefore, shows how this gestural language relates to the far more established and universal sign language for deaf people. A visual summary of this dictionary resulted in a printed edition ‘multiple’ artwork titled *Dictionary Grid* where all the paintings of gloves representing taxi hand signs for sighted and the graphic renderings designed for blind people are compiled to make an optical dictionary text used as such in the art exhibition for this thesis.

12.1 DICTIONARY OF TAXI HAND SIGNS

12.1.1 IMITATIVE SIGNS

IM-001 Cross-finger



Category: Imitative – Road feature or Place name

Description: The hand is held up vertically with the index finger crossed over the middle finger. The other two fingers are held to the palm with the thumb.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: ‘TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*’.

Explanation: This sign imitates the name of the place.

Deaf Sign: Represents the letter ‘r’. When shaking



the hand back and forth, it means 'ready'.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Crossroads in Soweto.

IM-002 Cross-hands



Category: Imitative – Road sign or Road feature

Description: Two hands are held out, each with index fingers extended and the other fingers held to the palm with the thumb. The two index fingers then cross to form an 'X' shape.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 14).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection 2009. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled 'GRID' exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012.

Explanation: This sign shows two hands with the index fingers crossing. It is used to go to Crossroads in Soweto as well as to indicate the logo of a cross usually associated with first aid or a hospital.

Deaf Sign: Means 'to defend oneself'.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Crossroads.

Plein Street Taxi Rank to Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital.

IM-003 Cross-wrists



Category: Imitative – Road feature

Description: Two fists are held in the air, palms facing in, the arms crossing at the wrists.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at *Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS Symbolic landscapes of public culture'*.

Explanation: The one hand and wrist crossing over the other represents two bridges, the one crossing over the other. This refers to a specific place in Soweto where this happens.

Deaf Sign: Stop.

Destinations: Johannesburg CBD to Soweto.

IM-004 Discount



Category: Imitative

Description: The hand is formed into a fist and held up. The index finger and thumb, however, are pinched against each other as if indicating something very small.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at *Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS Symbolic landscapes of public culture'*.

Explanation: This sign is used to indicate to the driver that the commuter would like a lift and 'has some cash' but it would be a reduced amount. Drivers of minibus taxis might stop for these passengers if their taxi is not full. They call it 'petrol money'.

This sign is used sporadically all over South Africa. Another system, used between Plettenberg Bay and Knysna in the Cape, allows people to choose how far they want to go. The commuters stand anywhere along the route on the side of the road, in the desired direction, and holds out one hand with a R10, R20 or R50 between their fingers. The driver can then see that the commuter wants a short ride or needs to go further.

Deaf Sign: With thumb not touching the index finger, it represents the letter 'e'.

IM-005 Roller-wave



Category: Imitative – Place feature.

Description: The hand held flat, curves in different directions whilst being drawn across horizontally, indicating a bumpy road, undulating hills or waves.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 21).

Art: Photoshop design. Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark* 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The hand rising and dipping is descriptive of the area around Diepsloot Township. The wave requires the movement of one hand only. A person signing to Diepsloot performs a motion with their hand like a roller coaster going up and down. The arm moves forward and the hand dipping downward and then upward several times. Commuters in Durban use this sign to indicate the direction of the beach or the ocean, as in up and down, representing the rise and fall of waves.

Deaf Sign: Bumpy road or hilly terrain.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Crossroads.

Gauteng to Diepsloot.

Mamelodi West to Mandela Village.

Noord Street TR to CBD.

Noord Street TR to Spruit.

Stoffel Park to Woodstock.

Durban Area to the Ocean.

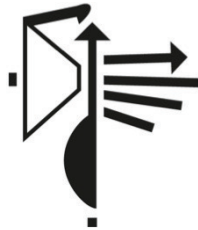
IM-006 Halfway-up

Category: Imitative – Place name.

Description: One hand is held out, all fingers and thumb pointing to the side, palm forward. The other hand, also straight, is held vertically and perpendicular to the other, as if to divide the palm in half.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 9).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark* 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013:



‘TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*’.

Explanation: The sign shows the one hand ‘cutting’ the other hand down the middle with the edge of the open hand. It is also a sign that says ‘midway’. For instance, Alexandra is the midway mark with taxis going to places at opposite ends. To the North of Gauteng are Corporate Park, Alexandra, Ivory Park, Kyalami & Olievenhoutbos and to the South is the Johannesburg CBD and Doornfontein. Halfway house, Kyalami and Midrand are considered halfway between Pretoria CBD and Johannesburg CBD.

Deaf Sign: Time out or T-junction.

Destinations:

Alexandra to Corporate Park, North (via Midrand).

Alexandra to Doornfontein.

Alexandra to Midrand.

Ivory Park to Midrand.

Midrand to Kyalami.

Olievenhoutbos to Johannesburg CBD.

IM-007 T-Junction

Category: Imitative – Road feature.

Description: The right hand is on top. It is held horizontally, fingers outstretched and palm facing down. The left hand is below the right hand and is held vertically, perpendicular to the other hand, its fingers meeting the right hand under the knuckles forming a ‘T’ shape.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 8).

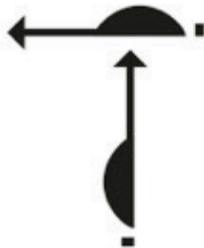
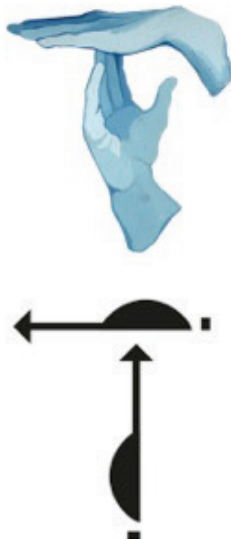
Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, ‘GRID’. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*. 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: ‘TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*’.

Explanation: T-Junction taxi hand sign takes on the shape of the letter ‘T’. A commuter wanting to catch a taxi to the nearest T-Junction imitates the Capital letter ‘T’.

Alternative Categorisation: In the case of Randburg to Tembisa, this is an Initial letter hand shape sign.

Destinations:

Anywhere to Nearby T-Junction.



Menlyn to Lusaka.
Randburg to Tembisa.

IM-008 Chop-off

Category: Imitative – Event.

Description: This sign has the left hand at the top, palm facing the floor and all fingertips and thumb coming together and touching each other. The right hand is directly underneath in a flat palm upward position. This hand moves back and forth in a cutting motion.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This hand sign is an interpretation of an incident that occurred within the Marabastad community. The event that occurred in 2001 is symbolised by the shape and form of the taxi hand sign. A well-known taxi operator from Marabastad was abducted and murdered and it appeared that his body parts were used for muti, (a term used for traditional medicine in Southern Africa). The hand sign symbolises the cutting off of the man's testicles. It is considered distasteful by many people who admired the murdered taxi operator. Many others may be unaware of the controversy surrounding the use of the sign, precisely because signs are generally learned by word-of-mouth. The pointed finger upwards, normally used to hail a taxi to the CBD, is also used frequently for hailing a taxi from Pretoria to Marabastad.

Deaf Sign: It means to "chop off".

Destinations: Marabastad.



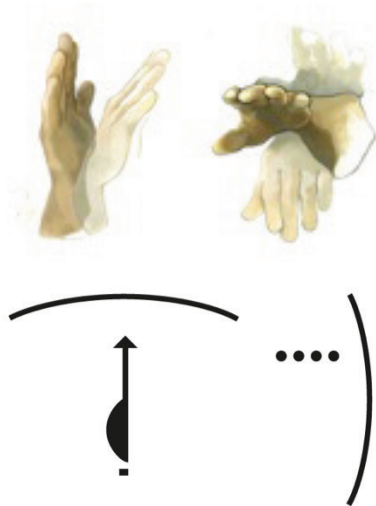
IM-009 Smell-slowdown

Category: Imitative – Place Feature.

Description: This is a body sign that is performed by waving one hand left to right in front of the face to show that it smells bad and the other hand waves up and down to ask the taxi to stop.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS



Symbolic landscapes of public culture’.

Explanation: People who live in the township of Kiptown, next to which has emerged a vast rubbish dump, perform a body sign by waving one hand left to right in front of their face to show that it smells bad and the other hand waves up and down to ask the taxi to stop! The Kiptown taxi sign has similarities with the taxi sign to Marabastad, which is a performance using two hands, each telling a different part of the narrative, to complete the gesture.

Deaf Sign: The left hand, waving back and forth in front of the nose, signals smell. The right hand waving back and forth means slow down.

Destinations:

Kiptown.

IM-010 Orange



Category: Imitative – Place name

Description: Hand held forward, palm facing upwards with fingers and thumb curled round the palm.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 13).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, ‘GRID’. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: ‘TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture’*.

Explanation: The taxi hand signal to the township settlement of Orange Farm is descriptive of its name. A commuter indicating the destination to Orange Farm stretches out his arm adjacent to the side of the body, elbow bent slightly. The hand has all four fingers and the thumb bent round as if to hold an orange. The orange is absent. In its ‘space’ is the shape of the volume that the orange would have occupied. This space is the symbol or code for the absent orange. The sign is also used to go to other destinations as seen below.

Deaf people use the same sign; however, they move their right hand, palm parallel to the floor in a sweeping movement across to the right to indicate

the word 'farm'. The right hand also uses slightly bent fingers which, when the hand moves across, symbolises the lines of the tilled farm fields.

Deaf Sign: Two hands in the shape of the Orange Farm hand, means, 'Have you got anything?'. One hand means 'thinking'.

Destinations:

Orange Farm.

Menlyn to Lusaka (Mamelodi).



IM-011 Direct-updown

Category: Imitative

Description: With fingers pointed away from the body, the hand moves up and down, top to bottom, indicating a straight road ahead.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: A directional sign used to indicate moving forward in a straight line.

Deaf Sign: Can mean 'Later' or 'Yes, I will'.

Destinations:

Straight ahead.



IM-012 Halfway-down

Category: Imitative

Description: One open hand with palm upwards 'a' is divided in half by the other hand above 'b'. The dominant hand is above. The passive hand is underneath.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This is used by commuters to any halfway point but also specifically to places with names that indicate halfway, as with Midrand. **Deaf Sign:** Means to 'park a car' or 'half'.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Midrand.
Halfway House.

12.1.2 INDICIATIVE SIGNS

ID-001 Point-behind

Category: Indicative.

Description: Arm bent up towards the same shoulder with hand pointing the Index finger backwards.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 22).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This sign points behind the commuter in the direction of the destination.

Destinations:

Alexandra to Johannesburg CBD.

Bree Street Metro Mall to Meadowlands.

Westgate to Bezuidenhout Valley.

Little Falls to Newclare.

Turffontein to Mulbarton.



ID-002 Thumb-up-corner

Category: Indicative.

Description: The hand is held out horizontally thumb pointing up. The other fingers are pointed sideways but then curl loosely to point backwards.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The hand indicates the commuter's desire to go to a place round the corner. It is site specific to the person in that place at that time.

Deaf Sign: This sign has two different meanings: Two hands together, touching and moving in a circle, means 'careful' and Two hands together,



touching and moving from the body forward, means 'from now on'.

Destinations:

Anywhere to any place around the corner.

ID-003 Four-fingers-front



Category: Indicative.

Description: Four fingers point forward away from the body, with the thumb in a relaxed state.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 13).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The sign pointing forward is represented in the taxi sign language for the blind by four dots only. The dots run vertically as do the fingertips of the forward pointing hand.

Deaf Sign: This sign has two different meanings: With the thumb pointing downwards means 'I don't like something' and Both hands, moving towards each other in 2 circular motions means 'socialising'.

Destinations:

Randburg to Noord St. TR (via Jan Smuts Ave).

ID-004 Local-down



Category: Indicative.

Description: Index finger pointing down. Other fingers folded into palm, held down by thumb. Back of hand facing outward towards others. Wrist usually bent as a result of arm being lifted.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 6).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This is the general sign from the CBD to the suburbs and is popularly called 'local'.

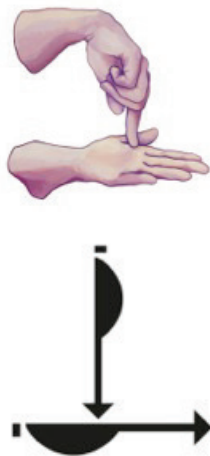
It is also used anywhere where the commuter wants a lift in the immediate area or close by. This sign indicates going to the suburbs in the opposite direction to the finger pointing upwards sign, which is to the Johannesburg CBD. Both the pointed finger up and the finger pointing down are common to other cities in South Africa too.

Deaf Sign: This sign has several different meanings: Means 'here'. If the hand moves up and down, it means 'this'. If the hand moves up and down twice, it means 'today'. Tapping the hand up and down means 'now'.

Destinations:

Any Area to Nearby.

ID-005 Local-to-Palm



Category: Indicative.

Description: The one hand is placed horizontally, palm facing up. The other hand points (with the index finger) down to and touches the middle of the palm of the first hand.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Deictic. This taxi hand sign points to itself. There are other deictic taxi hand gestures. These may point in the direction of a place or point to a whole class of objects (Mulder 1996: 3).

Deaf Sign: None

Destinations:

Any Area to Nearby.

Rockville to Lenasia Station (via Chris Hani Drive).

ID-006 Local-ellipse

Category: Indicative.

Description: Index finger points downwards to the floor and moves to outline the shape of a circle.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 18).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*. 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The circle indicates any area of Gauteng where the passenger wants to be dropped off within the same area.

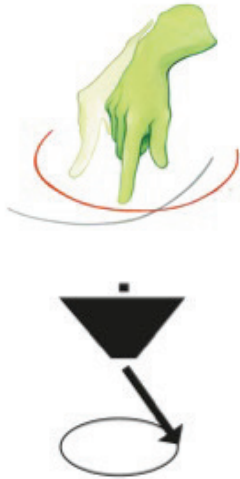
Deaf Sign: If the circle is small, it means 'local'. If the circle is bigger, it means 'all of us' or 'stirring', as in causing trouble.

Destinations:

Local to anywhere in the immediate vicinity..

Delfers to Ridges/Steeldale.

Soweto to Local [within close proximity].



ID-007 Palm-up-point

Category: Indicative.

Description: This hand with the pointing index finger, points forward but is upside-down with the back of the hand parallel to the floor. The four fingers and thumb tucked into the palm are facing upwards.

Published: Not published.

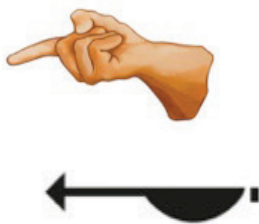
Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: In Tshwane this sign usually points to 'town' similar to the upward-pointing finger used to indicate the Johannesburg CBD. However, it is usually associated with a shopping area, so it may be used to indicate going to shops in the CBD or to go to the local shopping area.

Deaf Sign: None.

Destinations:

Tshwane area to Tshwane CBD.



ID-008 Direction



Category: Indicative.

Description: The hand sign points with the index finger, thumb and other fingers folded in.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 16).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This is a common sign used universally to point to the direction of the place one is travelling to.

Deaf Sign: Pointing at something.

Destinations:

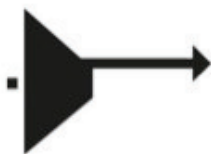
Tembisa to Kempton Park.

Johannesburg CBD to Diepkloof (via Booysens).

Naledi to Baragwanath (via Whitecity).

Maponya to Mrafi.

ID-009 Side-point-across



Category: Indicative.

Description: Index finger points to the side, back of hand in view. The pointed finger in this instance is pointing across the body.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work.

Explanation: The reason for this sign is not known.

Deaf Sign: Pointing to a person, for example, he, she, it, him, her.

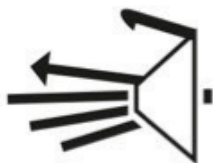
Destinations:

Bryanston to Petervale.

Old Potchestroom Road to Chiawelo.

Old Potchestroom Road to Glen (Soweto).

ID-010 Five to-side



Category: Indicative.

Description: Five fingers to the left side, with the thumb out.

Published: Not published.

Art: Adapted from unique painted work.

Explanation: No reason known for using the five fingers to the side.

Deaf Sign: Five fingers to the left hand side, with the thumb out, but fingers closed together. This indicates a group of people, as in 'them'.

Destinations:

Rockville to Lenasia Station.

ID-011 Point-front



Category: Indicative.

Description: The index finger points away from the body with the thumb out and palm parallel to the floor.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS Symbolic *landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: No explanation available for this relaxed sign.

Deaf Sign: As a single indicative pointing hand sign described above, this is not part of Deaf language as such.

Destinations:

Dlamini to Baragwanath.

Dobsonville to Ikwezi Station.

ID-012 Corner 2



Category: Indicative.

Description: Hand points to the side, palm and fingers folded in thumb folded in.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 19).

Art: Adapted from unique painted work.

Explanation: As in indicating that one is 'going round the corner'.

Deaf Sign: This sign is usually performed with both hands. One hand mirroring the other, fingers slightly bent inwards with tips of fingers touching. It could mean a class or a cake.



Destinations:

Dlamini to Baragwanath.

12.1.3 INITIAL LETTER HAND SHAPE SIGNS

IL-001 C-shape



Category: Initial Letter Hand Shape.

Description: The hand is held horizontally, the top four fingers all curled slightly to the bottom and the thumb curled slightly towards them (to the top). The handshape mimics the letter 'C'.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: One of the destinations indicated by this is Cosmo City. It is also the taxi hand sign to Cresta. The sign is shaped like the letter C and sometimes the C is shown with the curved thumb and index finger only.

Deaf Sign: When the hand touches each side of the chin, it means 'cousin'.

Destinations:

Cosmo City.

Cresta.

12.1.4 ORDINAL SIGNS

OR-001 One-up

Category: Ordinal.

Description: The index finger points vertically, with the other fingers curled to the palm held down by the thumb.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 1).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.



Explanation: The index finger pointing upwards generally refers to going to the City Centre, Johannesburg CBD. Notably though, the pointed finger upwards is the sign used in all major cities in South Africa to catch a minibus taxi to the CBD. In Gauteng, 'Noord' Taxi Rank is the central rank to go to in the CBD. Commuters travelling on to other areas then have to transit to Bree Street Metro Mall, where taxis leave from the CBD to outlying areas. Taxi Associations employ drivers named Executives to transport people from Noord Street Taxi Rank across to Bree Street Metro Mall. Many people walk the distance. The pointed finger sign is, however, also used in other specific areas. The upward pointing hand is most likely to have come from the notion that the centre of the city is 'up town'. One surmises that one finger may indicate number 'One' suggesting that it is the most important destination. In the case of the taxi hand sign the purpose is to hail a taxi facing the relevant direction of the place. There are, however, subtle differences in the meaning of the pointing gesture.

Deaf Sign: This sign has several different meanings: Reflects the number 1 or God. Moving in a circular motion means 'as'. Two hands coming together means 'meet'.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD.

Alexandra to Fourways.

Bree Street Metro Mall to Randburg.

Bree Street Metro Mall to Yeoville.
 Plein Street Taxi Rank to Yeoville.
 Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital.
 Faraday to 'R' Road.
 Fordsburg to Jeppe.
 Highgate to Pinehaven.
 Croesus to Pinehaven.
 Ikwezi to Johannesburg CBD.
 Jeppe to 'R' Road.
 Johannesburg CBD to Hill.
 Naledi to Pfefene.
 Randburg to Bree Street Metro Mall.
 'R' Road to Faraday.
 Yeoville to Rosebank.

OR-002 Two-up

Category: Ordinal.

Description: Hand is held vertically with the index and middle finger pointing up, forming a 'V'. The other fingers are held to the palm with the thumb.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 2).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Two fingers are usually associated with a place that has two stops.

Deaf Sign: Represents the number 2.

Destinations:

Bree Street Metro Mall to Radiokop.
 Dobsonville Ext 2 to Baragwanath.
 Dobsonville Ext 2 to Highgate.
 Dube, Mufolo, Pefeni to Highgate.
 Emdeni, Naledi to Highgate.
 Greenvillage, Island to Highgate.
 Newclare to Honeydew.
 Orlando East to Highgate.
 Soweto to Highgate.



OR-003 Three-up

Category: Ordinal.

Description: The hand is held vertically. The thumb holds the little finger to the palm, while the remaining three fingers point up.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 3).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled 'GRID: Taxi Hands' exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark 2012*. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Three fingers are usually associated with a place that has three stops.

Deaf Sign: Represents the letter 'w'.

Destinations:

Baragwanath, Orlando East to Dobsonville.

Emdeni, Zola, Jabulani to Imdingilzi.

John Page to Eastgate.

Johannesburg CBD to Zonke.

Pinehaven to Croesus, Highgate.

Ridgeway to Southgate.

Southgate to Ridgeway, Turffontein.

Tembisa to Johannesburg CBD.



OR-004 Four-up

Category: Ordinal

Description: The hand is placed in the air, four fingers stretched out with the thumb folded onto the palm.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 4).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark, 2012*. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Deaf Sign: Represents the number 4.

Alternative Classification: In the case of Fourways, this sign could be classified as Imitative – Place name.

Destinations:

Alberton to Baragwanath.

Baragwanath to Steeldale.



Bree Street Metro Mall to Fourways.
 Bree Street Metro Mall to Greymont/Florida Glen.
 Bree Street Metro Mall to Weltevreden Park.
 Emdeni to Baragwanath (via Sakkies).
 Naledi to Baragwanath (via Sakkies).
 Ivory Park to Fourways.
 Johannesburg CBD to Fourways.
 Midrand to Fourways.
 Hillbrow to Fourways.
 Zone 4 to Johannesburg.
 Pretoria CBD to Fourways.

OR-005 Five-up

Category: Ordinal.

Description: All five fingers extended. Palm facing out. This sign may be held upwards to the side of the body or held forward at waist level to indicate to different places.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 5).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The five fingers usually represent number five in the place name or the number five is used additionally to indicate the sections of a place. For instance, the sign to Phola Park is followed by a finger sign indicating numbers of the sequential sections in Paola Park. As with many signs it is also used randomly for destinations it has an unknown association with.

Deaf Sign: Stop.

Destinations:

Alexandra to Randburg (via Republic).
 Alexandra to Randburg (via Peter Place), Ellis Park.
 Braamfontein to Johannesburg CBD.
 Johannesburg CBD to Randburg.
 Johannesburg CBD to Westgate Mall.
 Mamelodi to Extension 5.
 Plein Street Taxi Rank to Randburg.
 Randburg to Plein Street Taxi Rank.
 Zone 5 to Johannesburg.
 Jabulani to Lenz.



12.1.5 UNKNOWN/ARBITRARY SIGNS

AU-001 Flag-wave



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: The thumb points up and the other outstretched fingers flap from side to side around the thumb's axis like a flag. The hand is in a position midway between the waist and head.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet (2010: 24).

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The reason for this wave is not known

Deaf Sign: Represents a flag.

Destinations:

Tembisa to Sebenza.



AU-002 Half-finger



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: The thumb points upward. The other fingers point to the side, but the index finger is bent back on itself.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The reason for this sign is not known.

Destinations:

Pimville to Dlamini.

Pimville to Protea.



AU-003 Hand-on-hand

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: The left hand is held horizontally, angled slightly down and out. It moves back and forth to indicate movement under a bridge. The right hand is placed on top at a ninety-degree angle.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This sign indicates to the driver that the commuter wants a ride to just after the next main bridge.

Deaf Sign: Means 'friend' when the dominant hand moves up and down to clasp the passive hand.

Destinations:



AU-004 Three-up-ok

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary

Description: The hand is held vertically, thumb and index finger forming a circle and the other three fingers extended vertically and aligned in a row towards the viewer.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet 2010: 10

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Commuters have explained that originally there were three areas a passenger could be dropped off when arriving in Tembisa. Today there are many more drop-off sites, as Tembisa has become one of the largest townships, but the three fingers remain the sign to all the extensions including Ext. 3.

Deaf Sign: Represents a flower.

Destinations:

Johannesburg to Sandton.

Johannesburg to Tembisa.

Indimgilzi to Baragwanath Hospital.

Ebony Park to Ivory Park Ext. 3.



AU-005 Side-ways-wave

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: The hand is held out horizontally, four fingers facing front. The hand is then waved from side to side.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet 2010: 27

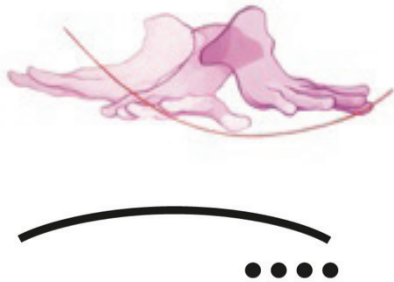
Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: No explanation found yet.

Deaf Sign: Represents runs in a cricket game.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Phola Park.



AU-006 Thumb-up

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: The thumbs points up with the other fingers curled in towards the palm.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: No explanation found yet. It certainly has no relation to the positive thumbs up sign or thumbing for a lift, which are the two most common uses for this sign.

Throughout West Africa, the thumb lying on the index finger of a vertical fist with arm extended is equivalent to the American middle finger; insult is emphasised by motioning the thumb up (like thumbs-up) and down repeatedly (Amoaka-Agyei 2009).

Deaf Sign: This sign has several different meanings: Means 'good'. Using both hands, holding fists together with fingers touching means 'partner'. Moving number 2 around in a large circle, away from the body represents 'collaboration'. One hand, twisting back and forth, indicates 'next'.



Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Westgate.

Dobsonville to Bram Fischer.

Greenvillage to Bram Fisher.

AU-007 Cool



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary

Description: The hand is held out, thumb pointing up. The little finger is stretched out and points slightly down, while the remaining three fingers are curled in towards the palm.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'. **Explanation:** No explanation available for this sign.

Deaf Sign: This sign has several different meanings:

Shaking from side to side, means 'cool'. Faces away from the body, means 'still', for example, for 'Are you still fighting...?'. Both hands moving forward and upward from body, is 'award'. Both hands rotating in a circle, means 'enjoy' or 'party'.

Destinations:

From Mamalodi to Mahube.

AU-008 Relaxed

Category: Relax-down.

Description: Wrist goes limp, palms faces floor, all fingers hang loosely downwards.

Published: *Taxi Hand Signs* booklet 2010: 7

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*, 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: No explanation available for this relaxed sign.

Deaf Sign: Means 'lazy or don't bother'.

Destinations:

Midrand, Ivory Park to Kaalfontein.

Rockville to Johannesburg CBD.



AU-009 Rest-in-peace



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: Commuters mimic the name 'rest in peace' by performing a taxi hand sign showing two hands, open palms touching each and the hands together rest against the person's cheek, as if indicating to go to sleep.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Kwa Thema (Rest in Peace) is the Springs Main Taxi Rank. It was established in 1951 to accommodate African families who were removed from Payneville. The sleepy denotation performed with the taxi hand sig, is anything but restful, rather the inference being something you would more likely say after a person has passed away, 'rest in peace'. One cannot just assume that commuters who perform that sign know the history of the place or perform the sign, knowing that Kwa Thema has been the site of much violence and unrest. In fact, only Zulu speakers might know the actual meaning of the name 'Kwa Thema'. 'Rest in Peace' is possibly an appropriate name for a place where extreme violence has erupted.

Deaf Sign: Sleep.

Destinations:

Ekurhuleni area to and from the taxi rank in Kwa Thema.

AU-010 Wiggle



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary – Body Sign.

Description: This taxi sign is performed as a 'body sign'. The commuter turns around and 'wiggles' his or her bottom as a signal to the driver of the oncoming taxi.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted sketch.

Explanation: Duduza is assumed by some people to be a place of action, where socially and politically everything was happening. It recognises the courageous spirit of resistance upheld by the people in the 1980s in Duduza. The history of this

township, however, tells a story of the challenges, poverty, broken promises and resistance. The name *Duduza* means ‘to comfort’ in English; this was to comfort the forced removal of the residents from the then Charterston township, which was also known as *Beirut*.

Deaf Sign: None

Because this is not a hand sign, there is no blind sign either.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Duduza.

AU-011 Downward-wave



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary

Description: Five fingers point to the floor, moving side to side.

Published: Not published.

Art: Adapted from unique painted work.

Explanation: Not going far or just a short ride.

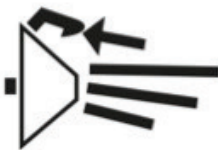
Deaf Sign: Means “nothing”.

Destinations:

Within Gauteng to Menlyn.

Going nearby.

AU-012 Three-to-side



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary

Description: Palm faces the body, index finger and thumb touching, remaining 3 fingers face the left side.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted sketch.

Deaf Sign: None.

Destinations:

Bree Street Metro Mall to Dobsonville.

Snake Park to Roodepoort.

AU-013 Mall

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary

Description: Hand open and 'cupped' bent fingers face downwards.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Sign to any new or nearby shopping mall in Gauteng. The fingers represent the many shops inside a mall. Frequently used in Gauteng, particularly the Pretoria area and from township areas such as Kagiso to the mall.

Deaf Sign: The dominant hand is held over the passive hand, palm orientated upwards. It means a 'province' or a 'cookie'.

Destinations:

Shopping Mall [Any mall in the area].



AU-014 Horns

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: Hand is held up with the baby finger and index finger pointing upwards. The two middle fingers are tucked into the palm, which is forward facing.

Published: Not published

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013: 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The 'Clever' sign used by young teenagers in Soweto; it has many different meanings.

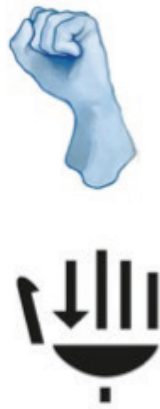
Deaf Sign: Means 'I love you'. The baby finger represents the letter 'I', index finger and thumb make the letter 'L' for love, and the 'u' is read between the baby finger and index finger.

Destinations:

Johannesburg CBD to Vereeniging.



AU-015 Fist-up



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: Hand is formed into a fist and held up.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. SA Taxi Finance Collection. Part of a Limited Edition Print titled, 'GRID'. Exhibited at *Dialogue in the Dark*. 2012. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The fist is the sign for Atteridgeville to Centurion. A fist is usually associated with power or triumph but can also indicate resistance. This appears not to be the case with the taxi hand sign 'fist' used mainly in the Tshwane area, the reason for the fist form is unknown. When a second hand is used to grasp the wrist of the other fist, it indicates capture or the direction to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town.

Deaf Sign: Sign for the letter 'S', with thumb over the forefingers.

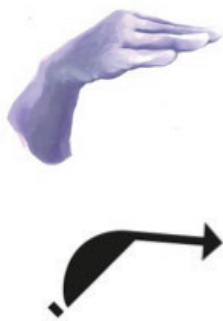
Destinations:

Atteridgeville to Centurion.

Menlyn (Pretoria) to Lusaka (Mamelodi).

Gauteng CBD to Katlehong.

AU-016 Knuckle-bend



Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: Palm down, fingers are straight and pressed together. Bend hand slightly at the knuckle.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: This is also a context-specific sign. It might mean other things elsewhere.

Deaf Sign: The same side.

Destinations: In Mamelodi to Lusaka.

AU-017 Point-away

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary.

Description: This pointed finger to the right has the palm open facing flat away from the body toward the viewer.

Published: Not published.

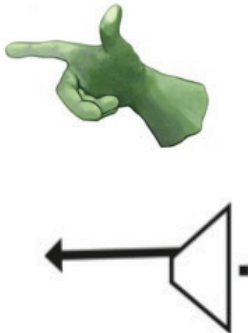
Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: Phomolong is an informal settlement in Mamelodi. The name appears in a number of news articles, but it is not acknowledged in Google Maps, OpenStreetMap, or any one of the mapping software.²¹⁰

Deaf Sign: Means 'gun'.

Destinations:

In Mamelodi to Phomolong.



AU-018 Snake-wave

Category: Unknown/Arbitrary

Description: One hand moves side to side and back again several times to indicate moving in and out through the township. The line also shows this movement.

Published: Not published.

Art: Unique painted work. Exhibited at Wits Art Museum (WAM) 2013. 'TAXI HAND SIGNS *Symbolic landscapes of public culture*'.

Explanation: The sign indicates that one has to take a roundabout route to go through Kagiso.

Deaf Sign: Means taking a roundabout path, not a direct route.

Destinations: Indicating going through Kagiso in a taxi.

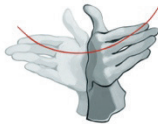


²¹⁰ Joubert and Masilola 2013: personal communication.

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CHAPTER 14: LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATA	Alexandra Taxi Association
BRT	Bus Rapid Transport
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPTR	Current Public Transport Records
DOL	Daily Labourer's Permit
DOT	Department of Transport
GATACO	Gauteng Taxi Council
GJRTC	Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council
NTA	National Taxi Alliance
NTPS	National Transport Policy Study
NTTT	National Taxi Task Team
OLS	Operating Licence Strategies
PADNATO	Pretoria and District Natives Organizational Taxi Rank.
PUTA	Pretoria United Taxi Association.
SABTA	South African Black Taxi Association
SALDTA	South African Long Distance Taxi Association
SANTACO	South African National Taxi Association Council
SAPTA	South African Provincial Taxi Association
SATACO	South African National Taxi Council
TLC	Taxi Liaison Committee
TOP 6	<i>Top Six</i> Taxi Organisation, (<i>Soweto</i> -based taxi associations)
TRP	Taxi Recapitalisation Programme
TYC	Tsakane Youth Congress
UDF	United Democratic Front
ULTA	United Long-distance Taxi Association
WATA	Witwatersrand African Taxi Association

APPENDIX A: BLIND ART BOOK

colophon

Taxi hand signs for the blind Susan Woolf: MATHABO

Sept 2009

Taxi hand signs for the blind, Art Book 1/7 edition.

Derivative of the spiral-bound version of the *Taxi Hand Sign Book for the Blind* (ISBN 089-0-9814144-3-5

Publisher: ada enup)

Front Cover: Hand painted by artist, Susan Woolf.

Pages, unbound.

Printer: Tiger Pro braille graphics embosser. Paper: International paper 'roll', standard size 280mm x 280mm.

Camelot Cartridge 135gsm. (not acid-free, each page separated by acid-free Velum).

Fourteen pages International standardised braille.

Eleven pages of tactile shapes embossed on two levels of raised dots. Printed by Blind SA (Phillip Jordaan).

Two edition prints bl/w. Edition each 1/20 included in art book. Taxi hand sign tactile symbols.

German gallery board 330 gsm. Printer: LightFarm.

This artbook was launched concurrently with the aforementioned book through curator Natalie Knight, as part of the Spiegel / Stein-Lessing Wing of the l'Afrique exhibition at Museum Africa, Newtown, Johannesburg.

Stamps: South African National Commemorative stamp. Taxi hand signs. January 2010, .

Book Box: White wooden boxed section has a framed lid with glass inner, 316mm x 313mm.

White cotton ribbon to lift pages out of the box.

The taxi hand sign book for blind publication was made possible with the financial support from the Estate of the late Leopold Spiegel. SA Taxi Finance is the sponsor of Woolf's original guasche artworks for sighted people that preceded the first book of Taxi hand signs for the blind, as well as the ongoing research for the Taxi hand sign project in Gauteng. Chief executive offer, Martin Bezuidenhout and Chairman of Principal Lending Rob Rossi. Marketing division Pete Simms and Ricardo Rosa.



Susan Eve Woolf

APPENDIX B: INFORMANTS AND RESEARCH METHODS: SUMMARY

KEY INFORMANT: Partick Imphepu.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi structured Interview. Participant observation. Questionnaire used.

PROFESSION: Taxi Dispute Manager and Chairman of Taxi Liaison Committee.

PLACE: Athol Square. Excursions into Taxi Ranks - Alexander taxi ranks (Two ranks) and Randburg taxi rank - Meetings at Greater Johannesburg Regional Taxi Council (GJRTC).

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen: Full transcription of interview.

FILM: Two short films by independent filmmakers²¹¹ captured this research in Randburg taxi rank in 2009.

KEY INFORMANT: Shirley Khunou

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi structured interview 2011, Participant observation and SAMPLING: Questionnaire used.

PROFESSION: Administrator in taxi associations. Co-researcher In CBD and at Faraday taxi association and the Witwatersrand Taxi Association.

MEETINGPLACES

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [full transcription of the interview]. Camera.

FILM: Film by independent cinematographer in Bree Street Metro Mall. This film documented the method of sampling used by the researchers demonstrating their ethical approach with participants in the rank. Excerpts of it form part of *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi Hand Signs, in the Landscape of Little Mice* and *Isindlela Zamagundwane. Taxi Hand Signs, Blind in the Landscape of Little Mice*, which are the two resulting short films for this thesis.

²¹¹ Films of the researchers, Imphepu and other commuters doing the taxi hand signs, were taken in 2009 for a Business Day online programme. In 2010 a BBC World News interviewed with myself and commuters in the Randburg taxi rank towards a series on the World Cup.

INFORMANT: Abner Tsebe

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi structured interview and Participant observation. Questionnaire.

PROFESSION: Taxi chairman in three Pretoria taxi associations including the GPRTC.

MEETING PLACES: Greater Pretoria Regional Taxi Council (GPRTC). Office in Pretoria East.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [Full Transcription Of Interview]. Camera.

INFORMANTS: Four taxi drivers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi structured interview - Participant observation.

PROFESSION: Taxi drivers.

MEETING PLACE: Wimpy restaurant.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [Full transcription of Interview]. Camera.

KEY INFORMANT: James Chapman

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi-structured interview - Participant observation

PROFESSION: Laywer for the Patnato Taxi Association from the 1960s. Director of Taxi Choice.

MEETING PLACES: Art studio and offices of Taxi Choice, Pretoria.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [Full transcription of interview].

KEY INFORMANT: Paradise Mahlangu

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi-structured interview - Participant observation

PROFESSION: Chairman Patnato Taxi Rank And Taxi Choice.

MEETING PLACES: Taxi Choice In Pretoria.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [Full transcription of interview]. Camera.

KEY INFORMANT: Vic D [Pseudonym].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi structured interview - Participant observation-

PROFESSION: Engineer. Director of company involved with submission of government tenders relating to taxi mobility.

MEETING PLACES: Vic D's company office and residence of Joubert.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [Full transcription of interview].

KEY INFORMANT: Paul Browning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi structured Interview - Participant observation-

PROFESSION: Author and consultant on taxi transport.

PLACE: University of Pretoria, office of Joubert.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen. Not Transcribed

KEY INFORMANT: Solly Msiza.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi-structured interview - Participant observation.

PROFESSION: Manager at Toyota [Involved in finance of taxi vehicles]

PLACE: Toyota offices In Edenvale [2hrs] and Restaurant, Sandton [4 Hrs].

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen: Full transcription.

KEY INFORMANTS: Wellington Pike [And Johannes Dube].

RESEARCH: Interview [Seeking practical and imaginative solutions].

PROFESSION: Work at Blind SA.

PLACE & DURATION: Offices of Blind SA and Dobsonville residence, Soweto.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen [Partial transcription of interview]

Film by independent cinematographer in Dobsonville, with Pike featured in It.

Excerpts of it form part of the second *Isindlela Zamagundwane* film.

KEY INFORMANT: Ian Hutton.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi-structured interviews - Participant

observation.

PROFESSION: Education officer for blind schools.

PLACE & DURATION: Home Office. Two interviews [1hr and 4 hrs].

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen: Full transcriptions.

VIDEO/FILM. Three Hours.

KEY INFORMANT: Gladwin Kgomo

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Semi-structured interview - Participant observation.

PROFESSION: Currently with the (BRT) Bus Rapid Transport System, (Kgomo was formally with the GJRTC.

PLACE & DURATION: Carlton Centre [2 hrs].

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen: Full transcriptions.

RESEARCH AT SIBONILE SCHOOL

PARTICIPANTS: Learners from Sibonile School for the blind.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: Observation, participant observation and experimental methods.

INSTRUMENTS: Recorder pen and camera: Full transcriptions