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Co-supervisor: Ms Nomusa Makhubu
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I declare that this essay is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed:

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Date:

17 October 2013

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is an exploration of curating and its various forms as understood in a South African art context. In order to understand this context I examine definitions of South African publics as well as different curatorial models. I raise questions around art and accessibility as well as the functions of language as a gate keeper within the visual arts. Through a practical exploration of curatorial methods of engagement, I assess the curator's role as disseminator of information. My final project *Conversations at Morija* that was held in Morija, Lesotho faces the challenge of curating within a space that has a strong creative platform, but lacks a visual art audience. The exhibition was held during the 2013 Morija Art and Culture festival which is dominated by its music component. Despite Morija being the country's creative centre and sole museum, there is little support for its programme both monetary and in terms of attendance. Through a series of conversations several issues pertaining to Morija, Lesotho and the diaspora were addressed. I look at the absence of creative platforms and alternative curatorial methods that engage the public in a participatory manner. Briefly exploring questions of migrant labour and definitions of what constitutes a diaspora. I look at relatable ways to engage the local audience whilst maintaining a creative core in which to spark dialogue around pertinent matters relating to the country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIG. 1 A *Thank You Driver* Taxi
2009
Cape 09 biennale,
Cape Town

FIG. 2 James Webb
In Living Memory of What Never Happened
2009
Recorded sound, speakers.
Langa Taxi Rank, Cape Town

FIG. 2 Edwige Aplogan
F.U.N.
2009
Perspex, ferry lights, foil, Newspaper

FIG. 4 Isa Suarez and the New Teenager's Gospel Choir
Taxi Voices
2009

FIG. 5 Tino Seghal
Kiss
2004
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

FIG. 5A Marina Abramović and Ulay
Imponderabilia
Originally performed in 1977 for 90min
Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna. Still from 16mm film transferred to video (black and white, sound). 52:16 min. © 2010 Marina Abramović. Courtesy Marina Abramović and Sean Kelly Gallery/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

FIG. 5B Kemang Wa Lehulere
Behave Or You Jump
2009
Digital video
Documentation a performance

FIG. 6 Brett Murray
The Spear
2010
Acrylic on Canvas
185 x 140cm

FIG. 6B Jonathan Cane and Zen Marie
Foucault's Children: An Examination
2009
6Min 35Secs

FIG. 7 Avant Car Guard
Protected by Theory
2007

Archival inkjet print
73.8 x 107.2cm
Edition of 15

FIG. 8 Donna Kukama
The Great South African Art Queue of 2009
Public performance
South African National Gallery, Cape Town

FIG. 9 Marcel Duchamp
Fountain
1917
Porcelain
36 x 48 x 61cm

FIG. 10 Maurizzio Cattelan
Another Fucking Readymade
1996
Cardboard boxes and plastic containing a stolen exhibition

FIG. 11 Maurizzio Cattelan
Turisti
1997
200 taxidermied pigeons

FIG. 12 CUSS
The CUSS Show
2012
Live Talk show

FIG. 13 Catherine Dickerson
Jellyfish
2010
Plastic, air
Dimensions variable

FIG. 14 Mbali Khoza
Chapter 1: A Carnival
2012
Digital video, colour, sound
Duration 7 min 34 sec

FIG. 15 Jamie Gowrie
Stoep
2012
Performance with wood, red oxide, polish, cloth

FIG. 16 Jared Ginsburg
Loop with Bamboo and Innertube II
2012
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

FIG. 17 Jared Ginsburg
Hoist
Digital video
Duration 5mins

FIG. 18 A Talya Lubinsky
A Place for Things
2012
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable

FIG. 18 B Talya Lubinsky
A Place for Things
2012
Performative wall-drawing
Dimensions variable

FIG. 19 Malose Malahlela
Dead Air
2012
Sound installation

FIG. 20 Naadira Patel
Clockwise from Left:
I Like It When It Goes Fast / Control
2010 / 2011
Video
Duration 3 min 49 sec

I Like It When It Goes Fast
2010 / 2011
Video
Duration 2 min 7 sec

What Is This Impulse Towards Death?
2012
Video and found footage
Duration 2 min 8 sec

It Starts With a List
2012
Video and found images
Duration 2 min 28 sec

FIG. 21 Nathalie Bikoro
Autopsy
2010
Performance via Skype

FIG. 22 Donna Kukama
1000 Ways of Being (Opening Speech)

2010
Performance via Skype

FIG. 23 Nástio Mosquito
Untitled (The Fisherman and The Soldier)
2010
Performance via Skype

FIG. 24 A Morija Museum and Archives (exterior view)

FIG. 24 B Morija Museum and Archives (interior view)

FIG. 25 A Maeder House
(exterior view)

FIG. 25 B Maeder House
(interior view)

FIG26 A-L *Conversations at Morija* - Maeder House

INTRODUCTION

Featuring Simplicity is a process-based theoretical and curatorial exploration of the concept of simplicity and its potential impact on contemporary South African art discourse. The project comprises of theoretical research as well as a practical component: a series of small exhibitions concluding with my main project title *Conversations at Morija.* The first part of the project is this thesis in which I investigate questions of accessibility in relation to previously curated exhibitions. Art terminology, ways of theorizing and strategies of curating have been appropriated from Western practices by South African art practitioners. Simplicity, which I would argue can be a keystone to accessibility, is 'the quality of being easy to understand or do'[1] and is rarely available in contemporary art due to a tendency to intellectualise in a way that seems to deliberately make meaning inaccessible. Concepts are often over-complicated with jargon and circumlocutory talk, perhaps out of fear that once it is all decoded nothing is left. In this thesis I examine the issue of language in relation to the visual arts and consider how language is utilised either to facilitate public engagement with artworks or to preserve a certain illusion that often serves to distance the public from a particular decoding. I look at the role of the curator, first by defining the practice's various forms and secondly how they apply in a South African context. Despite the growing presence of curating in the country, there is relatively little scholarship on the subject in South Africa, most being the product of symposia and workshops[2].Through defining curating and its various forms, I discuss the profession and its relevance and possible functions within the local context. I proceed to define the 'general public' in a comparative analysis of Western definitions of what this term constitutes and how art functions within such definitions in relation to a South African public and how art is consumed and understood here. I will examine public studies conducted in South Africa that indicate a large public disinterest in or lack of knowledge about art attributed to a mistrust formed by the lack of clarity in communication, and will further explore the implications of language. Through practical examples of exhibitions I have curated that work within a public sphere I examine the curator's function as facilitator of information. I further examine how the curator's role can differ based on the particular public that is addressed. I examine two other exhibitions in which I played different roles as curator. Finally, I discuss my upcoming exhibition that serves as the final practical component of my MFA, the focus of which is addressing non-art audiences. In examining curating's various forms and addressing the question of diverse audiences, the practical component of my MFA was broken up into several small projects ending with *Conversations at Morija*, which I will elaborate on in the final chapter.

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1 'Simplicity: the quality or condition of being easy to understand or do; the quality or condition of being plain or natural.' Oxford Pocket Dictionary (2009)

[2] WITS university is one of the first institutions that has begun an annual curatorial symposium which offers a critical reflection on curating. The inaugural colloquium was held in May 2013 and initiated by Nontobeko Ntombela and Rory Bester.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINITIONS OF CURATING

The field of curating is relatively loosely defined within a South African context. Given that local institutions such as art galleries and museums are comparatively fewer in number and scale than in developed countries, it is no surprise that contemporary curators in South Africa are few and far between. Programmes for curating have only in the past five years been introduced to local tertiary institutions[3] and as such job opportunities for aspiring curators are very limited. It is important to identify the different forms of curating in order to begin the examination of these. O'Brian (2005: 1) writes:

> Traditionally, a curator has been defined as the custodian of a museum or other collection: essentially, a keeper of things…the contemporary curator need not work with a collection or objects at all and instead engages with the cultural meaning and production of art, often from a position of development shared with the artist.

By virtue of this assertion, curating as a form has grown in parallel and adapted with the progression of art forms and movements over the years. Curating must exist simultaneously with contemporary art-making, and the idea of the absence of the object is one that curators have had to adapt to. Lippard and Chandler (1968: 31) observed and to some extent forecasted this dematerialisation:

> During the 1960's, the anti-intellectual, emotional / intuitive process of art-making characteristic of the last two decades have begun to give way to an ultra-conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively. As more and more work is designed in the studio… as the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art. The studio is again becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete.

Although the object has not yet become irrelevant as predicted by Lippard and Chandler, contemporary art has seen an increase in process-based, performative and ephemeral works of art and thus given rise to the need for the curator to reconceptualise preconceived ideas around curating.. To define these ideas broadly, curators can largely be categorised as follows: Museum/institutional curator, corporate collections curator, commercial gallery curator and independent curator. Each fulfils quite a unique role within the field, but the commonality lies in the bracket of organising. The curator's primary purpose is as an agent for the arts or paver of the platform onto which art is exposed to an audience.

As David Levi Strauss (2007: 17) notes about European curatorial legend:

> [Harald] Szeeman often said he preferred the simple title of *Ausstellungsmacher* (exhibition-maker), but he acknowledged at the same time how many different

[3] Rhodes University offers a Masters in Curating, as does Wits University and UCT's Michaelis School of Fine Art.

> functions this one job comprised: 'administrator, amateur, author of introductions, librarian, manager and accountant, animator, conservator, financier, and diplomat.'

Over the past two decades, the debate over the role of the curator has been heated and often times quite contested. Lind (2009: 63) writes:

> I am pondering how 'the curatorial' can contain all these varied dimensions as a loose methodology applied by different people in various capacities. Today I imagine curating as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns and tensions. This is a curatorial approach that owes much to site-specific practices, and even more to context-sensitive work and various traditions of institutional critique – each encouraging you to think from the artwork, with it, but also away from it and against it. In this sense, the curatorial resembles what an editor should do, only with a broader set of materials and relationships.

The modern day museum curator is essentially responsible for the cultivating of new audiences and dissemination of information to the general public. Broadly this role would involve managing the museum's collection, acquisitions, loans and other general responsibilities, the most important of which requires a strong sense of objectivity and more holistic and inclusive view with regard to the museum's programming and acquisitions. The museum curator is responsible not only to the museum directors and board of directors, but perhaps most significantly to the public. Budgetary confines and bureaucratic hurdles are often a real concern, especially in state funded museums. This is the case in most museums but arguably at a more extreme scale in countries with smaller economies for which art receives a miniscule piece of the pie.

The role of a museum curator differs quite significantly from curating at a commercial gallery which is essentially a contested role as it can be argued that the gallery curator operates from a commercially driven platform, and while the main focus is to promote the arts it is seldom not free from the question of saleability.

> Curating at a commercial gallery is full of possibility and problems. Possibility, in that the gallerist could be open to any myriad of projects; problems, in that the gallery is a business and, potentially, sales drive the selection (O'Brian 2005: 4).

This can be understood on a universal scale, however, I would argue that this is subjective as definitions of institutions such as the gallery and the museum are often shaped by the economic and cultural landscape of the particular space which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

Art is seen as a major cultural and touristic enterprise in most developed countries and integrated as part of culture (the Venice Biennale is one of the largest of most established art events in the world with attendance figures of more than 370 000 people). In countries with less developed economies this is often quite a different case with national governments focus being directed to more pressing matters such as education, health, housing and infrastructure. In South Africa the arts are seen as elitist and are very often side-lined, with national arts budgets focusing on recreation and sport. Aside from the economic challenges that are undeniable, I would argue that the visual arts suffer as a result of public disinterest (attendance figures will be discussed in a later chapter).

This results in heavy leaning on foreign funding as well as the private sectors for support of art projects. South African art galleries then begin to fill the void left as a result of poor museum funding and the resulting thin programming. Art galleries in South Africa, commercial interests aside, often play a similar role to that of museums elsewhere. The showing of contemporary international art in South Africa as well as the promotion of South African artists internationally is only a fraction of the role played by these institutions. *The Goodman Gallery*[4], which played an integral role in the international acclaim of various generations of South African artists such as William Kentridge, David Goldblatt, Moshekwa Langa and Tracey Rose, has also facilitated exchange and the showing of significant international artists to be seen by a South African public. *Stevenson*[5], which is comparatively a younger gallery (established in 2003 as Michael Stevenson), contributed significantly to the international acclaim of several of the younger generation of artists such as Nandipha Mntambo, Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi, as well as some from older generations: Berni Searle, Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe and Anton Kannemeyer. The gallery has shown works of acclaimed international artists such as Rineke Dijkstra, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Thomas Hirschhorn, Zineb Sedira, Frohawk Two Feathers, Francis Alys and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster to name a few. Younger galleries such as *Whatiftheworld* hold an impressive collaboration list as well, with some galleries such as *Blank Projects* blurring boundaries between commercial and independent/funded spaces[6].

[4] The Goodman gallery is one of the oldest contemporary art galleries in South Africa, and under the directorship of Linda Givon, founder of the gallery, the contemporary South African art scene was for the first time introduced from a place of authority to the international stage. Unlike centuries prior, South African art was presented by South Africans and not just part of a show and tell of colonial treasures.

[5] Stevenson Gallery began as Michael Stevenson in Cape Town in 2003, and partnered with David Brodie in Johannesburg in 2008 as Brodie/Stevenson. The gallery (both the Cape Town and Johannesburg space) was rebranded as Stevenson in 2011.

[6] Blank Projects began initially as an independent space that received the bulk of its funding from foreign arts organisations such as the Goethe Institut (the German cultural funding body). Set up to be a project space, it raised funders concerns when artwork was being sold, and so finally made the transition to fully commercial in 2012, with a new funded project space called Evil Son.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love (Stevenson 2011)[7], is one of several group shows held at a commercial gallery that included significant international artists such as Francis Alys, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Meshac Gaba and Glenn Ligon alongside South African artists Dineo Seshee Bopape, Wim Botha and Nicholas Hlobo amongst others. One of the recent most significant curated exhibitions held by Stevenson was the three part *Trade Routes* exhibition series held in 2012 at both the Cape Town and Johannesburg spaces[8]. These exhibitions marked the 15th anniversary of the second and final Johannesburg Biennale which was an extremely significant part of the South African art timeline, and has been a point of great debate since it happened in 1997[9]. This not only gave voice to the now dying discussion, but also saw a re-envisioning of a hypothetical future for the biennale. This and several other exhibitions illustrate the South African commercial gallery's unique role in offering a platform for continuing historical and contemporary dialogues. The accompanying publications become imperative archival material for future research.

One argument about exhibitions curated in galleries as mentioned above is that commerce affects creativity and drives selections, however, as I have highlighted it can also have a reverse effect. Commerce can offer the financial means to engage on international art platforms without the limitations and bureaucratic restrictions that come with government support. Commercial galleries often have the means to produce exhibitions that state funded museums are unable to, and furthermore given the constant interactions with international galleries, curators and artists, often a result of travelling to art fairs[10], commercial gallery curators often have good connections within the international art world. Art fairs which are criticised for the commodification of art to an undesirable extent, for South Africa, mean a greater exposure for local artists and the forging of new relationships with international collectors which has not only a monetary value, but also benefit in that some of the most significant international collections do their scouting at art fairs. Museum committees and

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[7] See the full list of participating artists at: http://www.Stevenson.info/exhibitions/love/index.html

[8] The first of this three part exhibition series *Trade Routes Over Time* was held at Stevenson Cape Town. This was followed by *If A Tree…* at the gallery's Johannesburg space. The final chapter of the series was titled *Fiction as Fiction (Or a Ninth Johannesburg Biennale)* once again at the Cape Town space.

[9] Curated by curatorial heavy-weight Okwui Enwezor, the biennale was rife with challenges most of which were financial, but also some contextualisation issues. The result was a set of mixed reviews with a strong opposition on one half of the art world and an unflinching support on the other. The three part re-enactment held at Stevenson in 2012 comprised of: *Trade Routes Over Time* (Stevenson Cape Town; curated by Joost Bosland and Clare Butcher), *If a tree* (Stevenson Johannesburg; curated by Clare Butcher) and *Fiction as Fiction* (Stevenson Cape Town; curated by Joost Bosland).

[10] As commercially driven as events such as art fairs are, they are also incredibly significant as social gatherings for a selection of some of the top galleries and artists in the world. Some fairs attended by South African galleries (Stevenson, Goodman Gallery, Brundyn Gonsalves and Whatiftheworld) include: Frieze London and New York, The Armory Show, ABC Berlin, Art Hong Kong, Art Dubai, Art Basel, Art Basel Miami and Volta. These cripplingly costly endeavours are, outside of the mega biennales, the highlights of the international art calendar. It is therefore no surprise that the most successful South African galleries often attend up to 7 art fairs a year.

corporate collections utilise such opportunities, where one could argue some of the most respected galleries in the world convene, to acquire new works[11]. Art fairs have begun to function as trend thermometers with significant magazines, newspapers and online publications, such as the Huffington Post, The Times UK, London Art Reviews, The New York Times and the Guardian, broadcasting these trends for a wider international art reading audience.

It is important to think about commercial galleries and art fairs: who gets to see these exhibitions, and at whom are they really targeted? Despite the absence of entrance fees to art galleries and the general access of such spaces to the public, it is apparent that the main bracket of targeted viewership is collectors and the media (who inadvertently generate more viewers). The commercial gallery, like any business, must make ends meet and therefore despite the significance of exhibitions and their public acclaim, for an exhibition to be a total success, it should ideally generate some income or generate a level of interest for income. Several priority clients or collectors are targeted and the gallery curator must often court their interests often achieved by showing off the artist's accolades. The ideal audience for most galleries would be a representative from a museum's acquisitions committee or a corporate collection owing to the significance of having artwork that is part of a permanent collection, and second to that a private collector. The next on the tier of significance would be the media and art critics, a good review, or in the case of South African newspapers, a mention of any kind is a great accolade. Following them would be the academic world, art students and other creatives from the industry. Only after this is the general public (unless of course they decide to purchase something which then ranks them in the collector's bracket). By virtue of this assertion, one can deduce that in this particular context the general public is seemingly irrelevant. Although the expansion of audiences is welcomed, it is essentially not within the commercial gallery's immediate objectives.

As genuine as intentions may be, with commercial galleries being amenable to giving information to schools and the general public, it would be unrealistic to deny that if nothing sells, shop closes. Although exhibition pamphlets and catalogues are often available, they together with several other devices are at play to communicate only with specific kinds of viewers and are for the most part undetected by the general public. For example, it is becoming less of a common practice to place titles near artworks in art galleries (prices of works are even less likely to be seen on walls). Upon entering the gallery, the viewer must often find the exhibition map/plan that identifies which works are which. It is rare to find a write-up that explains individual works but rather a general conceptual statement for

[11] An example is at Frieze London 2012, where by means of support from the fair and the Outset Fund, The Tate Modern's selection committee purchased four artworks directly from the fair for the national collection. One of these works included a sculpture by South African artist Nicholas Hlobo whose work was on show at the Stevenson Gallery booth.

the show and very seldom that those accompanying texts are easily deciphered by the average walk-in viewer. The viewer therefore walks into the white-walled space which is not designed for comfort, and often blankly walks from artwork to artwork having little else than the titles to assist understanding. Levi Strauss (2007:19) criticizes curatorial mechanisms when he says:

> Curators are not specialists but for some reason they feel the need to use a specialized language, appropriated from philosophy or psychoanalysis, which too often obscures rather than reveals their sources and ideas. The result is not criticism, but *curatorial rhetoric.* Criticism involves making finer and finer distinctions among like things, while the inflationary writing of curatorial rhetoric is used to obscure fine distinctions with vague generalities. The latter's displacement of the former has political and social origins and effects, as we move into an increasingly managed, *post-critical* environment.

The suggestion here is that criticism is fast losing its place and the voice of the curator as critic has muddied the waters. This 'obscuring' of ideas gives rise to the notion of the curator as fog-maker, trickster, deceiver of the eye.

OUT OF THIN AIR: THE CURATOR AS ILLUSIONIST

The gallery is a simulated environment, a fantasy space where certain rules of engagement are at play. The curator is the simulator of this environment, the magician or illusionist, who guides the experience of the viewer and in a sense plays a role in the comfort or discomfort of viewers. That means that to a certain extent the general public feels out of place perhaps because they were intended to. An academic on the other hand may give the impression of 'getting it' and feeling at home, although perhaps that is not the case. Others who frequent galleries and may unconsciously applaud an air of elitism, would already be familiar with the game and perhaps appreciate the implied exclusivity. The politics of the white cube are part of on-going art criticism, and it is undeniable that the gallery space is one rife with a history of debate and criticism. Nonetheless it retains its position as the halfway house in which the raw artistic product is imbued with the ephemeral qualities that formally define it as an art object worthy to enter the commercial realm, the sacred space where art receives its accreditation; the platform for the grand revealing of the fruits of the artist's labour. Watkins (1987: 27) argues:

> Using Oscar Wilde's idea that objects were transformed into art by the critic through writing, Watkins provocatively argued that curating was a form of artistic practice and that curated exhibitions were likened to Marcel Duchamp's 'Readymade Aided' artworks, where the display or exhibition is aided by the curator's 'manipulation of the environment, the lighting, the labels, the placement of other works of art.

In a recent exhibition I curated titled *Out of Thin Air* 2012[12] I explored these ideas of the gallery as a fantasy space. Over the course of three days, myself and eight young artists, occupied the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town and explored notions of fantasy and 'make-believe' space through multi-media installations. The participating artists were: Cuss, Catherine Dickerson, Jared Ginsburg, Jamie Gowrie, Mbali Khoza, Talya Lubinsky, Malose Kadromatt Malahlela and Naadira Patel.

The construction of any building or structure, imaginary or real, requires that one carve a space 'out of thin air'. In their installations, the artists focused on the demarcation of space and the creation of imaginary landscapes. The concept of a fantasy space denotes a simulated environment designed to generate a particular set of experiences, allowing us an escape from everyday reality. In a child's fort, where the rules of engagement are crafted and put into practice by the child, the framework is based entirely on one's imagination. Upon entering, we consciously partake in the act of make-believe. For the participants, the project kicked off on the train journey from Johannesburg to Cape Town, finding its roots in a mobile 'non-place[13]'. As Alain de Botton (2005: 6-7) writes:

> Of all modes of transport, the train is perhaps the best aid to thought: the views have none of the potential monotony of those on a ship or plane, they move fast enough for us not to get exasperated but slowly enough to allow us to identify objects... At the end of hours of train-dreaming, we may feel we have been returned to ourselves: that is, brought back into contact with emotions and ideas of importance to us. It is not necessarily at home that we best encounter our true selves.

The idea of 'train-dreaming' suggests a level of contemplation that becomes fertile ground for creative and reflective interaction. I had planned to circulate and discuss texts and films such as Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and K Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* on the 26-hour trip. However when on the train, I instigated cabin visits where myself and all the artists would gather in a cabin and present and discuss the various projects on the show, and that proved more reflective and fruitful than discussing the afore-mentioned literature. Instead we had referenced various elements from the sources in the discussions surrounding the conceptualisation of work and the curatorial framework. Upon reaching our destination, myself and the participants inhabited the gallery space in such a way that it became a three-dimensional collage of fantasy islands and breathing forts. Designed as an occupation of space

[12] *Out of Thin Air* was held at Stevenson Cape Town in July 2012.

[13] As coined by Augé (1995:77-78): 'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory', and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position'.

that generated events, the show was never static, nor did it ever reach completion: between polishing, hoisting, inflating and broadcasting, the fantasy spaces were in constant flux.

Johannesburg based artist collective Cuss built an Oprahesque set and hosted a talk show in the largest gallery space (FIG 12), combining pre-recorded video features by its three members. Drawing from iconic South African talk shows such as *The Felicia Mabuza-Suttle Show* and Dali Tambo's *People of the South*, the show was hosted by an invited guest and featured interviews and conversations with Cape Town-based creatives. This performance drew an overwhelming audience who played the role of the studio audience. Despite the fact that the show was a simulation, it featured live interviews with the artists in the collective. The talk show host asked them real questions around their process and their perceptions on the art world and their answers were seemingly genuine and unrehearsed.

Catherine Dickerson's breathing plastic sculptures (FIG 13) of strange creatures such as a chain of transparent plastic dogs, were ghostly and eerily beautiful: their thin, membranous but undeniable presence being somewhat uncanny. When activated, they whimsically inflated and deflated almost to the tune of one's body, momentarily dominating space - yet carved out of thin air much like fiction and fantasy. With no one to activate them, they lay on the ground like the wilted frames of a concept.

Mbali Khoza's video piece *Chapter 1: A Carnival* (FIG 14), invokes two characters, 'Rap' and 'Diaspora'. The poetry of Lesego Rampolokeng assumes the character of Rap, while writer Dambudzo Marechera plays Diaspora. Both writers explore language and narrative as tools to reflect on themselves as bodies positioned within the socio-political spaces of the past and present. Having famously stated that he disagrees with everyone and everything, Marechera's style of writing is seemingly not created for an audience. Although from time to time he allows the reader in to his sharp jabs at political issues in Zimbabwe, essentially one gets the sense of reading private notes. In her video, Khoza uses a similar technique. She applies make-up, preparing her joker mask in front of a mirror, for no apparent audience. Occasionally she turns towards the camera, acknowledging its presence but using it as a mirror. Without leaving the frame, she proceeds to remove her make-up, having completed her performance.

Khoza's work became of interest to me after seeing her video *Stitches,* which was initially selected for the show. In it, Khoza obsessively sews the English alphabet onto paper with a needle that has no thread – much like the make-believe of a child. The result is almost invisible: punctures on a piece of paper, an inverse Braille of sorts. Khoza wounds the paper as a response to a quote from Marechera's *House of Hunger* which reads:

> … As I read it every single word erased itself into my mind. Afterwards they came to take out the stitches from the wound of it. And I was whole again. The stitches were published. The reviewers made obscene noises. It is now out of print. But those stitches, those poems…

Stitches was initially selected because of playfulness of the gesture and its absurdity, however upon further reflection, I felt the work ought to be seen as a performance and the video felt more like documentation rather than a video artwork. I therefore felt the second video was more appropriate.

The inclusion of Jamie Gowrie's *Stoep* (FIG 15) involved a similarly circuitous process. The artist produced a wooden 'stoep'[14] made to resemble that at the front of a township house, which was then polished performatively throughout the opening. I was initially interested in her work after having seen it at her graduate show. There the 'stoep' was part of a larger installation that included re-coloured family photos that were often taken on the 'stoep' in front of relative's houses, a brick stoep, and hyper-real paintings of parts of the house and 'stoep'. I found that the paintings and photographs were in a sense an over-load of information and did not allow the viewer to interact and engage with the stoep as an object in its own right. After several conversations about the meaning of the stoep for the artist as well as its history in township and rural South African and – as we came to find – Southern African imagery, the maintaining of the 'stoep' became a focal point, whereas before it was implied amongst other references. After exchanging childhood memories relating to the 'stoep', the most prevalent was being reprimanded for playing on it, and the daily polishing that went into preserving a certain appearance. In previous installations of the piece, she had always polished it in preparation for exhibiting and therefore omitted this element from the audience's experience. After a few discussions around her intentions it became apparent that the performative element of the 'stoep' was most significant, referencing the obsessive manner in which 'stoeps' had been polished and maintained by relatives in her recollection. Curatorially, what this added to the concept was the idea of space and presentation. I began to think about how one takes care to present one's space in a certain light. The 'stoep' being the first thing that one encounters when entering into someone's home, is polished and shined daily, and implies a particular pride about the space one lives in. I recalled my childhood and the 'stoep' at the front of my grand-parents' house and the brushes, soft-cloths and panty-hose bundles used to portray my grand-parents in a respectable light. The polishing of the 'stoep' was a ritual as important as a morning bath. Ironically, given the locational context of the exhibition[15], Gowrie's performance brought up questions surrounding race, the image of a young coloured girl polishing a 'stoep' whilst the predominantly White Cape Town art audience walked all over it. The

[14] A 'stoep' is a raised verandah at the front door of a house. The Afrikaans word is derived from Dutch and is common to a certain style of Dutch architecture found mostly in Southern Africa.
[15] The gallery is in Woodstock, a predominantly working class 'coloured' area.

meanings of the work shifted in unexpected ways and resulted in a broader political reading of the work.

A piece which exemplified site-specificity was Jared Ginsburg's installation *Loop with bamboo and Innertube II* 2012 (FIG 16) which comprised of a bamboo-framed mobile sculpture which very slowly lifted pieces of bamboo into the air to form a kind of tee-pee structure, then just as slowly deconstructed it. This piece came about after initial interest in a video he had shown me of a 2011 installation entitled *Hoist* (FIG 17) . In the video, objects selected at random – a bicycle, an office chair, an old organ – seem to rise to nowhere with no particular reason. Unlike magic where the eye is often completely fooled, Ginsburg makes one aware that he is creating a spectacle for the viewer. Despite the visibility of the wire cable that hoists them, the slowly rising objects draw one in to the point of being almost hypnotic. Ginsburg had made a smaller similar sculpture previously, and in this instance constructed one that rose to the full height of the gallery's ceiling. On one end of the room was the mechanical device that revolved and controlled the action, and linked with invisible fish-gut that ran across the ceiling, on the other side of the gallery was the bamboo structure which folded into a pile of sticks. The trickery here is slightly more seamless than in *Hoist* and using light, space and distance the viewer is offered the experience of a seemingly inexplicable spectacle.

Talya Lubinsky's (FIG 18) text installation dealt with the way in which maps and words order experience. As we try to make sense of our worlds, we develop structures that simplify and condense that which is infinitely complex, layered and nuanced. Words function as place-holders; they do not describe reality but stand in for it. The installation, which included several taxonomical objects, created a space in which meaning was something to be searched for: signs and clues hint at connections between words and the symbols on maps but nothing is ever conclusive; the view is always partial. During the opening event, the wall drawing became a performative exercise with the artist generating text lines based on interactions of the evening. She would type these on a sticker label-making machine and stick then on the wall as part of the drawing. Malose Malahlela (FIG 19), co-director of Keleketla Library, occupied the intangible site of a radio station entitled *Dead Air*, conceived and produced for, and aired on, a non-existent channel. The show was broadcast on the train, at the gallery and online, and featured advertisements for fictional movies, strip clubs and gambling, among other things. In the gallery the station was presented as an interactive sound installation where the audience was invited to ponder the question 'Why do we daydream?', with responses recorded and integrated into the show.

Set in an amusement park, a vivid example of a fantasy space, Naadira Patel's video installation[16] (FIG. 20) takes one on a sensory journey. On one screen the viewer is confronted with a close-up of her face and its multitude of expressions while on a rollercoaster ride. The uncomfortable proximity to her face, the hypnotic yet jarring amusement park lights, and the observation of peaks of emotion make us feel as though we are witness to an extremely private moment. The curiosity lies in our obsession with adrenalin and creating artificial stimuli that generate this rush in a never-ending quest for obliteration. On another screen, the viewer watches a video that begins with a list of words then continues into images sourced mainly from Google searches – an uncategorised combination of art references and popular culture icons, brands and names (Tate Modern, Adidas, Art Basel, Roman Abromovich, Nicki Minaj, Damien Hirst, United Colours of Benetton, Turner Prize, Scarlett Johansson, Moët & Chandon, Marian Goodman etc) flashing at accelerating speed. The work uses the climactic ultra-speed of the roller-coaster to time the flashing of words and images. The work relies on the viewer's associations with the images and creates a bombardment of image and sounds. Even if the images and words fail to connote anything for a viewer, the speed at which they appear and the dizzying flash create an experience rather than a viewing.

On the question of group shows, O'Neill (2007: 14-16) writes

> The group exhibition has become the primary site for curatorial experimentation and, as such, has generated a new discursive space around artistic practice... Group exhibitions are ideological texts which make private intentions public...Exhibitions are ... contemporary forms of rhetoric, complex expressions of persuasion, whose strategies aim to produce a prescribed set of values and social relations for their audiences. As such exhibitions are subjective political tools, as well as being modern ritual settings, which uphold identities... they are to be understood as institutional 'utterances within a larger culture industry.

My curatorial approach for this show was interaction-based and relied on forming a certain kind of community. I encouraged the artists as best I could, to fully occupy the space, to possess it, and live in it. The curatorial process was guided by the artwork and the artwork was guided by the curatorial process. As Wells (2007:31) writes:

> Research comes to underpin curatorial 'voice'. Curatorial voice operates through initial definition of field and identification of key research questions, through selection of work, through the 'theatre' of exhibition which is fundamental to rhetorical affects, and through ways in which the project and the work of individual artists is contextualized in accompanying materials. Exhibitions wherein a curator has determined a theme or proposition, or used the work of others merely to illustrate it and produce writing geared towards anchoring and constraining interpretative

[16] The video installation comprises a grid of the following four videos: *I Like It When It Goes Fast / Control,* 2010 / 2011, Video, Duration 3 min 49 sec ; *I Like It When It Goes Fast,* 2010 / 2011, Video, Duration 2 min 7 sec *; What Is This Impulse Towards Death?* 2012, Video and found footage, Duration 2 min 8 sec ; *It Starts With a List,* 2012, Video and found images, Duration 2 min 28 sec.

> potential, really hold interest for very long. But where an exhibition has been carefully thought through, substantially contributing to knowledge within a particular field, 'voice' operates complexly, in effect, setting up some sort of dialogue between works included, as well as between the curator and the works. The multiple discourses through which this dialogue resonates contribute to quality of audience engagement.

In this exhibition I attempted to debunk the idea of the curator as conceptualiser of the show, but rather allowed the conversations I had with artists shape the curatorial form. The projects became concept as opposed to the curatorial concept moulding the resulting artwork. Of course ideas of fantasy space had been discussed beforehand, and each artist responded to discussions on the matter. O'Brian (2005: 1) writes:

> The verb 'curate' suggests a revisitation of the conception of what a curator does, a change from working at some remove from the processes of art production to becoming actively involved in its development.

Groys (2007:46) illustrates the disparity in the power of the artist and the curator by using the example of Duchamp's urinal, which is imbued with the 'chemical x' that transforms it from mundane functional object to artwork by the artist and argues that the curator can never achieve the transformation of an object into an art object. I would extend this further in saying that although the curator doesn't possess ability to convert an object into an art object, he or she through the process of editing and selection possesses the power to control what art is worthy of exhibition. Of course this is not the function of the curator alone, and the artist's input is significant, however it is often the curator's task to position the artwork within a particular conceptual framework – to translate it from studio creation to exhibition object. The curator is thus responsible for the transition and acts as a kind of half-way house for the art object. Furthermore, the curator influences how people experience art, which art people experience and which people experience art (how, what and to whom). The curator's 'chemical x' is not too far from that of the artist in that he or she creates a curatorial map through a combination of related or seemingly unrelated artworks and artists to give light to a set of associations which otherwise may not have been considered.

> The curator may exhibit, but he doesn't have the magical ability to transform non-art into art through the act of display. That power, according to current cultural conventions, belongs to the artist alone… Originally art became art through the decisions of curators rather than artists… The curators administering these [first art] museums 'created' art through iconoclastic acts directed against traditional icons of religion or power, by reducing these icons to mere artworks… (Groys 2007: 46).

Here Groys brings to light one of the earliest definitions of curating. Although of course the exhibition of historical artefacts is still practiced in museums worldwide, it is quite commonly in relation to a collection of historical fine art and contemporary art.

He goes on to pose the question:

> Why have curators lost the power to create art through the act of its exhibition, and why has this power passed to artists?...In exhibiting a urinal, Duchamp does not devalue a sacred icon, as the museum curators did; he rather upgrades a mass-produced object to an artwork...today in contrast, profane objects are valorized to become art...this shift in the symbolic economy had already been put in motion by the curators and art critics of the 19th century (2007: 48).

It has been argued that the curator is more significant than the art historian in that the work of the curator is more visible (Carrier 2007:80). It is difficult to distinguish between the two as for the most part, the average curator more than likely has a solid understanding of art history and the art historian operates within a scope of research and writing that examines artworks, movements and exhibitions.

THE CURATOR AS INTERPRETER: THE PROBLEM OF THE ORGANISER-AUTHOR

Of the various responsibilities of the contemporary curator, perhaps the most weighty is that of interpreter. Bauman (1998:31) lists the roles of the curator as including but not limited to:

> Scape-goat...animator... pusher...inspirer... brother...community-maker...someone who makes people work and things happen and someone who inspires artists with ideas, programmes and projects... there would be an element of interpreting, of making sense of people, of making them understand, giving them some sort of alphabet for reading what they see, but cannot quite decide about.

As Bauman describes it, the curator acts not only as disseminator of information, but as facilitator of understanding – one who interprets art and with a similar understanding of one's audience, seeks to communicate this interpretation in a language that is relatable and accessible to the relevant audience. Seen in this light, I would propose that two problems arise. The first is the ability or even interest of contemporary curators to communicate with an audience that is not within the curator's realm of discourse. The idea of the 'art audience' implies a certain level of pre-conditioning to assess and engage with the arts giving strength to the phrase 'to be cultured'. Given the analytical and conceptual depth in which art discourse finds itself, it is safe to say that the average person, may not have the necessary tools in which to consume most exhibitions and artworks. This is not to suggest that members of this 'general public' are not intellectually astute, however one finds that jargon and overtly complex approaches in art discourse are used in conceptual statements in exhibition publications and therefore disengage most industry outsiders.

The second problem lies in that the curator's interpretation of a particular subject is entirely subjective and can only ever represent the desired perspective of the curator. Furthermore, when looking at the

exhibition as the creative work of a curator, it is implied that the artists/artworks are merely tools for the articulation of the particular curatorial concept. As O'Neill recounts (2007:23)

> In 1972, the artist Daniel Buren wrote 'Exhibition of an Exhibition', where he claimed that: 'More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.'... Buren was suggesting that works were mere fragments that make up one composite exhibition.

In light of this position and the afore-mentioned role of curator as interpreter, one is posed with the question: Which concept is the curator responsible for communicating? If there is an overlap between the curatorial framework of the exhibition and the conceptual statement of the artwork within the exhibition, there are evidently two authorial voices in play. The artwork, which is often-times conceived outside of a curatorial backdrop, quite frequently ends up assuming the definitions which are inadvertently pinned to it as a result of participating in a particular show. The artist's intention may often be merged with curatorial definitions of the work as written about in show catalogues or other media surrounding the exhibition. As such the curator becomes the relator of the artist's as well as his or her own message and in the case of the artist meaning is often diluted and becomes very subjective. Buren (2004: 26) quite explicitly critiques the role of the curator and coins the satirical term 'organiser-author' in his description of the modern curator. He states:

> ...art-works are particular details in the service of the work in question, the exhibition of our organiser-author. At the same time – and this is where the problem has become pointed enough to create the crisis in which we find ourselves – the 'fragments' and other 'details' exhibited are, by definition and in most cases, completely and entirely foreign to the principal work in which they are participating, that is, the exhibition in question (2004: 26).

Owing to this 'problem' as Buren puts it, one is forced to ask the question: is it possible to curate an exhibition where the artworks have a synergy with the exhibition and relationships between works and the curatorial concept do not seem imposed? I would argue that the exhibition model where there is an exception to this problematic is in the case of commissioned work. In this case a curatorial premise is the initiator upon which artistic reflections are formed. This is however not a one-sided interpretation, and opens the ground for artistic and curatorial dialogue.

The works inform the concept and the concept informs the works, as was the case in the third of my projects *Out of Thin Air* as discussed above. In the exhibition, my curatorial strategy was to invite artists I thought were already working within similar ideology to the ideas I was looking at. I then approached them in relation to particular works, but with a focus on creating new dialogues and

elaborative directions on works. There were few exceptions [17]where new works were not produced as a result of the conversation between myself and the artists.

In this particular exhibition the curatorial platform is rather insular - curating an exhibition in a gallery space about ideas surrounding such spaces. The addressed audience is an art public, and in particular exhibition opening attendees and thus intentionally differs quite significantly from my other projects which are aimed at engaging a broader sector of the public.

[17] Mbali Khoza's *Joker* and Naadira Patel's *I like it when it goes fast* were the only works which were in existence before the show.

CHAPTER 2: CURATING OUTSIDE THE FOUR WALLS

PERFORMANCE IN THE PUBLIC REALM

The independent curator in South Africa plays a similar role to that of the museum curator, although of course being without the institutional framework and budgetary support. Owing to the huge financial void for the support of the arts, there are few (if any) independent curators who are able to sustain themselves outside of other sources of income. Unlike the commercial gallery curator, the independent curator is tasked with the role of finding the exhibition space, fundraising for the project and pretty much overseeing the entire project from start to finish. Securing funding is perhaps one of the greatest challenges an independent curator has. Martin (2007:39) writes:

> The success of the work of an independent curator depends on the 'good will' of institutions and sponsors. Imagining and supporting art events outside institutions suggest at the first glance freedom of action in planning an exhibition but no material and technical support. The infrastructure, the know-how and technical support of a museum [or gallery] often makes the realization of a project a lot easier.

The audience of the independently curated show, unless within a museum or commercial gallery, is less clear and varies based on selected location and the nature of the project. In 2009, myself and four other aspiring curators, under the umbrella of Cape Africa Platform's Young Curator's Programme[18] curated exhibitions for Cape Africa Platform's second and final biennale Cape *'09*. For the biennale, I curated an exhibition on minibus taxis that I titled *Thank you Driver* (FIG. 1). Although the exhibition was curated as part of an arts organisation, due to the poor infrastructure and a need to fundraise, it was my first semi-independent curatorial experience.

For the show I allocated a taxi to each artist in which to make an artistic intervention, and these ranged from an in-taxi magazine which told semi-fictional stories about experiences of a taxi commuter; a taxi hostess who offered snacks, collected fares, and announced information on the trip; a taxi newspaper that was dated in the future and offered to commuters; and a music performance involving a select number of choir members who serenaded taxi unsuspecting passengers. I distinctly made the choice to work with existing taxi drivers (via a taxi organisation) who drove on pre-determined official routes, as opposed to hiring independent taxis and orchestrating trips that people could join. That meant that, to the great frustration of the biennale art crowd, they were not the target audience. The audience that encountered these in-taxi happenings were unsuspecting, every-day taxi commuters who caught taxis from the Cape Town station to the various destinations around

[18] Cape Africa Platform's Young Curator's programme, which ran from 2008 to 2009, consisted of the following participants: Lerato Bereng, Bongani Mkhonza, Nkuli Mlangeni, Loyiso Qanya and Ntando Xorile.

the city and beyond including Sea Point, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, Woodstock and Langa. It also meant that one could not plan to ride one of the taxis[19], instead the passengers were random. My aims were two-fold: to expand art audiences and facilitate a true engagement with the city and its current transport systems and commuters, and most significantly, to invert the stagnant ideas of art viewership. In this instance the exhibition was inaccessible to the art world, and those few who persevered to see the show were forced to go to the Cape Town taxi rank on top of Cape Town station, which for most was a new experience. However, this project left me with some conflicting ideas owing to various challenges encountered. For each project there was a positive as well as a negative outcome, and I will discuss these individually as I consider some specific taxis as individual exhibitions with their own unique audiences. I wish to analyse these processes by means of Burke's set of questions as summarised by Walker (2012):

> Noted literary critic, philosopher, and rhetorician Kenneth Burke expanded the fields of contemporary rhetoric and performance studies exponentially through his Pentad, created as a method for divining rhetorical motives out of literary dramas. According to Burke, in order to understand motives, one must begin by identifying and examining the five elements (or questions) of his Pentad: 'what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)'.

Gugulective*'s* performance comprised a female performer dressed in clothing similar to a flight attendant, a till machine for calculating change, and refreshments that varied from coffee and biscuits to cold drinks and peanuts. The project was a success in that it generated immediate responses from the commuters and became quite popular. Another strength was that it was conceived having factored in the taxi passenger's daily experience, and aimed to subtly address certain issues such as the mandatory role of the front passenger as in taxi accountant. On long trips it is the responsibility of the passenger sitting at the front to collect fares, calculate and re-distribute correct change to the passengers. The driver seldom asks this, it is an unspoken understanding that is penance of sorts for sitting in the front. Despite the general successes of it, it ran the risk of appearing a kind of welfare project in that the public consumed the snacks, enjoyed the services of the hostess but failed to induce internal discussions (although the outcome is somewhat inconclusive). It also didn't happen for a long enough run owing to various challenges that included the taxi driver's tardiness, the performer's schedule etc.

[19] There were a few instances on the taxi assigned to Gugulective that ran from Cape Town station to Gugulethu, where the story spread amongst commuters and people would start trying to identify the taxi so that they could be part of the in transit host service which included coffee and snacks.

James Webb's *In Living Memory of What Never Happened* (FIG. 2) utilized the Langa taxi rank as a site for a sound-installation, where passers-by would hear announcements that were somewhat alarming or completely inaccessible to most. The following message was recorded in several languages, ranging from Xhosa, English, Italian to Mandarin, and broadcast over the existing speaker system: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, your attention please. You are reminded that everything is fine'. The message served to create a sense of unease and encouraged the viewer to question this suspicious reassurance. Questions such as: 'What wasn't fine before the message?' and 'is the same thing being said in other languages or is only part of the message being conveyed?' were raised in people's minds. On the practical side, ironically titled so, the project almost never ran owing to challenges around malfunctioning speakers and municipal inefficiency. Despite several meetings and assurances from the managers of this rank, the speakers kept malfunctioning and had to be repaired almost daily. The questions raised by this piece were interesting in that while most publically engaged art begins from a point of accessibility (at the very least in terms of language), this piece played on the complete obsoleteness of the message. The audience was not expected to be fluent in more than two languages, and so the ideas of access were toyed with. If one had the opportunity to listen to a few of the announcements, which were divided by long silences, one could get the impression that there were parts of the message that were not conveyed. The phrase, in and of itself is somewhat alarming, and one would most likely then listen for more information, that is, one would want to know what wasn't fine before the announcement. When the answer to this question came back in Mandarin, it would prove quite frustrating to most people and would possibly be further alarming.

As part of the *Thank You Driver* project, Beninese artist Edwige Aplogan wrote a series of newspaper articles titled *F.U.N.* (FIG. 3), whereby she explored print media and its influences on public opinion. The articles were dated with the future date of 2060 and compiled into a newspaper, becoming fictional predictions about economic and socio-political issues. The articles in the newspapers were created as site-specific installations as the issues discussed concerned South African and international news. The newspapers were dispatched via the Perspex sculpture made of a Beninese Fertility God that was meant to sit in between the driver's seat and the front passenger. The sculpture would be facing forward, with an attached protruding Perspex penis. This was a reference to the taxi rank scandal of the time where a young woman was harassed by Johannesburg taxi drivers because she was wearing a short skirt. The piece was created to invert the sexual exposedness and generate a discussion or forum for discussion around such issues. However, despite the initial agreement of the taxi driver, the taxi containing the work went missing after the first week. I located the taxi in Langa and discovered that the sculpture had been removed by the driver. I later decided to show the work in another taxi. Similarly that taxi driver removed the sculpture and disappeared. To date, the sculpture

has not been retrieved. This demonstrated the reality of the situation. This installation, idealistic in its essence explored real issues in quite undiluted ways. The piece was arguably quite confrontational and directed its criticism at the medium in which it sat. Consequently the discomfort of the driver overruled the conceptual function of the work, but on some level did exactly what it intended. Mine and the artist's most significant oversight, was not taking into account its audience and the possible conservative views of those who encounter the generously sized phallus protruding from the sculpture. To an art public, a Perspex penis would not be entirely alien and the position of the artist was perhaps based on such a public.

The *Thank You Driver* piece titled *Taxi Voices* (FIG. 4) by Isa Suarez and the New Teenagers Gospel Choir was a participatory performance with an emphasis on the transport system from young South African perspectives. The artist Isa Suarez worked with the Khayelitsha New Teenagers Gospel choir which is Cape Town based. Rehearsals were held for a two week period in Khayelitsha in the choir's rehearsal room in which two songs based on the youths aspirations, as well as a song about transport challenges, were written[20]. For each performance six choir members boarded the designated taxi at the Cape Town station and during the twenty minute trip to Khayelitsha would break into song, much to the surprise of the otherwise unsuspecting taxi passengers. In a similar vein to the performance by Gugulective, this piece was instrumental in engaging the passengers given the immediacy of the chosen medium. It also had its strengths in involving a non-art based performance team. For Isa Suarez the artist who conceptualised the piece, the significance of the work was not solely to engage with the taxi environment and its public, but to also create a platform for the choir to participate in an unconventional experience. The song-writing workshops, the performance rehearsals as well as the recording of the songs were as significant as the in-taxi performances. This project was successful in achieving a more impactful result in the long run, not only for the audience who at times recognised some of the youth, but mainly for the choir members.

In retrospect, I would liken this piece to the worldwide phenomena of a 'flash-mob'[21], in which a knowing group of people do a certain action that when done in unison alienates the passers-by. I would argue that when an individual deviates from the prescribed behavioural norm, he or she is perceived to be within a particular degree of insanity and the on-looking public tend to be regarded as the bars by which to measure the so-called rational. Of course this is somewhat of a generalisation and

[20] The songs were then recorded at Milestone Studios and aired on Bush Radio in Cape Town.
[21] The *Flash-mob* is said to be the 2003 brain child of editor and criticr Bill Rasik who held the very first as a 'social experiment' as he stated. The 'flash-mob' as defined by the Oxford dictionary (2013) is 'a public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, who perform a pointless act and then disperse again'.

can only be true in particular cases, thus I offer the example of singing alone out loud in a public mini-bus taxi. This would likely be denounced as abnormal behaviour, however, when the same action is performed by more than one person in the exact same context, the bar of sanity becomes obscured.

I will at this point return to the ideas of the flash-mob and the art performance (as discussed in this case) as multi-participant performances. Although in both instances the performers/artists are essentially performing for an audience, given that this is a passive unknowing audience, the performers/artists play both the role of the performer and their own audience. Often at the end of flash-mobs the participants (by this I refer to those who were pre-informed of the event) applaud themselves as an indication of completion and soon after, they disperse[22]. Similarly, with a public art performance the purpose of the project remains unrevealed to the unsuspecting onlooker, often only the performer and the 'art world few who were told' have any contextual insight to the piece, whilst the rest of the public is left in the dark seemingly in order to generate genuine surprise or confusion. Very seldom is an explanation offered. One could argue that the public that encounters this experience, is in fact a medium with which and to which the artist/performer communicates a particular message.

One of the more significant dangers of public art performances that do not address or intentionally utilise these factors is that they often rely on the anonymity factor and the element of surprise, which then creates a scenario where a self-constructed, insular process unfolds in public, the performer meeting a pre-defined checklist of performative gestures/actions not dissimilar to Burke's *Pentad*. Berlin-based artist Tino Sehgal, whose work has been used to coin the term 'constructed situations', works within this particular framework with a conscious and unapologetic utilising of trained performers and the interacting audiences as media or performative elements with which to act out the 'situation'. With regard to Sehgal's more static sculptural works, Lubow (2010) writes:

> The earliest works, like 'Kiss,'[FIG. 5] are silent and sculptural: a viewer encounters a piece in a museum or gallery just as if it were a marble statue. Sehgal is adamant that he is producing a work of art, not theater: unlike a performance, a Sehgal is on display for the entire time the institution is open, and the human actors are identified no more precisely than as if they were bronze or marble. (They are, however, paid.) But because the piece is formed of people, not of metal or stone, the viewer is aware that, regardless of how absorbed the models seem to be in their activity, at any moment they have the capability of turning their gaze on him — as, indeed, they periodically do in 'Kiss.

[22] Walker (2012) looks at the case study of Rasik's Mob #3 of 2003 where she writes: 'Wasik's use of language points toward the communal or community-building nature of this mob. Wasik's mob participants look across 'at one another' and his mob applauds 'itself,' acknowledging the 'we' of community created in the act of participation.'

A more recent piece that I was victim/audience/performance object to is his 2012 piece *These Associations,* held at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. As described in the *Telegraph* (Singh 2012):

> The performers walk, run, sit on the floor and chant in unison, occasionally playing what appears to be a game of tag. Members of the group break off at intervals to mingle with visitors, reciting pre-prepared lines about experiences they have had - from a walk along the Sussex coast to a surfing holiday. The effect is reminiscent of the T-Mobile flash mob adverts, or a particularly uncoordinated aerobics class.

This work unlike *Kiss* (2004), is part of the series that does not work with trained actors. In this instance people from the general public are invited to participate, generating less staged responses and levels of awkwardness. The interaction between an unsuspecting member of the public and a pre-selected member is very dissimilar to the trained performer. An obvious difference between Sehgal's work and the public performances discussed previously is that his are often within art related spaces e.g. galleries, art fairs, museums and their surrounds. Although one can still argue that the public is somewhat unsuspecting, one difference between Sehgal's work and the performances that were part of *Thank You Driver* is that his works are often void of site-specificity. Site-specific art refers to art that is conceived and created in relation to its spatial context, where the location of the work factors in its concept. James Webb's sound installation at the Langa taxi rank for example, although adapted for different sites, was conceived for a particular public space. Sehgal may orchestrate certain encounters that work within a particular space given architectural/spatial dynamics, but often as with several art objects which one would rather liken his work to, the 'constructed situations' can be re-constructed in various spaces. However, although Sehgal's work is somewhat easily adaptable, one can argue that it is not entirely un-contextualised. The museum or gallery seem to be his context and his work is always with these publics in mind. The idea of the performer as art object and working with the exhibition space and its set of practices is a quality that Sehgal's work shares with that of performance art legend Marina Abramovic[23].

Another interesting factor about Sehgal's work is its ability to immerse the viewer in an often unavoidable situation, perhaps as a result of his work seeming less theatrical and more of an unanticipated occurrence. The theatre performance automatically demands an audience, and is set up to be watched (a framework is created for an audience as well as a stage for the performer), whereas I would argue that Sehgal demands a 'situation encounterer' which then dislocates the stage in a sense. As Lubow (2010) writes:

[23] An example of this is *Imponderabilia*, 1977 by Marina Abramovic and Ulay. This was a performance where the two artists stood naked face to face in the entrance of (FIG 5B). The performance utilises the entrance of the space as its platform thus alluding to questions of accessibility and the ritual of entering an art space.

> What fascinates me about Sehgal is that working only with human clay, he can call forth thoughtful and visceral responses from people who remain unmoved by more conventional paintings and sculptures.

Sehgal's work can be likened to modern-day practices such as 'flash mobs'. Sehgal's work is experiential rather than confrontational. The viewer is immersed in an act of looking / observing but is seldom a participant. A work that utilises the public sphere in a slightly more confrontational manner is Kemang Wa Lehulere's performance *Behave or You Jump* (FIG 5B).

This piece was shot at Noord Street Taxi Rank in the Johannesburg CBD, one of the city's largest taxi hubs and an infamous site of sexual harassment of young women. Wa Lehulere writes (2013):

> Most notably there have been several cases of women getting 'taught a lesson' for wearing mini-skirts deemed to short: punishment takes the form of being violently stripped naked and then being forced to parade around the rank. In this video the artist jumps rope within the taxi rank, dressed in a roughly made skirt. The jump rope used is made from synthetic hair - a material synonymous with young women working within the city as hairdressers. A high number of these women are African immigrants, many living in South Africa illegally – as a result very few incidents of sexual assault that occur are reported to the authorities. The artist spontaneously inserted himself in the space after a much publicized incident of sexual harassment in early 2010, wearing a skirt and skipping as a way of causing discomfort both for him and for the men who occupy the space. The image of skipping alludes to girlish games, but in this instance the 'innocent maiden' is a shirtless adult man. Jumping also plays with various allusions to notions of absolute control ('I say jump, you say how high?') as well as the implied threat of violence.

The performance not only addresses heated socio-political subject matter, it also directly confronts the critiqued public: the taxi drivers who are notorious for the harrassment of women and African immigrants, as well as the on-lookers who observe this harrassment and fail to intervene[24].This performance both confused and aggravated the taxi public and Wa Lehulere was soon chased away from the scene. Owing to the exhibition experiences I have listed, it is difficult to deduce how valuable these public targeted initiatives are, and to what end they are fuseful in offering access and facilitating understanding about the arts, however focused public performances such as Wa Lehulere's are effective in addressing the relevant audience and by means of provocation, instigating a dialogue. Although marches were held in protest of the sexual harrassment of these women, taxi drivers

[24] In 2008 a young woman was attacked and stripped at the Noord Taxi Rank whilst on-lookers apparently just watched and laughed: http://mg.co.za/article/2008-02-19-outrage-over-attack-on-miniskirtwearing-woman Following this attack, in 2012 two teenage girls were similarly sexually harrassed at the same taxi rank by a group of between 50 and 60 men:
http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2012/01/03/women-in-miniskirt-attacked-at-taxi-rank

apparently responded with disdain for the marching women, calling them 'prostitutes' [25], and arguably the performance may have created more of a subtle discomfort that potentially could result in a level of reflection.

[25] The marching women are said to have worn miniskirts, some being topless and stripping in protest http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7276654.stm

CHAPTER 3: PUBLICS AND AUDIENCES

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS

It is relatively unclear what constitutes the 'general public', but simply defined, the 'general public' refers to a majority of people not from within the particular field of enquiry, in this case art, therefore deducing that specialist knowledge of a particular field exempts one from this bracket.
An audience can be defined as a group of people with prior engagement with a subject, in the case of art this is often formed from quite an insular combination of art practitioners, art students and collectors. In more popular fields it is difficult to distinguish between the 'general public' and the 'specialised audience'. When one looks at sports such as soccer for example, the audience is so large that it can be considered a general public.

It is important to examine the manner in which the public engages with art, and how art is an integral part of some cultures and economies and not others. In certain countries visual art is considered culturally significant and attendance and support for museums and galleries is comparatively larger than in South Africa. According to *The Art Newspaper's* Visitor Figures report for 2012, the top 100 Art Museum attendance figures comprise mainly of European, North and South American museums[26]. It is worth noting that there is not a single African country mentioned
on the list (despite the various categories mentioned). It is evident that art's place is more established in developed economies than it is in less stable developing economies, most likely owing to the smaller patronage and meagre governmental support. Governments of these smaller economies are already constrained by the more urgent concerns of meeting basic human living requirements, the demands of which very often cannot be met without large national debts being incurred. However, there is a significant role that art has played in the struggle for human rights and liberation throughout African history.

Protest or Resistance Art in South Africa is well known and respected and was one of the rare instances in South African history that the visual arts actively stimulated national social and political debate and political agendas. However, the term has been criticised as being too homogenising and broad in its inclusion of art from a particular socio-political period. Badsha and Light (2013: 1) write:

[26] France, America, Britain and Italy hold the top positions in attendance figures. The top ten best attended museums in the world in descending order are: Louvre, Paris (9,720,260 visitors a year); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; British Museum, London; Tate Modern, London; National Gallery, London; Vatican Museum, Vatican City; National Palace Museum, Taipei; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

> Much of the art produced during Apartheid that in some way was critical of the state's racial, cultural and or political polices was labelled as either 'Protest' or 'Resistance Art'. This term has been argued over by many commentators, historians and critics, but there is very little agreement on the definition of the term. What is Resistance art? Were there artists who supported the status quo and produced work that reflected the government's apartheid policy? There was a school of thought that argued that their work had no reference to any social message but followed the dictum art for art's sake. The rewriting of our [South African] history and of art history in this case requires a critical understanding of the evolution and development of artistic movements. It also requires us to look at the subjective factors that serve as the key to the production of a particular or body of work and to understand in what circumstances the work was exhibited and circulated if at all.

This movement was in direct response to the racially oppressive socio-political issues of the apartheid era in the country. Freedom of speech and democracy were absent and people were forced to communicate political messages discreetly and often anonymously. Artist such as Thami Mnyele, Gavin Jantjies, Willie Bester, Sam Nhlengethwa, Jane Alexander and Norman Catherine are some of the most notable art figures that contributed towards the art of this era. The urgency with which a visual representation demonstrated the plight of the South African people cannot be disputed.

However, post-1994, with the exception of national cartoonists such as Zapiro, it is a rarity to see a work of art enter broader public discussion. The now infamous painting *The Spear*, 2011 (FIG 6) by South African artist Brett Murray rose to international fame owing to the painting's direct criticism of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma. What then is the problem with contemporary South African Art? Given the intellectual levels of debate that were often disguised in satirical visual representations in art moments such as Protest Art, why then have South African publics not developed their visual literacy or is there a particular rejection of this notion? What are the differences between the then accessible, widely distributed works of art and 21st century contemporary art? In Protest Art, visual representations offered a sense of urgency in their conveying of ideas. It had an immediate resonance and literalness which, although stemming from conceptual roots, did not immerse itself in swollen-worded discourse from which contemporary art suffers today. However, I would point out that I am in no way exalting literalness nor am I proposing that the 'watering down' of concepts is a positive practice; in fact I aim to do the contrary in positioning simplicity as a useful tool for engaging in complex issues. Satire became the weapon through which visual activists of the time communicated complex socio-political issues and Protest Art, although relatable to several publics, was not simply literal. Art that is too literal does nothing beyond being tautological. It is important that art not only stimulates conversation, but also one's imagination. The multiplicities of associations possible in the reading of a particular artwork are the core of its excitement. If the artist painted a ball because it is a ball, the curator curated that very ball because it is a ball, and the audience saw nothing more than a

ball, we'd be wasting a lot of time and achieving nothing. It is imperative that the processes of art making, curating, spectatorship and interpretation are in dialogue if art is to have a socio-political relevance. The artist conceptualises and creates the artwork, the curator has the task of curating this artwork within a conceptual framework and the public is tasked with consuming this production and engaging in a dialogue. It seems, however, that with the exception of the curator-artist art practitioner-audience, the process seldom continues to the dialogue stage within a broader South African public. It is important to question these roles and how they function in order to understand where the breakdown in the chain occurs. The communication between artist / art-object and curator / exhibition is relatively seamless, however the line of communication between the curator / exhibition and the 'general public' is often disjointed. One could pose the following questions: What is the role of curating in facilitating understanding? What is it that the general public wants in order to experience art in a non-intimidating and accessible way? Is it possible to offer general insight without the curator's subjective opinion being interpreted as factual? According to Groys (2007: 47 -48):

> According to the tradition of modern art, an image must speak for itself; it must immediately convince the spectator, standing in silent contemplation, of its own value. The condition in which the work is exhibited should be reduced to white walls and good lighting. Theoretical and narrative babble must stop. Even affirmative discourse and a favourable display are regarded as distorting the message of the artwork itself. So modern artists began to hate and condemn curators, because the curators never could completely rid themselves of their iconoclastic heritage…The public wishes to be confronted directly with individual artworks and exposed to their unmediated impact. It steadfastly believes in the autonomous meaning of the individual artwork, which is supposedly being manifested in front of its eyes. The curator's every mediation is suspect: he is seen as someone standing between the artwork and the viewer, insidiously manipulating the viewer's perception with the intent of disempowering the public. That's why, for the general public, the art market is more enjoyable than any museum. Artworks circulating on the market are singled out, decontextualized, uncurated – so they get the apparently unadulterated chance to demonstrate their inherent value.

This however, I would argue, is based on a perception of a Western public. In South Africa where curators are few and far between, the field is really only opening up owing to the introduction of curatorial programmes in some universities as well as globalisation which over the years has exposed South African art practitioners to several curatorial opportunities[27]. In societies that have experienced an over-saturation of mediation, Groys's statement would resonate. Unlike the Western model on which his idea is based, the South African public has yet to assimilate contemporary art as an integral

[27] Examples of this are Independent Curators International's Curatorial Intensive (ICI), the Berlin Biennale's Curatorial program, as well as Apexart's Franchise program. Such programmes offer young curators from anywhere in the world the opportunity to interact with well-known industry practitioners and are often funded. In the case of Apexart's program, preference is given to curatorial projects stemming from developing countries, and more so limited to places with small populations.

part of society. Museum and gallery attendance has first to reach a significant enough number of people in order for consideration on mediation to become a factor. In fact, I would argue that what he later goes on to say is more resonant with a South African context:

> A work of art can't in fact present itself by virtue of its own definition and force the viewer into contemplation – artworks lack vitality, energy and health. They seem to be genuinely sick and helpless; a spectator has to be led to the artwork, as hospital workers might take a visitor to see a bedridden patient. It is no coincidence that the word 'curator' is etymologically related to 'cure.' Curating is curing. The process of curating cures the image's powerlessness, its incapacity to present itself. The artwork needs external help; it needs an exhibition and a curator to become visible (Groys 2007: 48-49).

Groys, perhaps, overstates things a little bit. One could argue that a work of art indeed cannot present itself, however there are several un-curated exhibitions in which art is seen and not mediated by curatorial texts and ideologies. This however, would be a somewhat problematic statement. Even exhibitions where the curator is anonymous or insignificant are still visual representations of particular decisions made by an individual or individuals. Even 'noncurating' is curating. The pertinent question becomes how the curator consciously uses this authority to pose questions and create dialogue as opposed to using an exhibition to communicate his or her personal perspectives. A successful exhibition brings to the fore particular ideas not as finite concrete concepts but rather open-ended sparks for dialogue. Wells (2007:31-32) puts it eloquently:

> Audience is a problematic notion. We can engage psychoanalytically and deconstructively with spectatorship processes, or we can follow Bourdieu into sociological analysis, but neither tells us much about what actually happens as individuals explore and respond to an exhibition…In many respects, viewers lie beyond curatorial control. In producing catalogue essays or exhibition statements, we assume that viewers have interests coinciding with that of the curator...Of course they may not… Spectators forge an independent sense of an exhibition; they bring their own subjectivity, desires, history and cultural experiences into play.

SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLICS AND HOW THEY SEE ART

Based on recent statistics taken by Business and Arts South Africa (BASA: 2011),
it is evident that the majority of the South African public does not have an understanding of the contemporary arts and therefore seldom engages when given the opportunity. Although research showed that in 2011, 35% of South African adults were interested in Sculpture, Painting and Photography (12% being passionate), 59 - 62% said they didn't attended art exhibitions at all. Furthermore, defining fine art within those three categories excludes some of the most contemporary media that dominates the field, such as video, performance and installation art. Whether this reveals

an omission on the part of the statistician or a lack of understanding on the part of the public, I cannot say, however the report further shows that respondents understand the term 'Arts' as falling within the two limited categories of Music and Painting. Only between 2% and 4% considered photography as a form of art, which once again exhibits a lack of exposure. A 2010 research report conducted for the Ministry of Arts and Culture (Gaylard 2010:11), revealed that 'only 1.2 million South Africans of ALL ages (2% of the total population of the country) visit … [public and private art museums, galleries] and collections annually, with the likelihood of some duplication in these visitor numbers'.

A further concern is the lack of definition of the word 'culture'. When asked what they understood by the term 'culture' the majority of respondents listed traditions, religion, music[28] and a very small percentage included art. Perhaps this is a result of the lack of clarity in the term 'Arts and Culture'. The 'and' marks an apparent difference between the two terms, as one similarly finds in Sports AND Recreation, in which one terms seems to be exclusive of the other. People see the two as distinctly unrelated, with culture being perceived as something that relates more to ethnicity and essentialised customs and arts describing drawing and other 'hobbies'.

> They both [Western donor agencies and African governments] argue that art and culture should be 'relevant'. But their definition of 'relevance' is thin and functionalist. In their eyes, good and 'relevant' art and culture is art and culture that is colonized by the imperative of 'development'. 'Development' itself is conceived in the narrowest of terms, in purely materialistic terms. They both think that 'to develop art and culture' (sic) is exactly the same as 'to develop sustainable agriculture' (Mbembe 2009)

Based on the findings of these two reports, in order to cultivate a public interest in the arts, the major challenges lay in accessibility, education and state funding. It is important to offer arts education in schools, as well as active arts programming within community arts centres in order to cater to those living out of reach of the major arts centres. The current inaccessibility and general negligence of community centres, fuels the belief that art is elitist and further estranges the public. In truth, as things currently stand, art in South Africa is in fact elitist and available to those within a certain sector of privilege. Despite the somewhat low entrance fares at museums, and the central location of several galleries and museums in the big metropolises[29], without any knowledge of the field, the cultivation of interest and appropriate incentives, it is unlikely that art in South Africa will spread its current scope.

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[28] When analysed by race, it is interesting to note that amongst Black people, traditions were the highest at 26%, followed by traditional dancing (14%), beliefs (11%) and customs (8%) and not anywhere did art feature; White people listed music (13%), different races (12%), dancing (11%), traditions (9%) with art halfway down the list at 4%; Coloured/Asians had traditions (22%), religion (21%), music (10%) and dancing (8%) with the arts only coming in at 3%.

[29] Johannesburg Art Gallery is located right in the centre of the city directly opposite Noord Taxi Rank, the main taxi rank in Johannesburg.

However, this proposed development is not attainable without financial support and proper infrastructure which is drastically lacking within the country. The level at which South African art is flourishing on an international platform is comparable to the low level of local support, and even further away from the levels of support given to developed countries by their governments. In developed countries, national and university museums for example, are often the heart of tourism and therefore regarded national treasures to which millions, sometimes billions, are invested by governments. These funds are directed at the overall maintenance of the museums but also largely at exhibition programming and purchasing of significant artworks from around the world thus growing the institution's collection. Famous museums such as France's Louvre, have some of the largest attendance figures in the world owing partly to the cultural heritage of the buildings and most significantly to iconic historical artworks[30] as well as significant contemporary acquisitions. The sustainability of a handful of commercial galleries in South Africa, demonstrates a particular support that comes partially from local collectors and largely from international collectors. The small pool of local collectors that exist are predominantly comprised of White middle class people. The Black elite that collect art are few and far between, mainly coming from creative backgrounds. When one looks at large institutions such as the Tate in London which has significantly larger acquisitions and exhibition budgets in comparison to the Iziko South African National Gallery (which is one of South Africa's main museums), one is able to identify the disparities caused by poor funding, and relatively minor government support. According to a report compiled by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), the Iziko South African National Gallery had an acquisitions budget of R700 000 in 2009 (2011:105). Comparatively, Tate had a budget of approximately R1.1 billion in the same year. As Tate's website indicates:

> Tate… spends around £1 million of its general funds each year on purchasing acquisitions and their related costs. This sum is significantly increased as a result of grants from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Art Fund. Other funds for acquisitions are raised by Tate funding groups such as the Members, - the Patrons and the American Patrons of Tate and its sub-committees... Tate also receives many important acquisitions by gift or bequest from collectors and artists, as well as works of art accepted by the Government in lieu of inheritance tax. In the financial year to March 2011, for example, the total value of purchases was £3.9 million. Of the £3.9 million, £3.4 million came from charitable funds connected to the Tate and individuals, and £0.5 million from Tate's general funds.

[30] Some of these include Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*

Over the past few years, the South African government has slowly began researching and developing a larger funding program for the arts[31], and although efforts are seemingly being made, they have been rife with controversy. An example of this is South Africa's participation in the 2011 Venice Biennale, which had the local arts community in an uproar. Fair and transparent procedures for selection of a commissioner, a curator and participating artists were not followed and allegations about the misappropriation of large amounts of public funding were made. Following the large public outcry, 2013 saw a public call for applications to curate the pavilion. However transparent the gesture seemed, the call was sent out only 19 days before the closing date, not allowing appropriate time for the development of detailed proposals. Largely, I would argue, one of the primary reasons for the lack of government funding is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the visual arts. Government officials occupying important roles in the Ministry of Arts and Culture and other cultural funding bodies are almost never from arts backgrounds and as Martin (2007:39) points out:

> Most radical events may happen within institutions…This is sometimes easier than convincing a sponsor to produce a totally radical event in art. In this case the sponsor itself must have already been convinced about the trends of contemporary art and must be familiar to the contemporary art world.

[31] The Research report mentioned above was funded by the department in order to gain a better understanding of the current state of the arts in South Africa as well as develop methods for a way forward.

CHAPTER 4: *PROTECTED BY THEORY*[32]

In this chapter I will not argue for art's potential to better societies, nor will I speak of it as an aid to development as this cannot easily be determined and in fact would be rather problematic, for as Mbembe (2009) points out, 'art cannot be seen as a remedy to an ailment'. However, I argue that art offers the potential for expression and acts as a catalyst for thought and dialogue. Although contemporary artists are sourcing from South African and international socio-political issues and the level of critical engagement is often undisputable, the manner in which these works are discussed and written about and the limitations of where and to whom they are presented, do not aid larger public engagement and access to the arts. Access to academic forums of discussion such as symposia is often limited, not only by the significantly high participation fees[33], but also by the often disconcerting over-intellectual jargon that only complicates issues that could most likely be put simply.

As Allara (2009) points out,

> critical theory is so well articulated and taught in universities in South Africa that, as in the West since the 1980s, much of creative art production dutifully illustrates theory, to its own detriment. Critical theory is neither a panacea nor a bogeyman. It is only problematic when teamed with commercialism and used by artists as a sign for a hip product.

Although this 'hipness' applies to only certain universities, and to some extent is quite subjective, it can be noted that art students are often prone to utilising theoretical discourse in order to justify artworks without having an actual understanding of these. An artwork that broaches this subject is Jonathan Cane and Zen Marie's video *Foucault's Children*, 2009 (FIG 6B) in which a set of students are asked to define some Foucaultian ideas such as 'discourse'. The resulting video depicts the students, who seem to have recently read Foucault, attempt to define some core terms. The attempts are humorous and at times quite intentionally evasive.

Contrary to the idea of an artwork generating discussion, several artists are inverting the model and creating works that are visual representations of theory, or using theory to add meaning to works. The result is what one can consider 'a picture story' or in the case of the latter a hollow shell sheathed by academia. Both are seldom successful, but often times the artists get away with it. Avant Car Guard, a Johannesburg based collective comprising Zander Blom, Jan-Henri Booyens and Michael MacGarry, received attention from the art world in 2007 owing to their satirically calling out of art world

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[32] Title relates to an artwork by the same name by Avant Car Guard (FIG 7).

[33] The annual Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism (JWTC) hosted by Wits University charges between 'R2000 - R4000 (depending on income) for professors and advanced graduate students from South Africa.' - http://jwtc.org.za/the_workshop/practical_info_and_fees_2.htm

'pretenders'. An artwork of theirs that accurately depicts this critique, somewhat satirically, is *Protected by Theory*, 2007 (FIG 7). The image depicts the members of the collective dressed in Dada-esque costumes made of pages from art history books, surrounded by art references including a reproduction of a Renaissance sculpture and several easels. The intentional literalness here, being the signature trademark of the collective, is used to poke fun at the very thing it illustrates: the use of theory, empty signifiers and academic discourse to justify art.

THE GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN ART JOKE

Why such a lack of interest in the visual arts in South Africa? As mentioned before, art is often seen as elitist. I would propose that together with this perceived elitism, quite simply, the audience seldom 'gets it'. Very often the more conceptual a work of art, the more explanation would be necessary, but ironically the explanation is very often as abstract as the work. There is a frustration induced by wordy conceptual statements that often serve only to make the reader feel inadequate, the resulting effect being disinterest or bewilderment or as described by a Black lawyer friend of mine who often accompanies me to exhibition openings, 'It feels as though there's a joke being played and I very well could be the butt of it'. I'd like to elaborate on this idea of the joke as it implies that the viewer's confusion is for someone's amusement. It is an accepted practice in the gallery space for people not to ask for information. The brave few who request an explanation are very seldom from the creative sector, and after being offered one very often leave unconvinced. Those who have affiliations with some creative industry or other, often obediently take the sheet of conceptual verbosity and ask no questions. Of course it is not fair to assume that no one ever understands anything, however, as revealed by responses from numerous art-outsiders[34], I think it beckons at the very least a mention. Borja-Villel (2004:21) describes the methodologies used by the MoMA in New York in the eighties:

> As countless specialists have observed, its narratives were historicist in nature…the way in which these narratives were transmitted to the public was based on transparency and immediacy. It could not be otherwise, since the spectator was faced with immanent truths. If we were capable of removing everything that could obstruct our view, if we were to present art with total transparency and without interference, the significance of it, its *reality*, would be apprehended automatically by the spectator, who would then become a passive factor. The white cube or, rather, the idea of it, was the appropriate architecture for this type of work, and a form of pedagogy founded on access was its educational method.

The absence of information or rather absence of transparency and clarity is what is addressed in Donna Kukama's performance at the exhibition closing of *Us*, curated by Bettina Malcomess and Simon Njami. The performance, *1000 Ways of Being: I'm absolutely ending this* (2010) denotes what its title

[34] Based on having worked at a commercial gallery in Johannesburg for three years, responses have been derived from gallery visitors.

suggests: at the closing event at the Iziko South African National Gallery, Kukama offered a guide through the exhibition. She was dressed as one would imagine a staff member of a museum (Black attire and name tag in tow) and pushed a trolley equipped with a sound system and several smaller radios as well as a white board and marker. To the great frustration of several audience members, as she approached each work and turned to the public to address them, she would by means of a whistle worn around her neck, offer a whistled explanation. The radios on the trolley implied some sort of transmission and seemed to allude to a message that was to come, which of course never came. One outraged senior citizen remarked 'what is the meaning of this?' to which Kukama responded in a set of more animated whistles. Another work of Kukama's , performed as part of the *Dada South?*[35] opening, is titled *The Great South African Art Queue of 2009* (FIG 8). Here Kukama, by means of a megaphone, asked people to queue outside the entrance of the South African National Gallery. Despite the fact that the show had in fact already opened, people unquestioningly queued for no particular reason. The queue grew and grew until the point where someone questioned the queuing and broke the chain, at which point the queue largely dispersed. I view this exercise in futility as a means to address the assumptions inherent within art society, the unchallenged form of passive consumption that is often dealt to an art public is in question here. The piece references the Dadaists principles of absurdity, chance and intuition, and within the current contemporary frame-work such performance strategies have been nick-named 'art-pranking'[36]. The audience of a public performance that does not source from conventional understandings of performance (i.e. the absence of the stage or a similar spatial demarcation and other signifiers) is often kept in the dark. This type of performance relies on the limited knowledge of its public as it is in a sense set up to challenge its very nature. The unknowing members of the public who patiently queued are the critiqued subjects of the performer's message, 'the butt of the joke' in much the same vein that reality comedy television shows such as America's *Candid Camera* function. In the case of TV show *Candid Camera,* the aim is to trick members of the general public into observing, doing or partaking in something ludicrous for the entertainment of the presenter and the show's viewers. I would argue that there are three roles that one can identify: that of the entertainer (presenter/actors engaged to act out the fictional scenario), the entertainment (the unsuspecting member of the public and the gesture performed) and the entertained (the viewers watching the spectacle on television). These scenes usually ended in the joke being revealed to the public member in question. In the case of 'art-pranks' the dynamics shift slightly but not entirely. The performer seeks to convey a particular message, and utilises the public to do so. In this instance the

[35] The exhibition was curated by Roger Van Wyk and Kathryn Smith, and I was curatorial assistant and was also asked to curate the performance programme for the show which included this performance by Donna Kukama.
[36] The term art prank has been cited numerous times in the past few decades, mainly as a result of the rise of this form of art. Based on a recent list in the Huffington Post titled *The 10 Best Art Pranks in History*, the first great art pranks is identified as Dadaist Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917 FIG 9.

roles can be distinguished as follows: the entertainer being the artist and the entertainment, the unsuspecting members of the public. It is less clear who the entertained would be, although I would argue that the 'art-prankster' seeks to address the 'knowing' art public. Those who would be watching, it is seldom that a contemporary art public is entirely fooled by such situations. In fact, as illustrated by the reaction of some onlookers that witnessed a man plunge to his death from a balcony at the Tate Modern and thought it was a 'staged flash mob thing and took pictures[37]', the expectation is that performances can be as convincing as reality and one is constantly in fear of getting caught out. One of the most renowned post-Dadaist pranksters of our time is Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan who gained great acclaim for keeping the art world on its toes by his dismissive attitude to authority and accepted norms of behaviour[38], some of his most notorious antics including *Another Fucking Readymade* (1996) which was the theft of an artist's entire exhibition (FIG 10); *Turisti,* his 1997 installation at the Venice Biennale comprised 200 stuffed pigeons that were placed on the air-conditioning pipes on the ceiling (FIG 11); *Untitled* 1991 which is the police report of a stolen invisible artwork; or his 1993 stunt at the Venice Biennale where he rented out the space allocated to him to a perfume company for their advertising.

THE LANGUAGE OF ART AND CURATING

Having assessed some of the reasons for general public disinterest in the arts, it is evident that one of the key problems lies in communication. Access can only really be facilitated through communication and this relies fundamentally on language. It is important to address the issues of language before any remedy can be found. One could start by asking the following questions: What is the current language used within South African contemporary art discourse? In what way can the language that is used in art related communication be simplified? Can simplicity be considered a valid curatorial strategy for cultivating broader audiences? How can simplicity be used by an artist, and how can it be used by a curator?

Arts writing and theory is really the spokesperson for the visual arts. It often precedes the artwork or exhibition, with press releases often being the only shot at enticing an audience, and becomes the after-life of it as well – the conceptual residue if you might. It is therefore curious to note that several press releases not only baffle, but often offer less information about the show than the supporting imagery. As Szántó (2007: 75 – 76) writes on successful curating and editing:

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[37] This was mentioned in an article in the Daily Mail as comments taken from tweets on the event: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2178598/Tate-Modern-suicide-Man-plunges-death-100ft-high-private-members-balcony.html

[38] Cattelan is known for repeatedly proclaiming on several occasions that he is a kleptomaniac of ideas and artworks.

> Jargon-besotted writing is indelibly linked to fuzzy curating, and both seem to resist all attempts to find a cure…Most art writing is commissioned directly from writers and rarely put to the test of a popular readership. Art, to be sure, deserves the support of complex ideas. But the tolerance for gobbled-gook in today's art world is stultifying.

The art of 'academic fogging' is not an unskilled one. When one finally deciphers the cryptic clouding with which most art texts are veiled, it is apparent that great thought and verbosity has been applied. After all it is the work of a magician to make something out of nothing. It requires a jargon-based vocabulary broad enough to fool an informed and intelligent art audience as well as academic substance with which to weight it.

As curating in South Africa has been and continues to be loosely defined and as pointed out before, not very many opportunities for curatorial training are available, aspiring curators from within the country and neighbouring surrounds are forced to resort to a 'learning on the job'. Galleries and Museum exhibitions become classrooms for the aspiring curator and often the mechanisms used become fundamentals of the self-taught set of curatorial principles. As a rule of thumb, artist statements or some sort of exhibition text accompany exhibitions and very often these are 'smartened-up' with superfluous adjectives so as to seem more authoritative or meet the academic checklist. Szántó (2007: 75 – 76) attributes 'academic fogging' to two things:

> Intellectual intimidation has something to do with it, but this epidemic of incomprehensibility is also linked, oddly enough, to the commercialization of art. Astronomical prices demand a smokescreen of 'theory' around objects whose monetary value has not material basis in objective reality.

By virtue of what he says, it would seem that the commercial gallery is the ultimate culprit. If the need to use pretentious texts is to give artworks particular monetary value, then this academic fogging would be less encountered in the public, as well as independent sectors, which are less commercially driven. However, although commercial galleries fall victim of this as well, it seems that the reasoning behind the smoke-screen is of a greater scope. Aspiring artists often go out into the world with the knowledge that complexity is indicative of thought and conceptualisation and utilise their word-smith skills to clobber together wordy excuses for what sometimes are poor artworks. Of course as Szántó points out, art should not be denied complex ideas, but I would argue that the use of big words to conceal otherwise thin concepts is a different matter. Szántó (2007: 76) defines the inclination to verbosity as ' the fear of having nothing to say.' Havens (1953:3) summarises some of the virtues of simplicity as discussed by critics over time:

> Simplicity, it would seem, is a simple matter... In the eighteenth century, critics, essayists, and poets were constantly referring to it as the supreme excellence in

> almost every field, the 'open sesame' to every door, whether of conduct, thought, taste, or artistic production. 'The best and truest ornament of most things in life,' Swift called it… Lord Kames declared, 'The best artists... have in all ages been governed by a taste for Simplicity,' and Horace Walpole said, 'Taste...cannot exist without Simplicity.' Joseph Warton went even further, maintaining 'Simplicity is with justice esteemed a supreme excellence in all the performances of art.'

In scientific theory, simplicity is associated with texts dating as far back as *Ockham's Razor* (also known as the principle of parsimony) in the 14th century, which states that theories should not multiply entities beyond necessity (Barnes 1975:354). Barnes describes what he refers to as the 'anti-quantity theory' in which the principle of parsimony urges that theorists utilise as few theoretical components as possible in explaining phenomena. He goes on to define a further branch of this, 'anti-superfluity theory', which denounces the inclusion of unnecessary components to explain theories (Barnes 1975).

It can be argued that contemporary art (art making, curating and theorising) suffers from this very superfluity by disregarding simplicity as a valid and potentially ground breaking tool for communication and engagement. In art, abstraction of thought and theory are at times instrumental to the artwork, and the transparency of this conceptualisation is assumed to weaken its purpose. There is an element of mystery that seems to be necessary in order to preserve a certain position above 'the masses'. Such art is often valued as good art, giving rise to the charge of elitism. This thesis and curatorial project critiques the art world's fear of simplicity (Virilio 2003), and questions the role of power in the process of curating—particularly the curator's power to deliberately frame art as inaccessible (Graham 2010; Greenberg et al 1996; Krysa 2006; Misiano 2009; Orbist 2011; Ruchel-Stockmans 2008; Rugg and Sedgwick 2007). Further, it considers the importance of art and art exhibitions to be accessible to a South African audience (Marschall 2001).

Simplicity, however, does not necessarily mean 'easy', and the concept of simplicity is ironically not quite as one-dimensional as one may expect. This raises the question: If explanations on art and curating are simplified, do exhibitions then become more accessible? Havens (1953:11) humorously summarises simplicity's multiplicities as follows:

> …even in the eighteenth century Simplicity was not simple…it was a term of many meanings…Aaron Hill distinguishes no less than ten of these meanings: the true Simplicity, which is natural and elegant, the creeping Simplicity of a louse... the skipping Simplicity of a flea… the stubborn Simplicity of the ass... the innocent Simplicity of the sheep; the strong one of the ox; the martial, of the horse; and to go higher up… the terrible Simplicity of the panther; the majestic, of the lion; and the soaring Simplicity of the eagle.

David Carrier (2007: 87) reiterates this when he says

> If I could wave a wand and change in just one way their [curators'] practice, I would seek more accessible catalog essays…these publications tend to fall into two categories…elaborate footnoted essays, experts debating before their graduate students. [sic] And displays of contemporary art employ inaccessible theorizing. Present-day academic art writing tends to be theory-bound, in ways that make it determinedly user-unfriendly…Contemporary art needs to be made as accessible as possible.

FEATURING SIMPLICITY AS AN IRRATIONAL FEAR

Featuring Simplicity As An Irrational Fear was a performance-based installation that I curated at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town in 2010. Through an unfolding email dialogue between myself and the artists a multitude of characters discovered in the excavation of 'simplicity' were addressed and re-interpreted to create a triangle of responses from three performance artists: Nathalie Bikoro, Donna Kukama and Nástio Mosquito. The exhibition was curated at the start of my MFA research and the very first questions I had about simplicity became the activators of the dialogue. I had become lost in my own theories and was spinning myself into a web of overtly complex ideas. The afore-mentioned idea of the excavation of simplicity refers to the idea that simplicity is a failed old concept, but also alludes to my circular process of discovery and rejection of the idea. For the project, I began by introducing my struggle with the concept. I posed the curatorial invitation as the beginning of a three-way dialogue. At the time, the three artists had never met and as they would not physically be there for the exhibition, I wished to create as much of a curatorial dialogue as possible. The physical absence of the three performance artists in the performance space created a deliberate rift between time and space. The opening night hosted the three performances via Skype, creating a cyber-space connection between Cape Town, London, Durban and Angola. The email correspondence conversations were then transcribed onto a blog, which served as residue post-exhibition as well as a forum for discussion on simplicity (www.fearofsimplicity.blogspot.com).

In the work, *Autopsy* (FIG 21), Gabonese artist Nathalie Bikoro utilized games of description to explore the simplicity theory that states that the simplest description is most likely to be true. South African performance artist Donna Kukama's *1000 Ways of Being (Opening Speech)* (FIG 22) played with spatial dynamics through the delivery of an opening speech composed from fragments of previous private conversations, current TV shows, literature, magazines, philosophy and fashion. *Untitled (The Fisherman and The Soldier)* by Angolan artist Nástio Mosquito was a story-telling performance (FIG 23), in which the artist delivered one of two choices of a story to an individual at a time.

A Re Fanon

Another project that was based around the ideas of simplicity in language is *A Re Fanon*, an intervention I curated in collaboration with Mohau Modisakeng in 2010. The title *A re Fanon*, simply

means 'He/she said Fanon' in Setswana/ Sesotho. This curatorial installation consisted of a blackboard, chalk, a duster and a Frantz Fanon (1952) quote written on the board:

> I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.

The project questioned the self-marginalization of art discourse from the broader spectrum of social language through employing content-blurring mechanisms such as circumlocution and quotation. The blackboard represented a platform for the invention, teaching, learning and erasure of language, and we invited several members from the art community to contribute by way of play, thoughts, anecdotes and mind-sketches placed directly onto the blackboard. As such, a new format of conversations on art was created through active participation in relation to discourse, processes of theorizing and issues of accessibility. One of the main challenges of translating some of the ideas about simplicity and accessibility into visual form, is finding the language and methodologies to do so. It is difficult to criticize curatorial language and inaccessibility whilst using the very curatorial language in question and addressing its selected public.

I will briefly mention an exhibition that I conceived, that may or may not be realised in some form or other titled 'Neko-neko: Indonesian for 'one who has a creative idea which only makes things worse.' This exhibition investigates the failures of language as a key communicator for the otherwise inexplicable in art. It is based on an exploration of Adam Jacot de Boinot's *The Meaning of Tingo* (2005), which is a dictionary of words that exist only in certain languages, but at times define concepts that are arguably 'universal'. Language acts as a divisive factor, or one of unification to those where it is common, and I argue that we can relate to several commonalities that often transcend the available vocabulary. This exhibition would have explored the need to express that which cannot be communicated in any conventional form, but which exists, and it raises questions about the accessibility of such art and the role of the curator in communicating with art audiences.
Based on my previous assertions, I pose a set of questions. If the terminology with which we define the curatorial practice in South Africa is in inverted commas and stems from Western ideas and methodologies, can notions such as 'curating' truly be contextualized and owned? Are we to assume that there is some South African curatorial and artistic realm that can exist despite its socio-political landscape? Can we look at how curatorial practice can aid understanding?

CHAPTER 5: ART AND SIMPLICITY – ENGAGING A PUBLIC OUTSIDE AN ART CONTEXT

CURATORIAL PROJECT: *CONVERSATIONS AT MORIJA*

I have chosen Morija Museum and Archives, Morija, Lesotho as the site for my final curatorial project owing in part to the fact that Lesotho is entirely surrounded by South Africa, and yet has managed to preserve a strong culture and identity irrespective. The resources of the country are very limited, and despite the strength of culture there are no creative spaces (galleries, project spaces etc) available to artists. There is no national arts funding body, and so the country is seemingly infertile for most creative ventures, with aspiring artists and curators often having to seek their training and experience from outside the country's borders. Being a diasporic Mosotho myself, I grew up in the curious position of dislocation, a creative exile of sorts. As the country did not offer any art courses at tertiary level and a rather limited programme at secondary schools, I was sent to boarding school in South Africa early on and completed my undergraduate degree in Fine Art at a South African University. Despite my emotional connection with the country, I will most likely never be able to sustain my profession from within its borders and therefore have been forced to operate remotely. As part of the 2012 Mohlomi Memorial Lecture, Dr Njabulo Ndebele (2012: 9) said:

> Lesotho's survival may have much to do with how much Basotho can succeed in working with the capacity to travel far and exercise influence distantly while remaining geographically grounded and surrounded. Being grounded and surrounded ought not to limit the field of options for resourcefulness and for maintaining the integrity of statehood.

Morija Museum and Archives (FIG 24) is the home of the Basotho historical archives. The Museum is situated in the small town of Morija which was founded in 1833. The town is fondly referred to as *Selibeng Sa Thuto* (the well of knowledge) owing to the museum as well as the establishment of the Morija Printing Works in 1861 Morija Printing Works was founded by Adolphe Mabille, a French Missionary in 1861. The press is the country's oldest and to date has published over 50 books in more than 50 languages. *Leselinyane La Lesotho* (The Little Light of Lesotho) newspaper, which is one of the oldest newspapers on the African continent, is printed at Morija Printing Works, the very first issue dating back to 1863. Among its many celebrated authors is Thomas Mofolo who is often recognized as the first African to publish a novel[39].

[39] This fact is not confirmed. Mofolo's first novel was published in Morija in 1907. It has been verified that he wrote the first book to be published in Sesotho.

The Basotho nation was formed under the leadership of King Moshoeshoe I during the late eighteenth century after a period of wars called the *Lifaqane* which define a series of 'tribal' battles that resulted in the forming of nations from varying socio-linguistic groups e.g. Nguni, San, Griqua amongst others. 'Moshoeshoe invited 'teachers of peace' (French missionaries) to join this nation-building exercise in 1833, leading to the establishment of Morija and a complex on-going process of adaptation and creativity' (Morija Museum and Archives 2010:7). During this period, Morija was seen as the most progressive part of the country owing to the schools set up by the missionaries and that the first church in the country was built in Morija. Although Moshoeshoe himself never became a Christian, he sought to apply Christian principles in the founding of the nation and as a result, Lesotho is still a Christian state.

The Museum (FIG. 25) was formally established in 1956 by French missionaries from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in response to a growing demand for a space to archive objects.

> The church authorised François and Paul Ellenberger to combine their recent geological and palæontological discoveries with the older collection that had already been on display for a couple of decades in the church offices in Morija, that is, the cultural and historical artefacts of the Dieterlen family (collected from the 1870s to 1940s). Thus, Lesotho's first formal museum was established at Morija after advice from the Regent, Queen 'Mantšebo Seeiso, who declared that as the historical centre of modern(Morija Museum and Archives Strategic plan 2010: 7) education in Lesotho, it was the most suitable site. Thus, the various collections were joined together and displayed in one unused classroom at the English Medium School. It was believed that additional 'sections' of the Basutoland Museum would be established by other authorities at Maseru and Thaba- Bosiu (and perhaps elsewhere as well), although this dream failed to materialise during that era.

The museum remains the sole archive of the country's history as well as the national museum of art and history. As such the programme of the museum has been focused on education, music, and literature which stems from Morija's literary and musical heritage[40]. The museum is currently run by a board that is elected by the church. This results in a relatively conservative programming and a sluggishness in terms of progress. The Museum staff including the curator has relatively little power in the decisions made about the museum. The primary funding for the museum is derived from church coffers and subsidised by the Government[41]

[40] JP Mohapeloa**,** an employee of Morija Printing Works, became Lesotho's greatest composer. His choral music is performed across Southern Africa. Like Mofolo, his compositions both preserve and transform the natural sounds, cadences and rhythms of Lesotho in an evolving harmony that is both ancient and contemporary, and always open to new interpretation.

[41] The museum employs 11 staff members, half of which are permanent. The government provides salaries not much higher than the minimum wage for museum staff. In 2013 with the blanket increase of salaries for all civil servants, the museum staff was told that they would not be included in the pay increases.

The chosen site for my curatorial project in is Maeder House (FIG 25), which is the oldest recorded building in Lesotho. Dating back to 1843 the building was erected by one of the first French Missionaries François Maeder. Run by resident artist Patrick Rorke, the museum currently uses the building as an exhibition space and craft shop for ceramics and paintings made by the local community. The spaces surrounding Maeder House are: 'Linotsing' a pottery and craft workshop where Rorke runs several training and mentoring programme with local artists and scholars and Morija Print Works.

The annual Morija Arts and Culture festival runs over a period of two weeks and is hosted by Morija Museum. The first week has a particular focus on education, with a school's programme including dance, theatre, traditional instruments and poetry competitions, literary events, creative workshops and the Mohlomi memorial lecture. The second week consists of a series of small exhibitions by local artists, film screenings and fashion shows, ending in a series of concerts the main event being the Jazz concert on the Saturday.

The Museum holds the national arts and culture festival annually on its premises. Contrary to what its name and programme incites, and the attempts made by the festival organisers, the festival has a strong focus on music and is nationally recognised for its superstar line-up. The festival has shown renowned African musical talents such as Hugh Masekela and Oliver Mtukudzi amongst others. Owing to the focus on music, the visual arts are often neglected as a result of poor funding [42] and infrastructural challenges. Although efforts are made to exhibit works, one of the main challenges lies in collecting works from artists who are often demotivated by the lack of public interest and thus fail to produce new works on time[43]. The 2013 festival ran from 26 September to 6 October 2013 and was in part a celebration of King Letsie III's 50th Birthday. Zakes Mda gave the 2013 Mohlomi Memorial Lecture.

Drawing on the country's geography and the historical disconnect of the museum from major continental creative production centres, together with the festival's need for engagement with the visual arts, I have curated a project that engaged the audience in a relevant and considered manner. Elaborating on the ideas of accessibility and the engagement of audiences broader than arts practitioners remains at the fore my focus on Lesotho as a subject is integral to my research. Despite being an independent country, Lesotho remains extremely reliant on South Africa. The land-locked

[42] According to Thabo Leanya, the organiser of the festival, the festival is not given base-funding and as such is compelled to fundraise annually for the event. Such challenges have resulted in cancellations such as the 2010 festival which failed to raise necessary budgets and had to be cancelled.

[43] As told by 'Matsooana Sekokotoana, the Museum's arts officer and the curator of *New Signatures*, 2013 (Art Library, Morija) which was one of the exhibitions at the 2013 Morija Arts and Culture Festival.

nation despite its rich culture and history has a miniscule art audience and has next to no infrastructure for creative production. Lesotho's only national University does not offer Fine Art or other arts related courses. There are no art galleries, and the country's only museum is small in scale and void of resources and government support[44].

As it stands, one of Lesotho's largest exports is labour. Despite having one of the highest education rates in Africa[45], Lesotho remains comparatively under-developed when seen in relation to its flourishing larger neighbour, South Africa. Owing to limited opportunities and a high unemployment rate, the country's most educated are often forced to seek employment abroad.

> The number of emigrants from Lesotho is estimated to almost 260,000 in 2005 (Ratha and Shaw World Bank 2007). Recent World Bank estimates indicated that the stock of emigrants from Lesotho reached 427,500 in 2010 meaning that almost 20.5 per cent of the country population was living abroad. By destination, Ratha and Shaw estimated that almost 10% emigrated to Mozambique and more than 80% to South Africa. Less than 500 persons live in the United Kingdom and the United States together respectively. Other countries of destination are, by decreasing importance: Canada, Germany, Ireland, Australia and Switzerland. These figures underline clearly the importance of South Africa as the main destination for emigrants from Lesotho. Regarding the trends, the annual net migration rate is around -6 per 1000 for the period 2006-2011 according to the 2006 census data of Lesotho (2010). Therefore, the total annual net number of international migrant stocks was assumed to decrease by 10 per cent between 2006 and 2011. (ACP Observatory on Migration 2012; 3)

As such the focus of my project is the diaspora of Lesotho, paying particular attention to those living in South Africa as it is evident that an alarming percentage of the country's labour lives beyond its borders. During the 2013 Morija Arts and Culture Festival I curated a series of online video conversations with creative and accomplished individuals from the continent with a particular focus on Basotho from the diaspora. I approached both well-known and less easily recognisable accomplished figures spanning different generations who are a part of the Lesotho diaspora or have strong personal affiliations with the country. The selected participants were as follows: James Motlatsi (Chairman of Platfields Limited, Executive Chairman of TEBA Limited), Maria McCloy (journalist, publicist and accessories line designer), Pikie Monaheng (founding member and executive director of Waymark Infotech), Max Thabiso Edkins (climate change consultant at the World bank) Kojo Baffoe (Editor Destiny Man), Desmond Dube (actor, producer, comedian and social activist), Lehlohonolo Matsela (Corporate Affairs Director Africa SAB International), Louisa Mojela (Group CEO of Wiphold), Mphethi Morojele (Founder of MMA architects), Pepsi Pokane (actor, television presenter, director and founder

[44] The ministry under which the arts falls is the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture.
[45] Lesotho is ranked 1st in the world for allocating the largest percentage of its GDP for education at 13%. (The World Fact Book; https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2206rank.html?countryname=Lesotho&countrycode=lt&regionCode=afr&rank=1#lt

of Bonngoe Productions), Dr Njabulo Ndebele (writer, poet, academic, former Vice Chancellor National University of Lesotho and University of Cape Town), Nthabi Sibanda (CEO and Founder of Puo Educational products), Hugh Masekela (Musician), Dr Zakes Mda (novelist, poet and playwright), Peter Schneider (Founding member of Sankomota) and Chimurenga (pan-African publication / organisation, former employee and creative partner of the late Liepollo Rantekoa).

Curatorially, my process comprised of the following steps: research conversations, invitations to participants, fundraising, marketing and realisation of the project. Having established my interest in engaging with a Lesotho based audience in relation to the MFA interest in accessibility and engaging audiences, I had several conversations with the Morija Museum and Archives about possibilities for curating an exhibition at the festival. I was aware that the visual art component of the festival despite the Museum's dedication to it was often not visible in light of the surrounding cultural events. Although I had begun with the idea of curating an art exhibition in the traditional sense[46] I was aware of the likelihood of a lack of public engagement with the work and sought to curate a project that would directly require interaction and provide space for dialogue to occur. Based on a series of conversations I had with a close network of creatives[47] it became apparent that in order to engage the local public it would be necessary to look at the successful elements of the festival and how visibility is attained for such creative projects. Referencing the festival's model, where the annual music concert line-up becomes the primary form of attracting audiences, I sought to create a recognisable line-up for the conversations. I compiled a list of names of accomplished Basotho based in South Africa and beyond which included the afore-mentioned participants as well as: Nolo Letele (chief executive of Multi-choice South Africa), Puleng Cadribo (pilot, first officer South African Airways), Dr Mphu Keneiloe Ramatlapeng (Clinton Health Access Initiative executive vice-president), Lillian Dube (actress), Ts'epo Tshola (musician), Hymphatic Thabs (Hip Hop artist), Mokena Makeka (Founder and owner of Makeka Design Lab), Dr Mothae Maruping (commissioner for Economic Affairs, African Union), Monna Mokoena (founder and owner of Gallery Momo), Koto Bolofo (fashion photographer)[48], Nthati

[46] The body of work I had initially proposed to curate was Sabelo Mlangeni's *Isivumelwano:An Agreement* which at the time was in development, and had its debut at the Goethe Institut, Johannesburg in May 2013.

[47] I discussed the project with art practitioners such as Simon Gush, Rangoato Hlasane, Terry Ayugi from Chimurenga, as well as a number of Lesotho based creative practitioners and political figures such as Matsepo Ramakoae (Lesotho's deputy minister of finance), Ntee Bereng (Head of Non-Bank division at the central Bank of Lesotho), Kommanda Obbs (Hip Hop artist), Tsepo Nkopane (Owner of Modumo music production company and Mosotho musician living in the diaspora) and others.

[48] Bolofo is a well-known and respected 'South African' photographer, and was most recently noted for being one of a select number of photographers to have been given open access to the Hermès factory. ' After meeting the chairman, Jean-Louis Dumas, Bolofo recalls, 'Mr Dumas asked where I came from. I said South Africa. He asked what part. I said Lesotho. He was shocked and very excited. He explained that his great great great grandfather was a missionary in Lesotho and that the Zulus used to attack his mission, but the Sothos - my tribe - protected him.' He adds, 'I was very happy to be a Lesothan in Mr Dumas's office that day. He called me his cousin and said

Moshesh (actress), Sechaba Morojele (actor, director, scriptwriter and producer), Jerry Mofokeng (actor and motivational speaker) and Bane Maleke (division executive at the Development Bank Southern Africa).

I contacted a select number of the mentioned participants with invitations to partake in the conversations, submit a contribution to the publication (I will discuss this later) and where possible to contribute towards the funding of the project. My intention with the project was two-fold: to engage a Lesotho audience and the diaspora in a set of conversations about what it means to be from the country; and to highlight, celebrate and contribute towards the creative vision of Morija Museum and Archives. It was therefore important that the project have a level of sustainability and leave the museum not only with a strong archive and network, but also provide the physical framework for similar creative ventures to happen. The approach to fundraising became a conceptual element of the project where I sought to have all contributions come from the diaspora and in that way offer a tangible contribution to the country's creative landscape. I approached institutions with affiliations to the country as well as some of the members of the diaspora that I invited to participate to donate monetarily and in kind. I was able to secure project support from Econet Telecom Lesotho, Pikie Monaheng (CEO Waymark Infotech), Puleng Ssali (first officer, South African Airways), South African Breweries and Lesotho Breweries[49]. Through this support I purchased three high-end touch screen computers for Maeder House which were then donated to the Museum and Maeder House for future projects.

My intention was not to isolate visual artists but rather to curate an encounter that is relevant to the addressed audience to which the visual arts are not prevalent. Through a similar format to that of *Featuring Simplicity as an Irrational Fear* (Michael Stevenson, Cape Town 2010, http://www.Stevenson.info/exhibitions/sidegallery/simplicity/index.htm), I staged a series of Skype conversations with selected creative individuals based in the region and beyond. In order to stimulate engagement, I generated a set of trigger questions and activation strategies that were to encourage public participation. I arranged for signage directing people to the Conversations (FIG 26a) and printed

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that his cousin was welcome any time and I had carte blanche to photograph what I liked in Hermès'.' (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/04/koto-bolofos-la-maison-hermes_n_926728.html)

[49] Econet Telecom Lesotho sponsored the project with internet connectivity. For this they installed a new ADSL line and modem with uncapped data for Maeder House. At present the museum is in discussion with the organisation to keep the line. Pikie Monaheng gave the largest monetary contribution to the project to the value of R20 000 towards the purchase of equipment. Puleng Ssali was unable to partake in the conversations owing to company regulation policies and offered a small monetary contribution of R500. Lehlohonolo Matsela arranged for the sponsorship of refreshments for the conversations which included beer, water, juice and soft drinks. I also received some research and production funds from Rhodes University as part of my scholarship.

out a set of instructions which were placed on the wall as one entered the space (FIG 26b) as well as a set of cue cards which each had one of the following questions:

- Haeno ke hokae? [Where do you consider home to be?]
- When did you leave Lesotho?
- What is your understanding of a diaspora?
- Would you ever live in Lesotho again? As Basotho, what do we do with the legacy left to us by Moshoeshoe I who managed to preserve our borders and thus the survival of the nation?
- In what ways do you believe you are engaging with Lesotho from a diasporic position?
- How do you think the Diaspora can contribute to the country?
- What are the most memorable elements of growing up here that you take with you?
- In what way has growing up in Lesotho impacted your understanding of space?
- What are your thoughts about Lesotho's landscape?
- Have you been to Morija Museum and Archives? When was the last time you visited?
- Would you be open to engaging in more diaspora conversations with other Basotho living outside the borders?
- What projects have you done in the country? Do you have plans for future engagement?
- What is your profession? How did you come to do what you do?
- What obstacles have you encountered as a foreign national if any?
- What would you say to a young Mosotho who aspires to do what you do?

The objective was to give members of the audience the opportunity to join in a conversation with an otherwise inaccessible individual of the Basotho diaspora and by means of directed talking points engage in a set of relatively intimate conversations. My initial intention was to have a visual representation for each of the participants that could stand in place of the participants and transform the space into an active information hub. Due to spatial constraints and what I felt would have disturbed the flow of the space, I had an information table which had a conceptual statement and participant biographies as well as cue cards for people to take. I also displayed publications including copies of Njabulo Ndebele's 2012 Mohlomi Memorial lecture text, Chimurenga Chronic newspapers, Chimurenganyana's (limited edition A6 publications) including an issue written by Njabulo Ndebele, Zakes Mda's *Madonna of Excelsior* and his biography *Sometimes there is a void: Memoirs of an Outsider,* information on the upcoming *Ba Re e Ne Re* Literature Festival amongst other things. My preference was to utilise *Google+ Hangouts* as it would have offered the opportunity for several people to join one conversation remotely[50]. However after running tests with the participants a few days before it was evident that the medium was rather complicated for most participants to set up and so I decided to use Skype which was a simpler and more familiar video conferencing programme. So as to facilitate the level of interaction between the speakers and the audience and also to remove the level of intimidation a one-on-one conversation may result in I set up three computer stations with Skype on the table in the centre of the room and projected the conversations onto the back wall allowing a larger viewership (FIG 26c). Around the room several benches were laid out (which were

[50] Google+ Hangouts allows for a conversation to be broadcast on Google+. People who have logged in to Google+ can join the conversation from a webcam enabled computer.

loaned from the local primary school) to allow for more than one person to sit in front of a computer (FIG 26d). The project was incorporated into the festival's main programme which was advertised on internet, print and radio. An event invitation was disseminated through social networks and project posters were produced and placed in several locations around Morija and Maseru (including Maseru's two malls, the national library and the campuses of the National University of Lesotho campus and Limkokwing University of Technology).

The methods used in this curatorial project are distinctly unconventional in terms of the norms of art exhibitions. Instead of working with artists and exhibiting artworks, I worked within a broader scope of professions and not exhibiting artworks or people, but rather creating a platform for moments for interaction. What is presented is the possibility to engage, and my role as the curator is to create a relevant and stimulating encounter where through a process of editing and selection, I make associations and connections between the participating individuals, the spatial context and relevant issues relating to both sets of participants. As Papastergiadis (2010:279)

> Kester (2004:9) also argues that the parameters of what he calls 'dialogical art' now extend beyond the aesthetic object and include wider forms of public engagement, whereby participants not only respond to artistic initiatives but also shape the communicative process. Hence, Kester argues that these projects tend to raise questions over the boundary of inclusion and exclusion in public dialogue, presenting situations in which people from different social positions or perspectives are invited to discuss common issues. The relationship between the artist and the public is also not only switched from the role of witness of a spectacle to participants in a situation, but also extended into being a constitutive partner that is actively involved in the whole field of meaning.

The challenges of the media I have chosen are undeniable. Technology, despite its ability to connect in the most unexpected of scenarios, is relatively unpredictable, more so in an untested space such as Maeder House. For the purposes of the project I was able to secure the sponsorship of an ADSL line by Econet Telecom Lesotho the country's telecommunication provider and the main sponsor of the 2013 festival. Maeder House had no existing ADSL line and had never been used for any projects requiring internet connectivity. Being the oldest recorded building in Lesotho, the conversations with the members of the diaspora via advanced technological connections was a symbolic moment that spoke about modernity, geography, borders and inter-connectedness. With the technological advancements of our time, nations are no longer simply defined by borders but more by an intangible chord fabricated by relationships between things, ideologies and nostalgia. Having chosen informal conversations as the medium I relied very heavily on the dependability of the invited participants and the stability of the connection. The participants are also high ranking in various corporations and organisations around the world and have very limited free time so on the day of the conversations,

several schedules were unexpectedly altered and I had to adjust the talks as they were happening. As mentioned earlier in *Thank You Driver*, 2009, when one is not working exclusively with inanimate objects the curator must factor the possibilities of delays and cancellations and be ready to adapt project models in order to successfully carry out the project. With this in mind, I made provisions for streaming previously recorded interviews with some of the participants found on video sharing website, Youtube. The curatorial process required several preliminary conversations to occur which not only moulded the structure of the project, but have also been incredibly moving and potentially expansive. In order to illustrate the function of these preliminary research conversations it is important to highlight some of the most impactful exchanges.

Hugh Masekela, for instance, is not a direct descendant of Lesotho. In fact as he tells me his roots can be traced to South Africa and Zimbabwe. My interest in him as a subject was a result of his years in exile. One of the most memorable concerts he participated in during the apartheid era was in 1980 when he together with Miriam Makeba and Herb Albert returned to Africa after 20 years in exile. They were not able to perform in South Africa and held a large concert across the border in Lesotho. In our conversation I learned that Masekela has had a strong affinity for Lesotho ever since and in fact spent several months in the country after the concert as a result when he produced his album titled *Live in Lesotho*. The passion with which he spoke of the Lesotho landscape and the relatively undocumented history of Moshoeshoe I, opened up a new conversation that is one of the first clear outcomes of the project. Masekela intends to, in the next few years, create a film about Moshoeshoe and the forming of the Basotho nation which he has invited me to help research. To this end, he noted that *Conversations at Morija* is the platform on which we will be able to engage a large audience as well as direct some attention to Lesotho. By way of the connections I have made from the research of this project, it is evident that people in the diaspora are keenly interested in contributing to the preservation of Lesotho's heritage. As Pepsi Pokane said in response to the question 'O khutla neng hae [when are you coming back home]?' which was posed by 'Me Matsepo Ramakoae (Lesotho's Deputy Minister of Finance and a parliamentarian for the Matsieng constituency FIG 26 E,F) 'the lack of engagement is both ways - in as much as some members of the diaspora are not engaging with the country, the country has failed to reach out to its diaspora.' Pokane further highlighted that it is through such initiatives that the need as well as the possibilities for engagement become apparent.

Lesotho is considered home not solely by Lesotho nationals and Basotho migrant labourers, but during the apartheid era in South Africa, Lesotho served as a temporary home for many South Africans fleeing from the racially oppressive conditions in their country. Lesotho has been home to many including former South African president Thabo Mbeki, the late Chris Hani, Njabulo Ndebele, Zakes Mda and

many others. Mda who pledged his support to the project but owing to a busy travel schedule was unable to Skype, delivered the 2013 Mohlomi Memorial Lecture in Maseru and said:

> ...I must begin by thanking you for inviting me back home to deliver the Mohlomi Memorial Lecture for 2013... Talking of 'home' reminds me of the last time I met King Letsie III a few years back... This is how our conversation went: 'So you do visit us sometimes,' His Majesty said as we shook hands. I told him I didn't consider my presence a visit and added: 'This is my country.' … I came to live in Lesotho the same year Prince Mohato was born... I was formed by this country. My father came to live here as a South African refugee in 1963... Even though we were refugees there was no difference between my family and any other Lesotho family. We did not live in refugee camps but were integrated in the community and enjoyed the same freedoms and privileges as everyone else. And this was the case with all refugees... Everyone irrespective of race, class, political affiliation, national origin, ethnicity, gender or educational status was integrated into the society. We were beneficiaries of a legacy of inclusiveness left by the wise King Moshoeshoe I. (Mda 2013:2)

Another insightful interaction was with Mphethi Morojele (FIG 26G), founder of MMA Architects which is one of the first Black owned architecture firms in South Africa. Morojele was very enthusiastic about the project and had some quite emotive associations with regard to growing up in Lesotho. Morojele said that it is rumoured that many Basotho go into the field of architecture owing to their understanding of landscapes and space, the mountainous region being known for its peaks and curves. Having curated the South African pavilion at the 10th Venice Architecture Biennale (2006) the main point of interest for Morojele was Maeder House, its history and its very simple architecture, the fired clay bricks having been the reason the building outlasted many others. In 2008 MMA Architects won the inaugural international Curry Stone Design Prize for humanitarian innovation in design, for a concept that borrows elements from indigenous mud-and-wattle building techniques[51]. Maeder House is therefore a point of interest: the walls and floors are clad in mud and dung while the ceiling beams of the building are unprocessed tree branches.

Njabulo Ndebele who gave the 2012 Mohlomi Memorial lecture was not able to Skype at the time of the conversations but like Zakes Mda pledged his support for the project. In response to the *Conversations at Morija* and *Haueeng Banna* publication brief he writes (2013):

> You write so well with all the courtesies now hard to come by in South Africa, but still so alive in Lesotho. I wish this Lesotho DNA was contagious and was spreading all over South Africa! I think that I too am highly likely to test positive and be deported to Lesotho! …You have got a lovely project going. Your approach to it from your thought provoking story is engaging and innovative. It is a powerful story. The shock effect of one's being selected for deportation where one had been reasonably integrated and comfortable triggers anxiety and anguish. But then the finality of the deportation gets everyone back at mountain Kingdom faced with the challenge to row their boat! Your story reminds me of how each time I meet talented Basotho such as yourself

[51] City Press, 100 World Class South Africans, 2013. http://www.citypress.co.za/features/100-world-class-south-africa-mphethi-morojele/

somewhere in South Africa, I ask: 'ho setse mang hae?' [translation: 'who is left at home?'] Your story makes the question dramatically concrete.[52]

Several of the exchanges from the conversations were quite emotive and inspiring. James Motlatsi spoke of his entry into the mining industry as a migrant labourer in the 1970s and the establishing of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in response to the exploitative conditions mineworkers were subjected to under the apartheid regime[53]. Nthabi Sibanda described how dislocation inspired the establishing of her children's book company 'Puo[54]' (FIG 26 H, I). Grappling with issues of bilingualism, migrancy and how language not only impacts but preserves and conveys a culture, Puo educational products address the challenges faced by the parent in the diaspora of teaching their children their native languages in the absence of cultural surroundings. The books not only teach bilingualism and important traditional African folklores, but also create relatable imagery for Black African children living in various diasporas. Kojo Baffoe related quite passionately to the issue of language also being a father and stemming from a Ghanaian-Mosotho-South African background. Kojo had a very interesting exchange with Morija artist[55] Ntate Lazarus (FIG 26J), who challenged him about speaking English. Lazarus asked 'Where is he right now? Why is he speaking English? Didn't you say we would be speaking to other Basotho here?' Until that point the conversations had been conducted in English and this led to the realisation that the use of both English and Sesotho interchangeably was necessary. Desmond Dube (FIG 26K), who was the most recognised of the participants, spoke of his profession in relation to the country and to the great enthusiasm of the audience announced the travelling theatre piece they are working on about the founding of the Lesotho born 1970's Afro-Jazz band Uhuru which later became known as Sankomota. Max Thabiso Edkins (FIG 26L) gave an engaging presentation on climate consciousness and renewable energy and the impacts of global warming. He noted that Lesotho's carbon emissions were very low and as such the country is on the positive side of the prevention of global warming.

Louisa Mojela (FIG 26M) whose ancestral home is in Morija spoke directly to the question 'What is your understanding of a diaspora?' Mojela does not identify with the diaspora identity and attributes this to her on-going relationship with the country and active involvement in the community of her native land, with particular focus on projects in her home village.[56] She says:

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[52] This is quote from an email he sent to me dated Wednesday 4 September 2013 at 9:54 PM; Subject: Re: *Conversations at Morija*.

[53] James Motlatsi was president of NUM for 17 years from its inception in 1982 alongside well know figures such as ANC deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa.

[54] 'Puo' means 'language' in Sesotho. For info on Puo Educational products see: http://www.puo.co.za/index.html

[55] Ntate Lazarus specialises in ceramics and the production of clothing, head-dresses and drums out of animal hide, wood and bone.

[56] Louisa Mojela has established and funded on-going agri-farming projects in the rural areas of Morija that empower communities with a particular focus on women. The produce from the harvests is divided 70% for sale

> My understanding of a diaspora is someone who 'says once upon a time I used to consider Lesotho my home but I have since found a new home, country, citizenship… My only connection with the country is ancestral.' I do not consider myself as part of the diaspora. I consider myself a Mosotho… a migrant labourer just like the miners who leave home to look for greener pastures but who periodically go back. I go home as often as once or twice a month and [Lesotho] is a part of me… wherever I go I tell people I'm from Lesotho… Coming from a small country such as Lesotho and working South Africa… you always want to do your very best and remember that in Sesotho culture a child belongs to the village, I make certain that everything I do with the utmost integrity… I encourage migrant Basotho to remember that irrespective of wherever they are they have left their hearts in Lesotho (Mojela 2013[57]).

Conceptually, the framework of the conversations quotes the history of when King Moshoeshoe I invited the French missionaries to Morija as co-builders of the nation or 'teachers of peace' (Morija Museum and Archives 2010:7). In this instance my intention is to place migrant Basotho in the position of these 'nation-builders' and engage them in a contemporary brand of nation building. With the rising impact of globalisation, the concept of a community or a nation is fast transforming. With technologies such as Skype and other internet media, possibilities of communication and networks are infinite.

> Throughout modernity, communities were based on a set of attributes that belonged to the ethnic, geographical, linguistic, political, religious or biological sphere: communities mainly existed in the form of families, nation states, professional or political groups. With globalization, the very nature of communities has undergone significant changes. There are far more, more complex and overlapping communities. People are no longer tied to 'their' community for a lifetime. Instead, they can move in and out of communities and even share their time between different communities, thus adopting 'multiple identities.' At the level of the individual, these micro-communities not only enrich, but also inevitably divide society. Has social coherence thus become utopian? Are common social goals out of reach in our ever-more fragmented societies? How do we deal with larger entities such as cities, nations or even transnational initiatives? Contemporary philosophy provides a number of visionary models of 'the coming community' that may help us approach communitarianism in a productive, yet radical way: Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou, among others, advocate new types of communities that are no longer defined by origins, geographical setting, ethnic or social bonds. Future communities, they argue, will be grounded in the absolute and uncompromising singularity of individuals. They will not be communities of essence, but a being-together of existences where political as well as religious concepts no longer apply.

These definitions of what constitutes contemporary communities speak of the facilitation by technology and globalisation of the forming of multiple and geographically dislocated communities – one example of such communities is the diaspora. Over the years, Lesotho's national 'brain-drain' has

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and 30% for the community. The proceeds from the sales are for the Makaota Development Trust which was established to offer education financial support for Mafeteng high school scholars who attain 1st class passes for their IGCSE towards their tertiary education.

[57] All the Skype conversations are available on: http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLq4sN1xiqin6pji84VKxxcaUT-wq-pOLw

been noted, however minimal attempts have been made to facilitate engagement with diaspora, or offer a platform for the recognition of this scattered community.

PUBLICATION: HAUEENG BANNA

The conversations concluded with a brief introduction by Zachary Rosen (FIG 26N) to the upcoming Literature Festival *Ba Re e Ne Re*, which is set to be held in Morija in March 2014. The literature festival was started by the late Liepollo Rantekoa (a Lesotho creative and former employee of Chimurenga). The project is being curated by her friends (from Lesotho, the diaspora, the US, as well as members of the Chimurenga team in Cape Town) in celebration of the dynamic energy her project was able to bring to Morija. I am in the process of compiling a small publication titled *Haueeng Banna* which is referenced from a song by Lesotho hip hop artist Kommanda Obbs https://soundcloud.com/tsepe-records/haueeng-banna-feat-matjeko. The emotive song metaphorically describes the journey of young Basotho labourers to South Africa in search of job opportunities such as mining and other skilled and unskilled labour, as well as the plight of the Basotho who despite the several challenges they face, patriotically remain in the country thus addressing Njabulo Ndebele's question, 'ho setse mang hae?' (translation: 'who is left at home?'). The song is themed on both experiences being bitter-sweet. I will source contributions of varying formats (texts, images, lyrics, essays) from some of the participants of *Conversations at Morija*. The publication will be formatted in a similar way: one part of the publication being the diaspora and the other being accomplished creative individuals living within the borders of Lesotho. The publication will offer a platform for the show-casing of creative energy from the country and its surrounds and in that way offer the platform for a two-way dialogue between the diaspora and Lesotho residents.

The brief and curatorial/editorial text is based on the following short fiction piece I wrote that describes the possibilities for the country's growth if everyone was repatriated (Bereng 2010):

> Let's pretend for a moment (or paragraph or three) that life was a dream, only because dreams, although somewhat uncontrollable, stem from either secret longings or a collage of valid thoughts in one's mind. Ke kopa re nkeng motsotso… [translation: let's take a moment]
>
> Ordinary Wednesday morning, on your crammed taxi ride to work, or for those more fortunate, whizzing through big city traffic and listening to the radio when there's a sudden announcement that all those with Lesotho DNA have been recalled to their home land to carry out their remaining years. Your heart halts for a second thinking about all the possible implications of this act, but the fact that you bought your South African ID before you hit puberty comforts you as the agent who sold it to you is probably six feet under. But alas, the next line cements your anxiety 'The UN has

passed a universal motion of deportation for former residents of Lesotho. Scientists have found a genetic stream indigenous to those born in Lesotho owing to the country's high altitude'. 'Phew', you think, 'Thank God for Pelonomi'. That is until the next paralyzing declaration 'King Moshoeshoe I's unique DNA can be found in all his descendants, ten generations removed'. The flash of an image of boxing up your Midrand villa for 'Ma line a Ha Hoohlo [translation: flats at Ha Hoohlo]' simply nauseates you. You do the first thing that comes to the mind of any rational sometimes festive Mosotho, you call your mom. 'Me, o mametse litaba, ke utloa hothoe re boele hae kaofela' sebe se o qhala Sesotho [translation: 'Mom, are you listening to the news, they're saying we should all return home' your limited Sesotho then failing you] 'I don't know, I don't know, they said something about Moshoeshoe's DNA and being born in the high altitude'. After furious speculation, conspiracy talk and a large offer of tjotjo [translation: a bribe] from your mom, you are reassured, mother knows best. You touch your screen and find your number ones, call them up and laugh hysterically about the insanity of the bulletin.

After much chuckling and briefing about the get-together this coming weekend, you parallel into your reserved parking space and confidently stride up to the office. All seems in order, until you see the large signage reading 'COMPULSORY DNA TESTING ZONE' plastered across the entrance. You numbly join the queue and take the test, the nurse attempts to comfort you with a joke, 'Kudala la makwerekwere bethata imisebenzi na madoda ethu, into e dikayo ke phofu aba fani nabo, tshi!' [translation: For a long time these kwekweres have been taking our jobs and men, the worst thing is they are hard to distinguish]. You give a nervous smile until her shifty eyes give light to the fact that your test is positive. She abashedly announces your status 'You are a Mosotho. Please report to the officer at the door'. Your world spins! Now more than gym class, you wish you could faint. You don't. You drag yourself to the deportation desk and wait for the verdict with some other unfortunate Positively Mosothos. Eventually you are all hauled into a caged van and driven to the police station. Piles of documents later, you are informed that your belongings will be packed up and sent with the next load of foreigners. Suddenly you are on the familiar path back to Lesotho. Only when you reach Senekal reality hits and repatriation becomes you. You frantically call your parents to inform them that you are half way home. You are greeted at the chaotic border gate by several dismayed familiar faces and number plates. 'Le kae ntate'! [translation: hello sir!] The only comforting sight is your mother's car through the mist of concern and grief. You disembark the overcrowded shuttle and scurry to the arms of your frantic mother. Relief. The car ride home is filled with conversation and panic, 'ke tlo bua le Thabane, ka 'nete ba se ba ile hole haholo' [translation: I'm going to speak to Prime Minister Thabane, they've gone too far this time'. Shock… anger… frustration then defeat! You try call your people only to be informed that 'the subscriber you have dialed is not available at present'. 'Shit, they got them too!' You call the only person who would answer, your SA booty call, 'Baby, I've been deported'! Booty's angry and determined to fight this, but you know it's a losing battle. Eventually you both relinquish, bravely lie and promise to make this work, 'I'll come see you as soon as I can get off work'. Weeks pass and eventually even headstrong mom has accepted the fact that you are back. Back for good. You and your

> fellow deported seem to be reliving festive and frequent Good Times le li party habo Nyeo [translation: and parties at so and so's house] until your retrenchment package starts to thin out. You spiral down the list of hot spots: Ha Frank, Ha Tlelai, Ha Khali, until you bump into your father at Sparrows, your mother's last straw. 'Tsamo batla mosebetsi!' [translation: go find a job!].
>
> Four year later things seem normal. Great even! Everyone is home, ALL THE TIME! No talk of Nthati is studying this and that in Europe, or Mojalefa's teaching English in China. Everyone had to start from the ground up and Lesotho is the way it should have been - all its industrious intellects and beautiful brainiacs repatriated and proudly pouring blood, sweat and tears to the nation once founded by the great Motlotlehi Moshoeshoe oa pele [King Moshoeshoe I]. Who needs MLK's dream ha Moshoeshoe a ile a shoashoaila? You pick your son up from his third day of Class two in the pine green zip up your mom dug up from her old trunk, Tsoalli flashes a quick smile from the other side of the road. This is how it's supposed to end.

This piece was written from a particularly personal moment of realisation that I could never work in my home country (Lesotho). Most of my generation of Basotho middle class youth (myself included) were sent to boarding schools and universities the world over, and as such have gained a skill set that is often irrelevant to the economic climate of the country. It is challenging to make a case for the support of the arts in a country with 49% of its population below the poverty line and the level of under-development crippling to most creative endeavours. However, this is not to say that the country is void of culture, in fact quite the contrary. Lesotho has a proud and unfailing culture and rich traditional heritage. Essentially the country preserved its borders with South Africa and fought off decades of attempted seizures by the neighbouring country as a result of great national pride and a historical foundation that has held the country's position for decades. Although the Kingdom of Lesotho is the second smallest country in Africa, preceded only by Swaziland, it is the only enclave in Africa (country that is entirely surrounded by one other country) and of three enclaves in the world. The country is a constitutional monarchy, with the King acting only as a figure-head. Despite its economic struggles, and heavy reliance on South Africa [58], culture is essentially the nation's primary treasure, and one could argue that development of current cultural models and an interpretation of contemporary art could eventually create a voice for Lesotho's arts in the global contemporary art scene. There is a danger too in art intertwining with culture, as Sontag (1966:9) writes:

> Once upon a time (a time when high art was scarce), it must have been a revolutionary and creative move to interpret works of art. Now it is not. What we decidedly do not need now is further to assimilate art into thought, or (worse yet) art into culture.

[58] 90% of the goods consumed in Lesotho are imported from South Africa (CIA World Fact Book; 2013)

Sontag argues that interpretation of art serves only to dilute and eventually dissolve its purpose and essence. She speaks of art as intended for the senses and not for intellectual rationalisation or academic justification. Despite what can be deemed a failure to meet broadly conventional terms of what defines contemporary art practice, Lesotho has a rich historical heritage and owing to the limited access to technology, the stories, 'litsomo' (folk-tales), 'lilotho' (riddles) and poetry remain the undocumented fruits of a creative culture. Through this project and others to come I aim to highlight these attributes and spark a dialogue around the preservation of this opulent history.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research done in preparation for *Conversations at Morija*, as well as the outcome of the conversations it is clear that engagement with the country's diaspora is not only welcomed, but is quite necessary. As such the only official organisation aimed at acknowledging and creating a platform for strategic engagement of the diaspora is an organisation called the Lesotho Diaspora Alliance (LDA) that was founded in Johannesburg in 2009 through the Lesotho High Commission. Over the years, a few meetings have been held in Johannesburg, however an engaging platform for the diaspora has yet to be established. The members of Lesotho's diaspora remain unidentified and have yet to be acknowledged on a singular platform. My overall intention with the project is to create a platform for such recognition to begin in the hopes that the conversation will organically unfold and thus expand the network. Based on the need to continue the conversation and develop this network I have started to compile a 'Diaspora Database'. The function of this is not merely to be able to identify Basotho living outside the borders, but ideally to create an archival resource that can be accessed in order to maintain the dialogue between those living within and outside of Lesotho's borders in the hopes that collaborative projects will arise. Morija, which is a historically opulent site, has remained relatively underdeveloped and quite isolated. Technology offers the opportunity to bridge the gap and extend the small town's networks thus connecting the museum to the rest of the country and extending beyond its borders[59]. In the absence of formal creative platforms within the country it is important that independent initiatives and alternative spaces are established and in that way allowing for experimental public oriented models to emerge. Although *Conversations At Morija* was a well-received curatorial project that operated within a socio-politically conscious framework and contributed to the creative landscape of Morija and by extension Lesotho, it is important not to make claims about art being a vehicle for social change. I propose instead that curating can create platforms for dialogues and exchanges that directly impact pertinent social issues.

[59] After the 2013 Festival the museum is considering the revision of the use of Maeder House from art and craft gallery/shop to a multi-media hub for creative engagement.

I revisit the questions that induced my excavation of the concept of simplicity. Does simplicity truly exist? Is simplicity in relation to language and communicative strategies a useful strategy for the engagement of broader 'non-art' audiences? Despite the possibilities for understanding and broader engagement, is the interpretation of art virtuous and more-over, should it be done? The answers to these questions are circular and I have yet to find one position, however the analysis of them is useful in a reflexive understanding of the curatorial process and it's often ambiguous position. Sontag (1966:9) offers a useful perspective:

> Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there. This cannot be taken for granted, now. Think of the sheer multiplication of works of art available to every one of us, superadded to the conflicting tastes and odors and sights of the urban environment that bombard our senses. Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life - its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness - conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. And it is in the light of the condition of our senses, our capacities (rather than those of another age), that the task of the critic must be assessed. What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all. The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art - and, by analogy, our own experience - more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.

In curating projects outside of an art context, it is imperative that the curator is not only aware of the contextual frame work of the chosen site, but incorporates this contextual information in the process of establishing the project. It is therefore the role of the curator to interpret these factors and formulate a relevant language for the engagement of the specific public. My contention is that language is essentially one of the key factors for facilitating these associations and with conceptual clarity and unembellished language one may be able to address a broader public.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

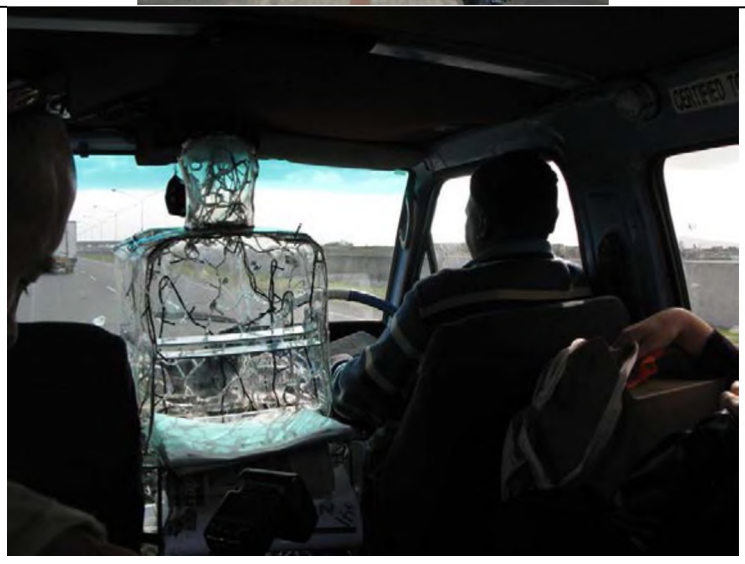
FIG. 1	A *Thank You Driver* Taxi 2009 Cape Town	
FIG. 2	James Webb *In Living Memory of What Never Happened* 2009 Recorded sound, speakers. Langa Taxi Rank, Cape Town	
FIG. 2	Edwige Aplogan *F.U.N.* 2009 Perspex, ferry lights, foil, Newspaper	

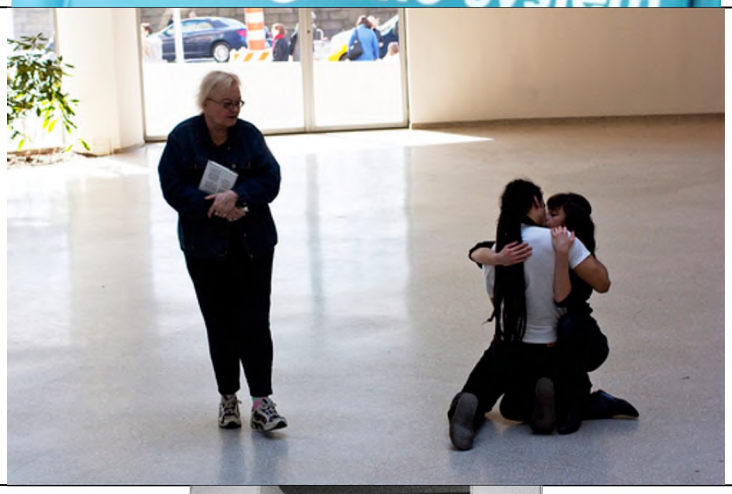
FIG. 4	Isa Suarez and the New Teenager's Gospel Choir *Taxi Voices*	
FIG. 5	Tino Seghal *Kiss* 2004 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum	
FIG. 5A	Marina Abramović and Ulay *Imponderabilia* Originally performed in 1977 for 90min Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna. Still from 16mm film transferred to video (black and white, sound). 52:16 min. © 2010 Marina Abramović. Courtesy Marina Abramović and Sean Kelly Gallery/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.	

FIG. 5B	Kemang Wa Lehulere *Behave Or You Jump* 2009 Digital video Documentation a performance	
FIG. 6	Brett Murray *The Spear* 2010 Acrylic on Canvas 185 x 140cm	
FIG. 6B	Jonathan Cane and Zen Marie *Foucault's Children: An Examination* 2009 6Min 35Secs	

FIG. 7	Avant Car Guard *Protected by Theory* 2007 Archival inkjet print 73.8 x 107.2cm Edition of 15	
FIG. 8	Donna Kukama *The Great South African Art Queue of 2009* Public performance South African National Gallery, Cape Town	
FIG. 9	Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* 1917 Porcelain 36 x 48 x 61cm	

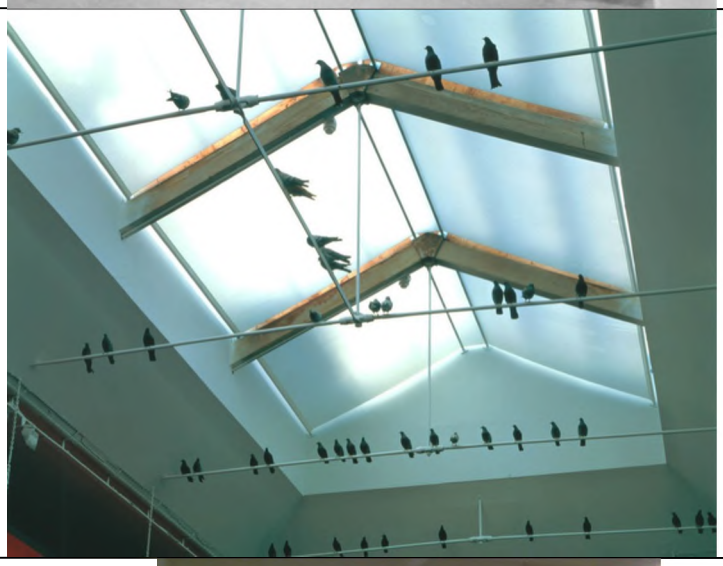
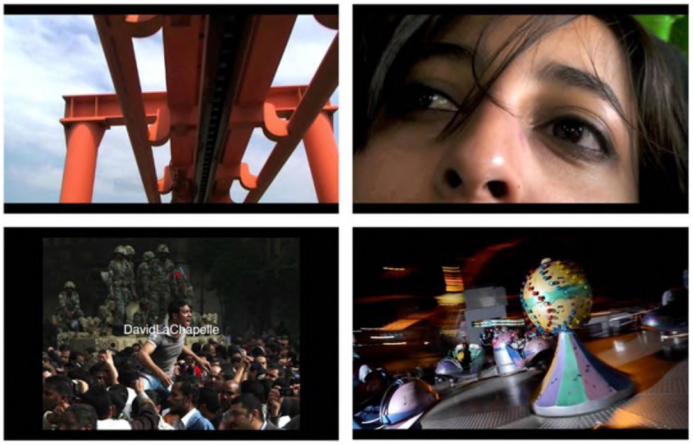
FIG. 10	Maurizzio Cattelan *Another Fucking Readymade* 1996 Cardboard boxes and plastic containing a stolen exhibition	
FIG. 11	Maurizzio Cattelan *Turisti* 1997 200 taxidermied pigeons	
FIG. 12	CUSS *The CUSS Show* 2012 Live Talk show	

FIG. 13	Catherine Dickerson *Jellyfish* 2010 Plastic, air Dimensions variable	
FIG. 14	Mbali Khoza *Chapter 1: A Carnival* 2012 Digital video, colour, sound Duration 7 min 34 sec	
FIG. 15	Jamie Gowrie *Stoep* 2012 Performance with wood, red oxide, polish, cloth	

FIG. 16	Jared Ginsburg *Loop with Bamboo and Innertube II* 2012 Mixed media installation Dimensions variable	
FIG. 17	Jared Ginsburg *Hoist* Digital video Duration 5mins	
FIG. 18 A	Talya Lubinsky *A Place for Things* 2012 Mixed media installation Dimensions variable	

FIG. 18 B	Talya Lubinsky *A Place for Things* 2012 Performative wall-drawing Dimensions variable	
FIG. 19	Malose Malahlela *Dead Air* 2012 Sound installation	
FIG. 20	Naadira Patel Clockwise from Left: *I Like It When It Goes Fast / Control* 2010 / 2011 Video Duration 3 min 49 sec *I Like It When It Goes Fast* 2010 / 2011 Video Duration 2 min 7 sec *What Is This Impulse Towards Death?* 2012	

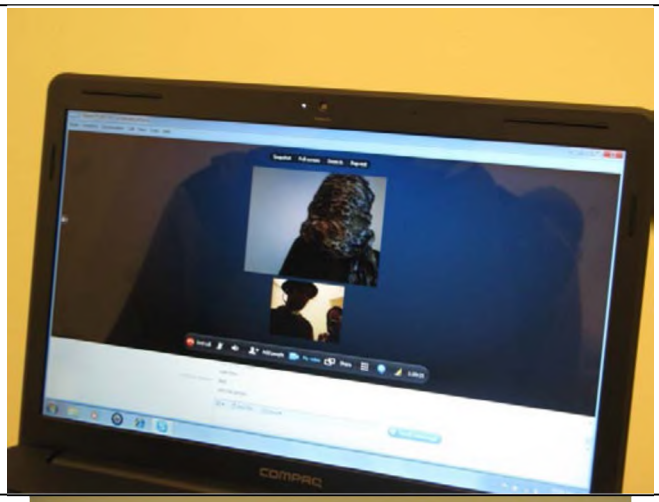
	Video and found footage Duration 2 min 8 sec *It Starts With a List* 2012 Video and found images Duration 2 min 28 sec	
FIG. 21	Nathalie Bikoro *Autopsy* 2010 Performance via Skype	
FIG. 22	Donna Kukama *1000 Ways of Being (Opening Speech)* 2010 Performance via Skype	

FIG. 23	Nástio Mosquito *Untitled (The Fisherman and The Soldier* 2010 Performance via Skype	
FIG. 24 A	Morija Museum and Archives (exterior view)	
FIG. 24 B	Morija Museum and Archives (interior view)	

FIG. 25 A	Maeder House (exterior view) Image appears courtesy of Meri Hyöky Photography	
FIG. 25 B	Maeder House (interior view) Image appears courtesy of Meri Hyöky Photography	
FIG. 26 A	Signage for *Conversations at Morija* 2013 Morija, Lesotho	

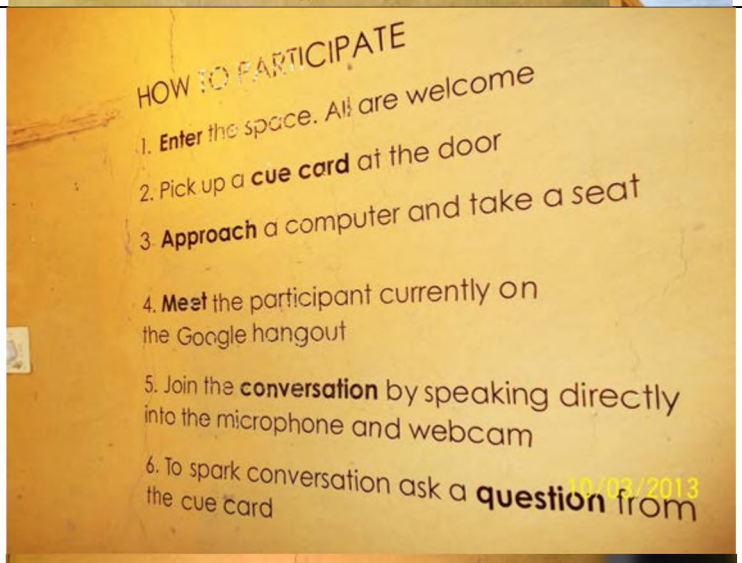
FIG. 26 B	*Conversations at Morija* 2013 Maeder House Morija, Lesotho	
FIG. 26 B	*How to Participate* Instructions for *Conversations at Morija* Maeder House Morija, Lesotho 2013 Image 2 courtesy of Meri Hyöky Photography	 

FIG. 26 C	Back wall projection + computer set up *Conversations at Morija* Maeder House Morija, Lesotho 2013	
FIG. 26 D	*Conversations at Morija* Maeder House Morija, Lesotho 2013 Image appears courtesy of Zach Rosen Photography	
FIG. 26 E	LEFT: 'Matsepo Ramakoae, Deputy Minister of Finance and Member of Parliament for the Matsieng Constituency; RIGHT: Mabela Khabele, Lecturer at Institute of Extra Mural Studies – National University of Lesotho Image appears courtesy of Meri Hyöky Photography	

FIG. 26 F	*Conversations At Morija* – LEFT: Pepsi Pokane; MIDDLE: Matsepo Ramakoae; RIGHT: Ntsebo Bereng BOTTOM: Lerato Bereng	
FIG. 26 G	*Conversations At Morija* – Mphethi Morojele	
FIG. 26 H	*Conversations At Morija* – LEFT: Nthabi Sibanda; RIGHT: Moliehi Khabele Bottom LEFT: Member of the public; BOTTOM: Lerato Bereng	

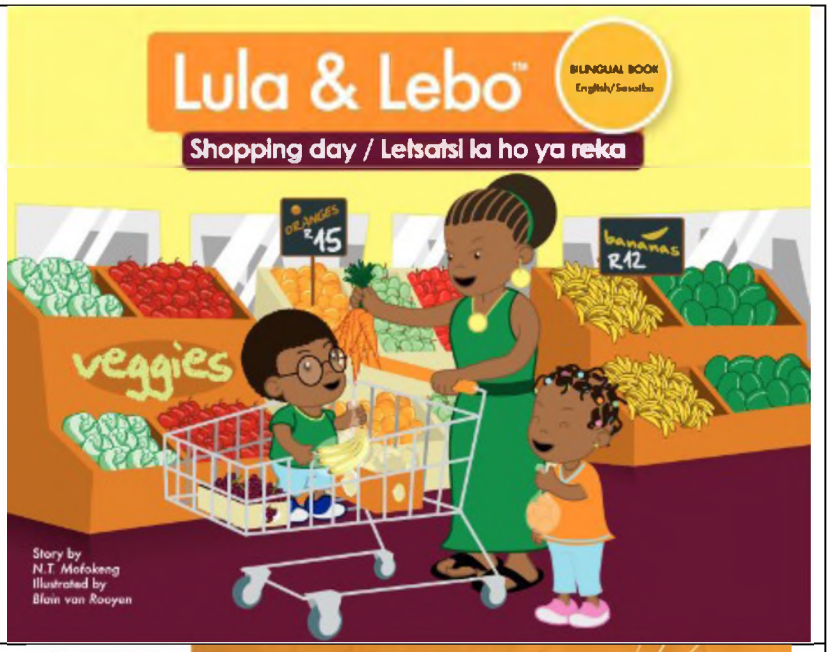
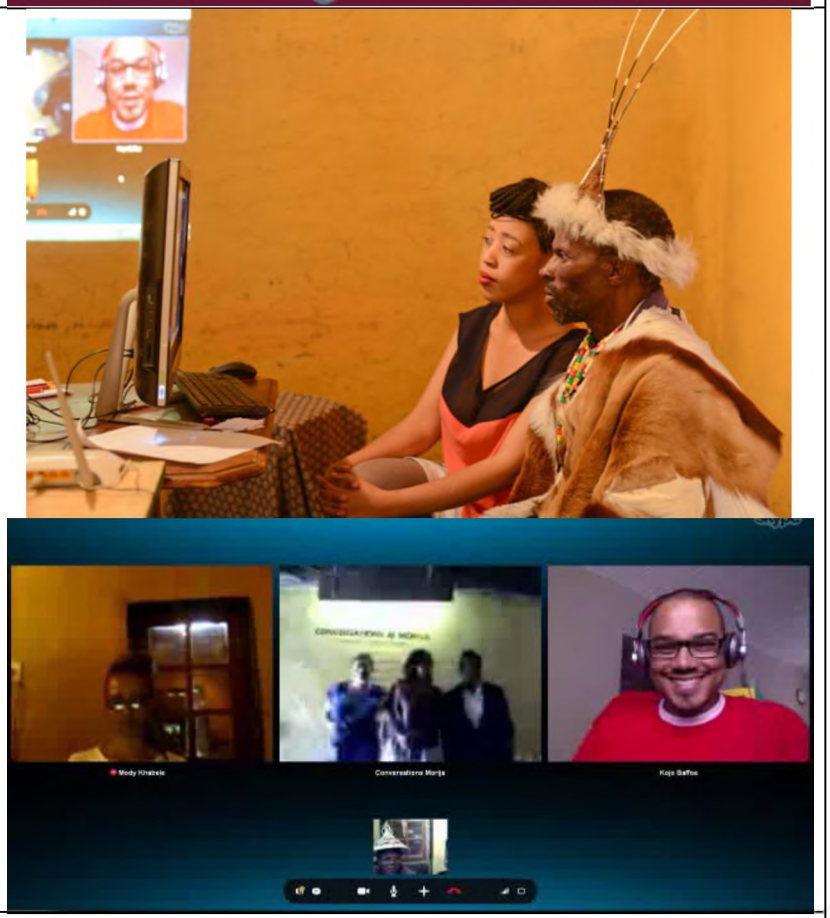
FIG. 26 I	*Lula & Lebo* Book cover Bilingual Book – English/Sesotho Puo educational products	
FIG. 26 J	*Conversations At Morija* – Image 1 - LEFT: Kojo Baffoe; CENTRE: Lerato Bereng; RIGHT: Local artist, Ntate Lazarus.	

FIG. 26 K	*Conversations At Morija* – Desmond Dube in conversation with Maeder House resident artist Patrick Rorke.	 
FIG. 26 L	*Conversations At Morija* – Max Thabiso Edkins	
FIG. 26 M	*Conversations At Morija* – Louisa Mojela	
	Conversations At Morija – Ba Re e nere Zachary Rosen