

**AFRICAN MODERNISM AND IDENTITY POLITICS:  
CURATORIAL PRACTICE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study, entitled *African modernism and identity politics: curatorial practice in the Global South with particular reference to South Africa*, postulates that perceptions of African identity in curatorial exhibitions are changing, moving towards the intercultural views generated by Africans themselves. African identity politics is investigated in relation to critical ideas on African modernism and post-Africanism, in conjunction with similarities with Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of altermodernism. The research focus falls within the Global South as a geo-political location, with particular reference to South African artworks and their curation.

In this qualitative study, an investigation is launched of curated exhibitions dealing with identitarian issues. A critique is set up on curatorial approaches on African identity as presented at seminal exhibitions, from the 1985 exhibition, *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art* (curated by Ricky Burnett), through the 1990s Johannesburg Biennials, to more recent exhibitions such as *Documenta XI* (2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor) and *Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent* (2004-2007, curated by Simon Njami), as well as the Tate Liverpool exhibition *Afro modern: journeys through the black Atlantic* (2010, curated by Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter). Along with a critique of curatorial intentions, these exhibitions are reviewed in order to explore the representation of African modern identity.

This study considers how, after postcolonialism and postmodernism, binary differences such as Western/African and black/white have become less pronounced, due to globalising processes, resulting in interculturalism and transnationalism. This study captures the shift away from the centrality thinking of postmodernism and postcolonialism, not in terms of white superiority, but in terms of a reconstruction of the modern, in order to situate Africa as a product of globalisation. The study hypothesises that transmutation has occurred, rendering society as culturally intermixed, and thus dismantling essential racial stereotypes. The study rather investigates identity exchange in terms of translation, where the understanding of difference is considered in terms of changing understandings of difference itself through globalisation. In order to surpass stereo-racial boundaries, this study postulates that identitarian understanding is now trans-conscious, pluralised to the point of being racially exchanged. The exhibition *Trans-Africa: Africa curating Africa* challenges and transmutes stereotypes of backwardness, exoticism and dislocation in perceptions of Africa within the curatorial realm, and aims to elicit new frameworks to interpret African art. The curatorial objective is to posit a contemporary understanding of

African identity within the public domain: in a space where terms like race, culture, tradition or self/other need not form the basis of identitarian understanding in Africa.

The outcome of such an understanding is explained through the concept of the transmutation of culture, that problematises differences in cultural translation and trans-consciousness. This results in a transnational and global understanding, no longer limited to the understanding of African identity with regard to diasporic or nomadic conditions. As such, cultural intermixing and trans-consciousness conveys that within changing curatorial perceptions, the issue of who has the right to comment on whom is fading.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Within the modernising context of the Global South, and particularly when considering South African multicultural identities, the ability to clearly differentiate between the self and the other has become particularly compromised. Robert Farris Thompson (cited in Barson 2010:8), proposes that there is a need for a “retelling of Modernism to show how it predicts [that] the triumph of the current sequences would reveal that the Other is your neighbor – that black and modernist cultures were inseparable long ago.” This view is echoed by Brenda Atkinson (1999:16), who argues that since South Africa’s initial years in which it was set free from apartheid, “it is clear that the stakes have shifted, and the country’s reintegration into ‘international art’, culture, and politics, has given fuel to – and perhaps even made possible – greater critical openness around the politics of identity and representation.” Often, according to Atkinson (1999:16), “white artists, critics, and curators can no longer assume an unchallenged and definitive authority, and black artists are increasingly critical of a market that demands a certain formulaic ‘Africanness’ from their art.”

Yet, diametrically opposed to this view is that of cultural theorist and curator Okwui Enwezor (1999:376), who claims that the white artist is unable to comment on a black subject, as it results in an “act of surrogacy that emphasises the subject’s muteness and silence, while embellishing their own positions as the voices of reality.” Enwezor (1999:376) states that this act once again forcibly silences the black subject and fails to acknowledge the “crucial psychic split that positions black and white bodies in polarities of worth and value.” Enwezor (in Atkinson 1999:17) argues that “the spectacular black Other of colonial history [...] is no less abject and marginal a figure in the contemporary intellectual and cultural production of ‘white South Africans’.” Such postcolonial thinking demands a need for change towards a view positioned in the changes brought about by the globalisation processes and the advances of technology, leading to new economic and socio-political developments in Africa and a subsequent altered understanding of African identity. Importantly, there is a need for the deconstruction of (still) prevalent arguments that one race is not able to speak on behalf of another in terms of gender, culture or any other aspect relating to identity.

## 1.1 Background to the study: towards new African identity politics

Considering viewpoints of cultural theorists such as Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie (2010), who maintains that “ahistorical interpretations of contemporary African art” are currently being created, it is postulated in this study in curatorial practice that African identity is changing, and moving towards the kind of intercultural views that are generated by Africans themselves. Through curatorial means, African identity politics are investigated in relation to critical ideas on African modernism and post-Africanism, sharing similarities with Nicholas Bourriaud’s (2010) concept of altermodernism.

The research focus falls on the Global South as a geo-political location, with particular reference to South African artworks and their curation. I set up a critique of curatorial approaches to African identity from the 1985 exhibition, *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art* (Ricky Burnett), through the 1990s Johannesburg Biennials, to more recent exhibitions such as *Documenta XI* (2002, Okwui Enwezor) and *Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent* (2004, Simon Njami). I then select and investigate artwork from the Global South as presented at seminal exhibitions, that focuses on identity. Along with a critique of curatorial intentions, I review these exhibitions in order to explore the representation of African modern identity. Within the context of my own curatorial practice, I investigate changing curatorial perceptions and views on identity through the selected themes of *Identity and connections*, *Identity and behaviours* and *Identity and place*. These themes are investigated and outlined in the accompanying catalogue *Trans-Africa: Africa curating Africa*. Grounded in cultural transmutation and intermixing, I argue a new model of identitarian understanding of African modernism that problematises differences in cultural translation, trans-consciousness, global understanding and views of transnationalism, whereby a change towards a view based within African modernism and altermodern is postulated.

A useful definition of African modernism has been provided by Tate Liverpool curators Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter (2010:179), who describe it as being “a broad term referring to those strands of twentieth-century transnational black art and literature affiliated to global modernism and composed of disparate strains of African experience and tradition.” This definition is appropriated in this study, which considers how, after postcolonialism and postmodernism, binary differences such as Western/African and black/white have become less pronounced, due to globalising processes, resulting in interculturalism and transnationalism. I then undertake an investigation into how such transformations have been affecting definitions of identity and self. Emerging post-Africanism has also been induced by the economic factors underpinning certain cultural developments, and “differences such as

Western/African and black/white [that] continue to be important for the understanding, and making, of contemporary culture” as Gen Doy (2000:204) maintains. I maintain that postcolonialism, set within binary theory, no longer provides the tools to understanding contemporary globalised identity. African modernism and altermodernism considers the notion of globalisation in terms of a contemporary understanding of identity, which will be investigated within this study.

### **1.1.1 Research intentions: beyond postcolonialism**

The foundations of postmodern discourses in South Africa are situated within the framework of postcolonialism.<sup>1</sup> According to Stuart Hall (cited in Malik 2000:157), Western culture continues to differentiate itself from other cultures, such as those to be found in Africa. According to Doy (2000:201), African history is “polluted with colonial values”, which has influenced our understanding of postcolonial theory.<sup>2</sup> Colonialist views maintain the idea of a static black culture, which in reality is constantly shifting (Doy 2000:223). Nicholas Bourriaud (2009:17) has argued that “the use of the prefix ‘post- ...’ [sic] ultimately served simply to lump together multiple versions of that *after*” [original emphasis]. Discussing the deconstruction of postcolonialism, the author claims that it has thus substituted “one language for another, the new one contenting itself with subtling the old one, without ever getting started on the process of translation that would establish a possible dialogue between past and present” (Bourriaud 2009:14). Doy (2000:204) views the notion of the postcolonial as closely linked to that of the postmodern, and much of current art practice as “often relating to issues discussed in postcolonial theory, such as identity, displacement, mixing of cultures and peoples (hybridity) and indeterminacy.” Thus, the dialogue between past and present has not been established, but has rather merged within theories that pose problems when hypothesising contemporary identity today.

Postcolonialism could be viewed as a response as well as a resistance to colonialism, wherein issues such as historical events, beliefs, traditions, conventions and languages are considered in an attempt to reveal the superiority and centrality of certain systems of postcolonial thinking. This idea of superiority and the notion of power relations play core roles in postcolonial investigations with regard to white superiority. Frantz Fanon (1967:30), in an attempt to move past the theories of colonialism into postcolonialism, calls upon the

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<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial art has been described as “art produced in response to the aftermath of colonial rule, frequently addressing issues of national and cultural identity, race and ethnicity” (Postcolonial Art 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Identitarian ‘categories’ rooted within post/colonialism are mostly based on essentialist categories grounded in the aesthetics of race and colour. Nationality, birth place and ancestry are taken as secondary in the process of determining identity.

conditions for comprehending the 'self': firstly that in order to understand the self we need to be viewed in relation to an otherness, and it is this relationship to the other that forms the basis for identification. The second condition is determined by "the place of splitting"- the fantasy to occupy the space of the other, as well as the self, so that one may understand "you're different" and at the same time have the feeling that "you're one of us" (cited in Bhabha 1994:44). Thus, in terms of postcolonialism, the image of the self was aligned with the West, and the other was made to acknowledge their own difference through this dominant image of the self (non-West). Yet, the other was made to feel to be equal when splitting, conveying postcolonial identity theory's roots within white superiority. Fanon (cited in Bhabha 1994:44) states "it is precisely in that use of 'different' – to be different from that that are different, that makes you the same – that the Unconscious speaks of the form of Otherness."

Postcolonialism has not liberated the world from Western-centred theories on the making of culture (Bourriaud 2009:15). Postmodern and postcolonial theories still rely on the Western model to describe globalisation and multiculturalism, although this has certainly raised awareness of the sensitivities of difference around race and such cultures of power and domination. When considered in terms of postcolonialism, globalisation and multiculturalism are investigated with regard to historically European perceptions, as the basis of postcolonial theory falls within Western style theorisation. Edward Said (1978:293) states that "the attitude of the colonizers towards the colonised is that they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented, 'they' could not speak, but must be spoken for." White superiority, as well as issues of centrality, are still considered within postcolonial theory, which, according to Bourriaud (2009:15), have become "conceptual fretters from which we must free ourselves in order to rethink the relationship of contemporary" to power, politics, culture and identity. I argue in this study that new theories, in conjunction with the theories of African modernism and postAfricanism, need to be developed in its positioning outside postcolonial and postmodern understandings of identity.

Within postcolonialism, notions of nation and racial identity are not transcended. Rather, the definition by which the self and the other is understood has been transformed. It can now be understood that people are different, but that they are equal, and that mainstreams and marginalisations cannot be tolerated. In such poststructural discourse, "the Other is a social object, the difference against which the Self is measured" and without which there can be no sense of self identity (Malik 2000:158). According to Kenan Malik (2000:156) "the differences between Western and non-Western cultures are rationalised through non-Western peoples being defined as the 'others', distinguishing solely through their antagonism to the dominant

image of the self.” Similarly, Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) states that in order to understand the self, one needs to understand oneself in relation to a form of ‘otherness’. Therefore, in colonial and postcolonial discourses, the basis for understanding identity is based on frameworks of binary opposites, especially the binaries of white/black.

Fanon (1967) argues that to question identity was never fulfilling, but rather amounted to “the production of the image of identity.” This statement can be viewed in accordance with Homi Bhabha’s (1994:50) statement that “identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality.” The connotations of self and other are deeply rooted within colonialism and postcolonialism. This dependence on the self/other is highly charged with negative connotations, often with the connotation of other being opposite to civilised (Lemke 1998:4). The African modern theorist, Sieglinde Lemke (1998:4) defines the use of the word ‘other’ as a term “that remains an affront” – as something exotic – “non-white, non-sterile, non-weary, not-so-uptight [...] non-Western, black, non-European, or ‘primitive’.” The construction of difference within the postcolonial mindset thus rests aligned with the employment of racial othering. The study of *blackness* investigates the social construction of being black, and is encompassed within the study of racial othering. Blackness is uncompromising in its view of the essential black body, with a “disapproving attitude and stance on cultural identity and consciousness” (Harris 2005:210). Blackness has always involved racism and exemplifies the stereotypical view of the other from a colonialist perspective, similar to what Diana Fuss (1989:75) has pointed out as “the colonialist inscription of the black African as primitive.”

As Atkinson (1999:16) argues, power shifts within societies and therefore compositions of self and other need to be remapped “not only in terms of race, class, ethnicity and gender, but equally in terms of the local and the international, and in light of the ominous expansion of global capital.” In a globalised society, transgressing borders is no longer limited to physical travel; the internet allows transnational experiences on a daily basis. Through economic globalisation, societies have become cosmopolitan, diasporic activities are now common occurrences, and the notion of the nomad is no longer only applicable to the traveller. Bourriaud (2009:11) states that “this sudden emergence into the contemporary arena of individuals from countries then considered ‘peripheral’ [...] was to acquire the name *globalization*.” Globalisation has thus brought about changes in perceptions of self and other, as the self and other are becoming progressively intermixed. In her article *Stylizing the self*, Sarah Nuttall (2008:93) formulates self-representation in contemporary South African culture with particular reference to Michel Foucault’s concept of “stylizing the self”, where Foucault (cited in Nuttall 2008:93) describes practices of “self-stylization” or “self-fashioning” in which

individuals create their own bodies, souls, thoughts, ways of being and conduct in order to transform themselves. Nuttall (2008:93) comments that “such processes of self-stylization draw on technologies of the self to ensure that what emerges from the moment of political liberation are indeed practices of freedom.” What is evident is thus the contemporary need to redesign one’s own ‘self’, or sense of identity, outside of the postcolonial concept of the central image of identity, and outside of the postcolonial concept of the ‘image of totality’.

### **1.1.2 Research intentions: African modern identity politics**

Under the influence of major changes in the urban and world contexts, the way in which the self is shaped in the South African context is changing, or perhaps, a new generation is being formed, where histories, cultural values and notions of the self are constantly renegotiated and remade. In *Johannesburg: the elusive metropolis* (2008), Nuttall and Mbembe (2008:1) state that:

as elsewhere in the global South, [the city] has been shaped in the crucible of colonialism and by the labor of race. Worldliness, in this context, has had to do not only with the capacity to generate one’s own cultural forms, institutions, and lifeways, but also with the ability to foreground, translate, fragment, and disrupt realities and imaginaries originating elsewhere, and in the process place these forms and processes in the service of one’s own making.

As such, the idea of the post-African or the African modern has emerged, which Nuttall and Mbembe (2008:1) describe as “a specific way of being in the world.”

African modernism should be considered in comparison to a kind of ‘*past* postmodernism’, in which postcolonialism was firmly rooted. Lemke (1998:6) suggests that “the ‘other’ of colour was always within the culture of Modernism” and, moreover, that the other is deeply rooted within contemporary culture. African modernism firstly acknowledges that not only was black art instrumental in forming white modernism, but that white culture was also instrumental in shaping black expression. It can be acknowledged that “intercultural exchanges shaped the formation of modernist aesthetics” (Lemke 1998:7). In keeping with this view, Nuttall (2008:99) claims that the past has been “recalled and reworked, [and] is in turn cross-pollinated.” Lemke (1998:3) is concerned with finding the connections between white and black culture in early twentieth-century art and literature, and her focus is on the aesthetic collaboration between the two. This investigation proves useful when considering that changes in identity – in terms of a separation between cultures – occurred much earlier than

previously acknowledged.<sup>3</sup> Lemke (1998:4) states that it was the expressions of black, or “African-inspired” parties, that have played such an important role in shaping modernism and that “it is this injection of blackness that caused modernism to assume the precise form it took.” Such views demonstrate a shift away from the centrality thinking of postmodernism and postcolonialism in terms of white superiority, and introduce the need to further investigate African modernism in order to come closer to an understanding of African contemporary identity.

### 1.1.3 *Altermodernism*

The consciousnesses and sensibilities evident in African modernism show similarities with altermodernism. Both African modernism and the altermodern are concerned with identifying an emergent phenomenon that has, in Bourriaud’s (2009:16) terms, moved beyond the historical meaning of ‘modern’. African modernism’s imperative is to *re-generate, re-make* and *re-hash* new theories in order to come to a contemporary understanding of identity. Similarly, Bourriaud (2009:15) asserts that “it is possible to reclaim the concept of modernity without for an instant feeling that it’s a throwback and without ignoring salutary criticisms of the totalitarian temptations and colonialist claims of the modernism of the last century.” By outlining the links between other cultures, Lemke’s (1998) adoption of African modernism encourages the rethinking of the relationship of contemporary artworks to power and politics. Similarly, Bourriaud (2009:16) maintains “a focus on the present, experimentation, the relative, the fluid.” Bourriaud (2009:16) challenges the conventional perception that the twentieth-century Modernist movement was a Western oriented cultural phenomenon; instead he argues that we need a “global equivalent.”

However, Bourriaud’s altermodern remains theorised from a European perspective and he has had little comment on globalising processes in Africa itself. Bourriaud (2009:164) questions how contemporary theorisation exists to valorise “peripheral cultures” within the value of contemporary art, of which his answer remains representative of European perspective. Although Bourriaud (2009:166) acknowledges the globalising processes in Africa, he situates this globalisation in terms of economic globalisation and excludes Africa from cultural globalisation. The differences between the altermodern and African modern are founded on the geopolitical locations of the founding theories and the cultural

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<sup>3</sup> In order to convey this, Lemke (2010:4) uses a metaphor from a novel by Virginia Woolf, *To the lighthouse* (1927), concerning a discussion of achieving the purest of white hues - if you add a couple of drops of black paint to white paint, the purest of whites is achieved. The black is invisible to the naked eye, but becomes integral to achieving this white hue. Lemke (1998:4) uses this metaphor to describe the workings of the phenomenon of “the invisible man,” which she uses as a form of “cultural criticism: that black, or African-inspired, expressions have played a seminal role in the shaping of modernism.”

consciousness's therein of the current globalising processes. A pitfall of altermodern theory is that it excludes Africa. African modernism attests to cultural globalisation in Africa itself, although it often remains in relation to understandings derived from diasporic Africans.

Thus, this study considers applicable aspects from both altermodern, as well as African modern's studies on globalisation, with the objective to convey that intercultural exchanges have shaped the formation of modernist aesthetics since the early 1900s (Lemke 1998:7), and acknowledges that a re-examining of this formation needs to be considered in terms of Africa itself. Binary logic ought to be considered dated, as it is central to the differentiation associated with the philosophies of modern and postmodern movements, colonial and postcolonial. According to Axel (1999:41) "it seems that, with its critics, South Africa, perhaps the quintessential 'new' nation, is in the midst of a struggle over the production of a new body – whole and thus [...] penetrable, in which the 'rainbow nation' will reside."<sup>4</sup> Axel (1999:41) goes on to state that due to the vulnerability of our South African situation in relation to identity politics, "its analysis may set an important precedent for [new] theories of representation and identity politics."

#### **1.1.4 *The role of the curator***

Marianne Eigenheer (2011:4) questions "how and in what terms curating functions as a critical cultural practice." In answer to this question, Oliver Marchart's (2008:7) notion of Biennaleisation, the idea of the "Western mega-exhibition", is particularly relevant in order to understand what the art world and mega exhibitions signify to the public, which he states "throw an enormous amount of symbolic, representational and structural resources into 'nation building'" (Marchart 2008:7). This, Marchart (2008:7) argues, transforms these major exhibitions, and in effect, the art world, into ideological tools which can be used by the dominant culture. Yet, in response to this argument, one needs to contemplate Eigenheer's (2007:5) viewpoint that "cultural globalization compels us to neither negate our own background nor to take it as the only premise, but to question it time and again in the contextual flow of ongoing projects." Therefore, in terms of the function of curating as a cultural practice, one can argue that it provides the tools to explore, and to question dominant ideologies.

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<sup>4</sup> Olu Oguibe (1996:[sp]) refers to this notion of the "new Other" within the technological age, applicable to South Africa stemming from a minority of white privilege and a disadvantaged black majority, in which he states 'the other' of contemporary society will not be measured in terms of race, but in terms of access to technology and cyberspace.



Ogbechie (2010) argues that although “artists in the era of Modernism claimed an *avant-garde* status and the authority to define the horizon of meanings of their work, contemporary curators have, by and large, usurped this role, and curatorial practice is increasingly seen as a form of installation art, in which curators aggregate artworks and objects to construct a structure of interpretation for contemporary practice.” Beatrice von Bismarck (2007:19) states that “curatorial practice is defined by its production of connections.” Curating entails finding artefacts and information, and connecting these artefacts within an entirely new setting, “as exhibited objects, the materials assembled are ‘in action’: that is, they obtain changing and dynamic meanings in the course of the process of being related to one another” (Von Bismarck 2007:19). Ogbechie (2010) agrees with Von Bismarck’s definition that “it gives the ensuing installations created by contemporary curators a new position of authority”, thus laying claim to Von Bismarck’s (2007:63) notion of the curators “special powers to interpret the processes of connection.” According to Ogbechie (2010), “this means that the curator’s work as a creator of connections and narratives between various forms of art and cultural objects is rapidly taking the place of the work of the artist.”

Dorothee Richter and Barnaby Drabble (2011:7) state that “the figure of the curator and for the most part curating is controversially described and debated as a new and powerful form of cultural authorship, an approach that can be attributed to curating’s perceived proximity to the subject-oriented ideology surrounding the idea of artistic authorship.” Thus, as curating functions within critical cultural practice (Eigenheer 2011:4), my research will attempt to convey the opportunity to posit a contemporary understanding of African identity within the public domain, which will begin the movement of achieving a new understanding of identity on a much wider scale, beyond the academics of the contemporary art world. I argue that previous attempts of curating African identity have not offered the public an understanding of African identity outside of a typically Western understanding of ‘African’. Similarly, Ogbechie (2007:[sp]) has argued of previous exhibitions, that “curators compress broad and generalised views of the continent in single shows designed to provide a quick comprehension of varieties of modern and contemporary art in Africa.”

## **1.2 Aims and objectives of the research**

The focus of this research is the question raised by Ogbechie (2010), articulated as follows:

The location of contemporary African art within a global discourse of art confronts a central problem of cultural practice in the era of globalization: what is the value of Africa as a site of globalization, as a place with its own history of development of

specific visual languages and strategies of visual representation?

The objective of this study is to convey Africa as a site of globalisation with identitarian implications. Ogbechie's (2010) question demonstrates that new viewpoints and arguments have emerged with regard to contemporary African art production and its histories of modernity. Salah Hassan's (1999:217) view of more than a decade ago states that in African art, essentially Western criteria of validation and acceptance are still at play, grounded in "racial determinism" and "the demand for the display of authenticity and spectacle", which reflects old binary thinking. Ogbechie (2007:[sp]) argues that it is such thinking that has "victimized modern African art by making it practically impossible for African artists to emerge as active subjects/agents of modernity in art history." These statements by Ogbechie *et al* have spurred this investigation, which aims to convey the development of the visual languages and strategies of visual representation within South Africa from the 1980s to the present. Bourriaud (2009:21) comments that due to a constant "professional" nomadism, there is a commonplace found increasingly within the world, "goods and services are increasingly similar, we are becoming transnational."

This study critically analyses and interprets notions of both whiteness and blackness in conjunction with the discourses of post-black and post-cultural. I follow Lemke (1998:9), who maintains that "blackness helped to create the white aesthetic that we today refer to as modernism", and asserts that "black and white influences have been engaged in the dialectical formation of an aesthetic and cultural identity." She further states that "this identity is necessarily new, is neither purely black nor purely white, and is (metaphorically) the defining aspect of [African] modernism" (Lemke 1998:9). Steven Connor (in Lemke 1998:150) claims that "postmodernist theory names and correspondingly closes off the very world of cultural difference and plurality, which it allegedly brings to visibility." Dyer (2003:300) argues that the idea of 'white' and whiteness has become normalised, and "othered voices" are seen as opposite, which thus need to be subverted. I propose that Africa has moved past the postcolonial into an era of fully-fledged African altermodern/neomodern. I thus equate the post-postmodernism in the African context with African neomodernism, as surpassing the modern as such. This term synthesises the point of view of both the altermodern and African modern, and is applied within the African situation itself. The term neomodern initiates a novel understanding of these theories, as applicable to African identitarian understanding.

I further maintain that due to large-scale globalisation and the infiltration of new technologies, cross-cultural intertwining is inevitable, and agree that there is a need to elicit

“new critical frameworks for interpreting modern African art’s intersection with local and global discourses of modernity” (Ogbechie 2007:[sp]). This I aim to convey within my curated exhibition. According to Lemke (1998:148), there is no longer an absolute in terms of culture, but rather there is a cultural-mixing. This is therefore similar to Bourriaud’s (2009:21) altermodern, where he questions whether “this novel situation [will] give rise to a new way of conceptualizing cultural identity”, which constitutes a central hypothesis within this study in terms of African cultural identity.

My research proposes an alternative model for understanding contemporary African identity in a context of merging cultures, which is becoming a worldwide condition. Within postmodernism and postcolonialism, the concept of hybridity has been used to understand our increasingly globalised world, yet in an era where platforms such as the World Wide Web and Google Earth allow transnationalism on a virtual level (Bourriaud 2009:18), hybridity remains associated within binary theorisation as a condition of postmodernism and postcolonialism. Bourriaud (2009:18) explains that the term 'hybridity' implies “popular culture, gaining the distinctive features of another cultural identity”, but remains associated with the movements of postmodernism and postcolonialism. I postulate that the African altermodern can be explained as a movement that has surpassed previous theorisations. Within a contemporary context, hybridity and multiculturalism are no longer sufficient ways to theorise identity, as this simply serves to be reductive. Theorising the hybrid within postcolonialism is still grounded in dualistic identitarian understanding. This study will thus attempt to theorise identity in new terms, such as 'post-identitarian', 'post-African', 'intercultural', 'transnational' and 'transcultural'.

In order to investigate these notions of globalisation and transculturalism; double consciousness and transnationalism occupy central positions in this study. The impact of black material culture on Western modernism is investigated. Equally significant is the impact of white colonial and postcolonial presence on black indigenous culture. According to Barson and Gorschlüter (2010:21), during the 1980s and 1990s “the use of the black body by white artists was itself a contentious issue.” I duly state my objective to convey that these divisions have greatly diminished, by investigating curated exhibitions within a historical period, from the mid-1980s to current exhibitions. Within the curatorial domain, these exhibitions will provide insight towards formulating a new direction within identity theories as well as curatorial practice.

### 1.3. Curatorial intentions: African altermodern identity politics

The research engages with a range of contemporary art and curated exhibitions, which convey an insistent need for a new model of theorising African identity. In keeping with the notions of such manner of African neomodernism, a critique is set up of various recent failures at conveying an accurate perception of identity in curated exhibitions, and by doing so, a new model for theorising postAfrican identity is proposed. Curatorially, the study disputes the idea that modernism is a *white aesthetic* and postulates that African artists have moved beyond Enwezorian postcolonialism into the era of the African neomodernism. A main curatorial aim is to contest notions of ‘white’ or ‘black’ writing, ‘white’ or ‘black’ exhibiting, stating that due to a change in understanding of African modernist and postcultural identity politics, white perspectives on the black body or writing from the white perspective on both black and white artists alike, is no longer a contentious issue. The focus of the curated exhibition will therefore be on cross-cultural identity politics.

Curatorially, the exhibition maintains that due to globalising processes, resulting in transculturalism, transnationalism, post-identity and post-African trans-consciousness, (past double consciousness<sup>5</sup>), there is a need to elicit “new critical frameworks for interpreting modern African art’s intersection with local and global discourses of modernity” (Ogbechie 2007:[sp]). With relevance to this, Salah Hassan (1999:215) argues that “the field of African art in general requires new frameworks for understanding its forms and aesthetics that engender them.” In order to understand contemporary African identity, its repositories and products, one needs to consider aspects such as geopolitical location, conditions of globalisation and patterns of socio-political activity. Within the curated exhibition, the themes included attempt to provide solutions to the failed models of identity previously curated, and attempt to describe the curatorial shifts when considering identity. Although previous theoretical outlining of African modernism was closely associated with the diaspora, my consideration of these theories attests to the fact that diasporic Africans do not adequately represent African modernism. Contemporary artists situated within Africa and the Global South should be considered integral to this investigation.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Double consciousness’ refers to “the state of belonging to a culture but being simultaneously outside it, denied access or ignored within it” (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:180). This concept conveys a familiar problem at the core of racial dynamics, namely whether a subject can be simultaneously inside and outside of a given culture.

## 1.4 Literature review

A seminal source for this study is the theories of Sieglinde Lemke, Professor in American Studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany. Lemke (1998:144) provides critical insight into the views of transnationalism, hybridity and the idea that identity is neither purely black, nor purely white, but what she calls “a cross cultural dynamic of interracial collaboration, borrowing, re-appropriation and outright parody.” In addition, she argues that there is a formal trend present, to attempt to “illuminate a widespread black presence in modern culture ... in assessing the broad impact nonwhites have had on modernity” (Lemke 1998:13). Lemke (1998:3) thus concerns herself with the exploration of the formal connections between ‘white’ and ‘black’ cultures in early twentieth-century art. Instead of contrasting white modernism with black “counter-modernism”, she attempts to trace how both are “inextricably interrelated” (Lemke 1998:3). The author does not focus on black aesthetics nor the neglected history of black modernism, but on the aesthetic collaboration of white and black cultures (Lemke 1998:3). In studying both contemporary culture as well as the modernist avant-garde, Lemke (1998:6) attests to the fact that black culture plays an inextricable part in shaping Western culture: “even a cursory glance at MTV attests that the Other is deeply embedded within contemporary culture.”

Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie is currently the associate Professor of art history at the University of California, and specialises in classical, modern and contemporary African and African diaspora arts, with specific interest in alternative modernities. Ogbechie provided useful criticism in terms of exhibitions previously curated, as well as defining the curator’s role within the contemporary art world. Ogbechie (2010) attests to the fact that the curator is able to assert autonomy in the art market, and that since such is the case, he criticises Enwezor where his exhibitions use diasporic Africans to best represent the continent. Ogbechie (2010) attests to the idea that the curator plays a fundamental role within the defining of the meaning of art, and as such, is at the forefront of rendering cultural understanding to the public. Ogbechie (2010) states “curators fit into the new economy as culture brokers who mediate the value of artworks in economic and critical discourse [...] curatorial practice as brokerage redefines a process where known objects accumulate greater value merely by being known, while other objects of equal value, rendered unknown by selective curatorial dismissal, find it difficult to gain traction.”

Okwui Enwezor is currently curator at the International Centre of Photography, New York, and has been artistic director of several major institutions and seminal exhibitions concerning African art in the West. In January 2011, he was appointed director of Haus der

Kunst in Germany. Enwezor's texts, as well as his curated exhibitions, take a central focus in this study. Enwezor has been a forerunner in placing African art on the global map, particularly through the curated exhibition *Documenta XI* (2002). Another seminal exhibition examined includes *Trade routes: history and geography*, the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale. Enwezor's aim to structure *Documenta XI* (2002) around a 'new' postcolonial thinking and offering an 'avant-garde' curatorial structure for *Documenta XI* (2002); is criticised by Ogbechie (2010), who argues that although Enwezor's curatorial impact has succeeded to direct attention towards Africa through his curatorial aims, more so "his curatorial practice is devoted to radical notions of contemporaneity built mainly on the idea that diaspora Africans best represent the continent." Viewing Africa as *ahistorical* and irrelevant to the understanding of its contemporaneity, Ogbechie argues that as a curator, Enwezor therefore remarginalises Africa.

Curators Tanya Barson<sup>6</sup> and Peter Gorschlüter's<sup>7</sup> *Afro modern: journey's through the black Atlantic* (2010) entails a critical discussion by various authors on topics such as African modernism and views on whiteness and blackness, as well as their seminal idea of 'double consciousness.' Their views on identity represent a departure from an inheritance of black/white binaries – although the study remains in the West and concerned with African diaspora. The identitarian view is a seminal starting point to the research, and concerns a deconstruction of cultures classified as other in Western discourses, in which African, Asian, Oceanic and Native American artists are critical participants.

Nicolas Bourriaud<sup>8</sup>, author of *The radican* (2009), is the Director of the *École des beaux arts* in Paris, and formerly was the Gulbenkian curator of contemporary art at the Tate Britain and the co-director of the *Palais de Tokyo* in Paris. Other publications of his include *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), *Postproduction* (2002) and *Formes de Vie: L'Art Moderne et l'invention de Soi* (1999). Bourriaud's (2009) theory of *The radican* provides a critical methodology on multiculturalism, in which he questions individual identity and cultural diversity within the theories of the altermodern, which provides a seminal perspective on a model for identity theory in post-postmodernism, which in turn can be synthesised with notions of African modernism.

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<sup>6</sup> Tanya Barson was appointed as curator of Exhibitions and collections Curator at Tate Liverpool in 2004 and as Curator (International Art) at Tate Modern in 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Gorschlüter has taken up the position of Head of Exhibitions and displays at Tate Liverpool in 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Other well-known publications by Nicolas Bourriaud include *Postproduction* (2001), *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), as well as *Altermodern* (2009).

Another relevant view is held by John Pepper<sup>9</sup> (2004) , who “calls for a wholly different approach to South African art history and goes on to emphasise the paradoxes of what he terms the ‘grey areas’ of South African modernism” (Ogbechie 2007). Similarly Hassan<sup>10</sup> (1999:214) states that, “to this day, the study of African art remains largely a Western discipline” and argues that “[scholars] have egregiously neglected the contemporary experience in African art.” Other authors to be consulted include Ann Douglas cited in *Afro modern: journeys through the black Atlantic* (2010) as well as the work of Gilroy’s *The black Atlantic* (1993). Gilroy’s text was seminal in inspiring the exhibition *Afro-Modern: Journey’s through the black Atlantic* (2010) and the use of the term ‘double consciousness’. Although the text is a decade old, he is a seminal source when considering identity from a post-racial perspective.

By using a variety of writings, namely black writing on black and white artists and theories (seminal sources being Lemke, Ogbechie and Enwezor) as well as white writing on black and white artists (Bourriaud, Barson & Gorschlüter), I attempt to analyse artworks and curated exhibitions in terms of a new way of approaching identity – not through seminally white writing or black writing – but from a post-black, post-racial approach, where race does not form the pivot on which terms such as ‘identity’ or ‘Africa’ turn. I am outlining within my research the tensions within identity politics, and therefore am attesting to an altogether new way in which to consider identity.

## 1.5 Research methodology and theoretical framework

This is a qualitative study. There is wide consultation on theories pertaining to postcolonialism, African modernism and altermodernism that are studied and brought to praxis to comply with the requirements for the degree of Masters in Fine Arts with specialisation in curatorial praxis – which consists of a mini-dissertation that forms the theoretical framing document, a curated exhibition and an accompanying catalogue for the curated exhibition.

The study further includes wide consultation of a variety of theories within this theoretical framework, including postculturality and notions of postblack, globalisation and othering. These theories are critically analysed and applied to visual texts in order to review the

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<sup>9</sup> Assistant Professor of Contemporary / NonWestern Art History at Ramapo College, New Jersey.

<sup>10</sup> Salah M. Hassan is Goldwin Smith Professor and director of the Africana Studies and Research Center and Professor of African and African diaspora art history at Cornell University.

changing views on identity and modernisms within contemporary art culture as well as to offer an alternative model on theorising identity within the current era of African modernism.

Selected exhibitions along with their provided catalogues are critically analysed as a part of the qualitative research, in terms of the use and projection of identity, and with regard to differing views and approaches on contemporary African art, such as those offered by Ogbechie and Enwezor, as well as comparing their approaches to the more recent *Afro modern: journey's through the black Atlantic* (2010, curators Tanya Barson and Gorschlüter). Both their selection of artworks and their catalogues are reviewed in order to create an analysis of the terms in which various curators have deployed and conceptualised terms such as 'identity'. This analysis is then used as the foundation for establishing a solution in terms of theorising, as well as portraying identity within the curated exhibition and accompanying catalogue.

## 1.6 Overview of chapters

Chapter One provides an introduction.

Chapter Two consists of the contextualisation of the assumptions of the research and relevant terminologies. Seminal exhibitions have been examined, such as *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art* (touring South Africa and West Germany), curated by Ricky Burnett (1985), the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale – *Africanus* (with a particular focus on the South African displays), directed by Christopher Till, as well as the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale *Trade routes: history and geography* (1997) curated by Okwui Enwezor. Issues relating to the move away from postmodernism and postcolonialism have been explained in terms of the reasons why it is argued that old terminologies need to be discarded.

In Chapter Three, the emerging ideologies of African modernism, conveying the shortcomings of postmodernism and postcolonialism, is applied to seminal exhibitions, artworks and publications showing a historical change in perceptions and consciousness. The seminal exhibitions *Documenta XI*, (2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor) and *Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent* (2004, curated by Simon Njami) and *Afro modern: journeys through the black Atlantic* (2010, curated by Tanya Barson & Peter Gorschlüter) have been investigated.

In Chapter Four, African modernism is conceptually linked to globalisation, nomadism, diaspora and technology and dealt with in the key terms appropriate to African



altermodernism, such as transnationalism, post-cultural and trans-consciousness. Particular application to the emerging new theories of identity is explained, pertaining to the seminal artworks of my own curated exhibition.

The conclusion is provided in Chapter Five in terms of a review of the change in the perception of identity. A model for an alternative approach to understanding identity within the construct of the African modern is outlined.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CURATING IDENTITY: THE AFRICAN MEGA EXHIBITIONS

The New African Man] is standing between the past and the present, worried by a future without horizon, and remains captive in the turmoil of a modernisation that upsets him.

(Ery Camara 1995:27)

From the mid-1980s to the 1990s in the wake of apartheid in South Africa, the art community witnessed the emergence of the mega-exhibition. These international exhibitions emerged after the seminal exhibition, *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art*, curated by Ricky Burnett during the height of the state of emergency. *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art* aimed to convey a view of contemporary South African art, which would be exhibited in South Africa and in Germany. Then, just one year after the fall of apartheid, South Africa witnessed the emergence of the first Johannesburg Biennale, *Africus*, in 1995, which aimed to place African and South African contemporary art within the international art agenda. In 1997, the second Johannesburg Biennale *Trade routes: history and geography* was curated by Okwui Enwezor, which contested ideas of Western hegemony, which Enwezor felt still weighed heavily upon discourses around African art.

By investigating the afore-mentioned exhibitions, this chapter aims at grounding the investigation of emerging identitarian modernisms historically, considering both the curators' and critics' approaches to the perception and theorisation of the artists' work. Seminal artworks within each exhibition are investigated in terms of the motivation of their inclusion within the curatorial concept of the show. The aim is to demonstrate an emerging change in attitude towards identitarian theories. Curatorially it is evident that motivations were still grounded within postcolonial theory. This chapter thus investigates the aesthetic encounter of Europe and Africa and corroborates the existence of African modernism historically. Research into blackness/whiteness studies and racial stereotypes historically traces the roots of self/othering processes in order to locate *avant-garde* stereotypes of the exotic.

An exploration of *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art* conveys that a curatorial shift had occurred, where non-white<sup>1</sup> artists were included within organised exhibitions, despite the socio-political status of South African apartheid. An investigation into

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'non-white' became politically stigmatised during apartheid, but it should be noted that in terms of this study, 'non-white' is used as an all-encompassing term referring to all other cultures except white. 'White' has been used to indicate supremacy in the country, and other terms referring to race may be too specific and thus exclusive.

the curatorial motivation of *Africus* conveys the development of an understanding of identity through multiculturalism. *Africus* also aimed to forge a connection between Africa, South Africa and the West in an attempt to lay a path for previously marginalised artist's work to be experienced outside of Africa itself. *Trade routes: history and geography* (1997) considered difference in terms of globalisation, in order to respond to the evolving nature of contemporary culture, which I use to demonstrate the reasons why binary terminologies need to be discarded within identitarian theory. The way in which black influences on white modernity and *vice versa* have formed the basis for our current models of modernity, convey the reasons why new identitarian understanding is paramount to contemporary culture, outside of binarism.

## 2.1. The origins of racialism: situating South African art in colonial perspective

The Modern artist's first encounter with African culture came as a result of colonial trade, with African sculpture having been acquired by private collectors and museums in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century (Archer 2010:30). Initially there was a general ignorance about the origins of the imported objects; the fascination with these objects was seen as a mere flirtation with the 'otherness' of the object – labelled "negrophilia" at the time (Archer 2010:30). European artists were seen as sharing a "love of black culture parallel[ing] the innovations and cultural borrowing reflected in modernism art [sic] as well as the rebellious postures associated with their 'outsider' status" (Archer 2010:30). African objects were seen as a sort of muse to artists at the time of modernism, allowing them to further their creative capabilities – the African objects introduced a new conception of the figure. Picasso, according to Klopper (2006:34) "inaugurated a new formal language that revolutionised the history of twentieth-century European art." Lemke (1998:4) states that "black, or African-inspired, expressions have played a seminal role in the shaping of modernism," where African art, made available through colonial trade, has changed the experience of the modern artist forever. Thus, one can acknowledge that "intercultural exchanges shaped the formation of modernist aesthetics" since the early 1900s (Lemke 1998:7). Klopper (2006:34) argues that the Modernist's acknowledgement of African art was inevitably seen through the lens of "racist colonial endeavours." Picasso (in Archer 2010:30), upon his first encounter with African items, is alleged to have exclaimed:

Those masks were not just pieces of sculptures like the rest, not in the least, they were magic things [...] they were against everything; against unknown threatening spirits [...] I kept on staring at the fetishes. Then it came to me, I too was against everything [...] I too felt everything was unknown, hostile!



Figure 1: Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, 1935  
Oil paint on canvas  
2439 x 2337 mm  
Museum of Modern Art, New York  
(MOMA: The collection)

Lemke (1998:7) refers to Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1935) (Figure 1), as "the primal scene of the aesthetic encounter between Europe and Africa." The use of a non-naturalistic aesthetic, not accurately depicting the social world and its objects, allowed dominating European artists to transform the arts of that period to embrace non-naturalistic and non-representational forms. Artists such as Picasso were heavily influenced by the African masks and sculptures – pushing their works to new boundaries as a result of this influence. Lemke (1998:7) refers to this cultural exchange as "primitivist-modernism" – the hyphen indicating that without this cultural contact, this type of artefact would not exist. Klopper (2006:34) describes *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* as conveying two "Africanised female figures [...] imbued with a raw sexuality suggestive of a deeply problematic conception of Africans as brutally uninhibited." Thus, from the beginning, cultural exchange and influence historically merged the primitive and the civilised from the modern era.

Simultaneous to this cultural exchange of Western artists emulating African artists (objects), one must take into account that African artists and writers were often influenced by and emulated Western artists, albeit under different political circumstances of power relations. Lemke (1998:7) refers to this as "re-appropriated primitivist-modernism." While the focus has often been on the African influence on the visual arts of European/American artists, one

needs to consider the alternative influence on African artists – most often artists of the African diaspora. Archer (2010:32) argues that although it was in vogue for Parisians to believe that the Africans that associated with them during the European *avant-garde* were ‘authentic’, this was far from the case, as “African-Americans eager to enter white society accentuated the more entertaining aspects of their culture by exploiting their talents and commodifying primitivist stereotypes to meet the needs of their white audience.” This revolutionised art was based on blackness, which qualified for modernity (Archer 2010:32). Archer (2010:32) argues that black peoples at this time had to “negotiate, straddle, distort and deny their identities” and to accommodate the European taste for “vitality, sexual potency and Africa” in order to participate in this European modernity. The impact that black people have had on modernism has not been adequately discussed, according to Wallace (in Lemke 1998:4), who refers to the black performer, Josephine Baker (Figure 2), as the “Afro-American ‘other’ of the Euro-American Modernism” (Lemke 1998:4). Josephine Baker, the famous dancer who wore a banana skirt, exaggerated certain aspects of her otherness to gain popularity within Modern Parisian society. Thus, historically such a re-appropriated primitivist-modernism and cultural exchange is evident from both the Western and African perspective, with African influence taking its effect on European or Western society, and Western society presiding over the African diaspora in Europe.



Figure 2: Josephine Baker in the Banana Skirt from the *Folies Bergère* production ‘*Un Vent de Folie*’, 1927

Cultural analyst Brent Hayes Edwards, referred to by Archer (2010:32), discusses the relationship of the theoretical construct of negrophilia to the African diaspora. The African diaspora saw the use of African idioms and exaggerated cultural explanations as a complement to their own cultural ideals and modernity, where “contemporary cultural expressions [...] were meant to counter racist stereotypes and position the culture of diaspora Africans as contemporary” (Archer 2010:32). The European *avant-garde*’s preoccupation with primitivism and atavistic transgression closed down this sense of modernity, where the black experience was no longer seen as a part of the modern experience, and a black identity that was misunderstood and misrepresented became favoured as a catalyst for the *avant-garde* to ascend towards modernity (Archer 2010:32). Black people of the diaspora were painted using the exaggerated ‘blackness’ which was often negotiated in order to accommodate for the European taste for Africa. As a result, the now-favoured understanding of the black identity was hinged on the exaggeration of negrophilia. The black diaspora had been primitivised, and any form of their contemporary culture was thus attributed to the idea that they were wholly influenced by the Western culture in which they lived. Thus, the exaggerated image of the African became in part to racial discourse and stereotyped constructs, with the influence on white culture amounting in the claims of a ‘pure white modernism’ in which no African influence was accounted for. Lemke (1998:9) states that often canonical examples of American art, literature, music and dance “owes many of [their] themes and structures to intercultural, interracial exchanges”, historically grounding the presence of blackness, or “Africanism” in Modernism in general. Camara (1995:22) ponders thus: “what would contemporary art be without the rhythm Africa injected into it?” By these arguments, the influence of Africa in modern and contemporary art can be traced to the early twentieth century.

Blackness is generally understood as being socially constructed, although as Aldridge (1992:1) claims, “black studies is a change-orientated [...] activity” evident in the South African governmental change orientated goal of black empowerment. Fuss (1989:75) states that for Fanon “the body image of the black subject is not constituted by biological determinations from within, but rather by cultural determinations from without.” Essentialism, according to Fuss (1989:xi-xii) “is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity.” This ‘whatness’ is socially constructed through the ideologies of hegemonic society and, as such, essentialisms are typically defined in opposition to difference. Fuss (1989:11) goes on to state that this difference “reminds us that a complex system of cultural, social, psychological, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences, position

and constitute the subject.” Essentialism thus implies that there is a specific mould or restrictive and reductive ‘stereotype’ that informs the way a subject is constituted in another’s view. An attempt at breaking down the frameworks of such restrictive meta-narratives can be viewed within the curatorial motivations of *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art*, curated by Ricky Burnett, albeit ostensible. Emerging modernities seen in South African curatorial intentions, and a shift in curatorial identitarian perceptions, can be read as early as the mid-1980s.

### **2.1.1 *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art, curated by Ricky Burnett (1985)***

Racism was the dominant hegemony during apartheid, where a separatist ideology was enforced by the national government. Peoples classified as ‘non-white’ were not only denied basic human rights, but excluded from national participation in government and from institutional forms of cultural participation including state-sponsored art museums, with black artist’s work often designated as craft. During this time, sanctions were levelled against South Africa from international organisations, excluding South African citizens from participating in a number of international events in order to discourage apartheid government policies. It was during this time that Ricky Burnett curated the exhibition, *Tributaries: a view of contemporary South African art*,<sup>2</sup> sponsored corporately by BMW. *Tributaries* was an attempt to put together the first international exhibition of contemporary South African artworks that would include both white and black artists.

The curatorial aim of *Tributaries* was to add energy to the ‘creative forces’ in South Africa and to enhance understandings of these ‘creative forces’, specifically when regarding black artists and art. Ricky Burnett (1985:[sp]) outlined that the exhibition functioned to convey an art that was neither insular, nor simply commercially mainstream, but rather, an art that evinced the “rivers and tributaries appropriate to its own terrain.” Although the inclusive nature of the exhibition was *avant-garde* at the time for South Africa, patterns of cultural dominance are intrinsically apparent both in the treatment of the catalogue as well as the installation of the exhibition as a whole. As King (1991:39) states, curated exhibitions often signify patterns of cultural dominance. Aldridge (1992:1) likewise writes that “racism depends upon a collective mindset [sic] and behavioural syndrome to systematically deny people of colour any kind of persisting equality except that of being equally exposed to racism.” Studies on the politics of blackness involve the white representation of the black subject as

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Tributaries*.

an extreme other, and according to Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1962) (cited in Fuss 1989:75) this extreme otherness is “the image of the biological-sexual-sensual-genital-nigger.” Fanon (1962, in Fuss 1989:75) states that “not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man.” This view of blackness and whiteness is inherent within the exhibition *Tributaries*, where the black man or artist, is always posited against the understanding of the white artist. This can also be investigated in terms of the art versus craft debate where art was generally reserved for white artists (with the inference of a greater conceptual rigour) and black art was typically understood in terms of craft, or as ‘township art’. Hassan (1999:216) argues that Western notions of validity generally display a “preference for the exotic, the naïve, the unusual and the crude” (Hassan 1999:218). According to Kasfir (1999:112), replication within the art/craft object is performed through the artists’ hand resulting in inexact and varying artefacts. Kasfir (1999:112) states that it is this “uniqueness” which is seen by the Western audience as the “*sine qua non* for an object to transcend craft status.” Therefore, although emerging modernisms are present within Burnett’s intention and a move away from separatism was attempted as early as the mid-1980s; the execution of such an exhibition remains grounded within the political patterns of cultural dominance of the time.

Curatorially speaking, *Tributaries* avoided typical museum displays by mounting the exhibition in a space which “carried little of the aura of authority which public museums often do” (King 1991:46). This proves important, considering the role of museum authority during the height of white hegemony in the country.<sup>3</sup> As a result, this allowed work from various cultural backgrounds to be juxtaposed; works were not hung according to categories, but rather “placed so as to draw attention to unexpected contrasts, or similarities, of execution, of content, or of medium, and thereby aimed to forge new perceptions about what may constitute meaningful activity in the visual arts” (King 1991:47). The intention of *Tributaries* seemed sound, yet the inclusion of “terrains as diverse as toy-making, ritual garment creation and artmaking” (King 1991:46) undermined the aim to present a survey show of *contemporary* South African art (Figure 3). Burnett, in all his effort to eradicate the exclusion of black artists from gallery exhibitions, failed to uphold the category of contemporary art making within South Africa - the inclusion of such traditional toy-making and ritual garment creation conveys the pressure of representing an African art current that was still defined by a sense of ‘authentic Africa’ and Africanness. Kasfir (1999:104) states that the issue of craft or art-commodity is complicated by the fact that objects such as masks, figures, and various other utilitarian objects identified by Western collectors as art, do not hold the same value by

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<sup>3</sup> *Tributaries*, curated by Ricky Burnett (1985), sponsored by BMW, was mounted in a then unoccupied hall within the Africana Museum complex in New Town, now Museum Africa.



the people who make them. Kasfir (1999:104) states that “to their African makers and owners, valuable objects were ones that possessed visual power and ritual efficacy.” Thus, although the intention was to merge ‘white-art’ and ‘non-white-art’ categories, evidently the exhibition was still grounded within a Western curatorial perspective with a reductive view of non-white art.



Figure 3: Traditional dolls from the Ndebele and ban'Twana groups  
(undated)  
(The left doll quoted by Burnett (1985:8) as being “probably from the Ndebele group” and the right, “probably from the ban'Twana group”)  
(Burnett 1985:8)

Jackson Hlungwani, seen by his own Shangaan culture as a prophet, spiritual leader and healer, had work included within the exhibition *Tributaries*. His work, *Crucifix* (undated) (Figure 4) would not usually have been included in contemporary art exhibitions at the time, but was included on the show, as the work was seen to have prominent “Romanesque qualities” (Burnett 1985:[sp]). These so-called qualities aligned with the Western understanding of art consciousness, also conveyed qualities of an “authentically African” art (Burnett 1985:[sp]). This curatorial consciousness continues to convey a preoccupation with an essential view of Africa, viewed from a Western perspective and with a Western fixation with the exotic. The understanding of the work was based with total disregard for the conceptual properties of the piece, but rather focused on the African aesthetic properties of

the work. Hlungwani was both a prophet of Christianity and a spiritual healer, and merged both Western and non-Western culture in his practices. Hlungwani's aspiration was to build a stone "palace to God" (Burnett 1985:8). The crucifix evidently references the traditional symbol of Christianity but also recalls the traditional African Totem specific to Hlungwani. The work was inspired, according to the artist, by both African culture and Western religion. In the curatorial essay, Burnett (1985), states that he avidly investigated themes of aesthetic and ideological prejudice, in which he appropriated the desire for a certain 'Africanness' in South African work. Although the curatorial project was speculative, black artist's works were disregarded within the theoretical framework of understanding and were included merely for their aesthetic 'African' qualities. Hlungwani's work was thus included in *Tributaries* on the basis of the aesthetic quality of the work, seen as being authentically African. The conceptual content of the work was disregarded. Burnett (1985:[sp]) argues within his curatorial essay that there is a boundary between defining art and ethnology, a kind of misplaced exclusivity, where art is defined outside of ethnology. Burnett (1985:[sp]) argues that "this 'exclusivity' has dictated that official art and culture [of the apartheid regime] is white and orientated towards Europe." Thus, once again, although there is a shift in the inclusion of work from black artists, the worth of the work is still set against the mirror of the Western definition of art – thus conveyed in the writing on Hlungwani's work within the catalogue for *Tributaries* (1985).



Figure 4: Jackson Hlungwani, *Crucifix* (undated)  
Wood  
1150 x 620 mm  
(Burnett 1985:46)

According to King (1991:46), works were selected for exhibition from four categories: rural tradition, rural transitional, urban black and urban white – the only criterion being that the works needed to be beyond average. The majority of the curatorial essay builds theories of a ‘new’ category for black or rural art, under various themes. Burnett’s stated aim was to include rural art (the term ‘rural’ used by Burnett), in the discourse around the nature of art and developments in contemporary art. Burnett (1985:[sp]) does include or acknowledge that “the contemporary urban black artists would tend to look to the precedents set by the official white culture”, which he nonetheless states is only true insofar as the picture and sculpture have emerged as viable modes of expression. Burnett (1985:[sp]) considers, within the theme of rural art, the notion of dreams as a source and guide in art making, investigating works such as Dr. Patuma Seoka’s *Head* (undated) (Figure 5), who stated “dreams show me what to make, if I don’t obey, then I dream it again.” Seoka’s sculpture references a white male, in a traditional Western suit, supporting a branch on his head with a snake wrapped around it. The act of carrying an object on one’s head clearly recalls the African, with the threatening symbol of the snake so close to the subject’s own neck. Although the art of named black artists within the exhibition conveys a shift in attitude about the worth of the work of a specific artist to white South African art pundits – since previously there was an accepted ignorance concerning the origins of African art from specific African artists amongst them – the work was still considered inferior in terms of its value. This is referenced within Seoka’s *Head*, as cultural frameworks may be the result of restricted opportunities.



Figure 5: Dr. Patuma Seoka, *Head* (undated)  
Marula wood and enamel paint  
1050 x 550 x 550 mm  
(Burnett 1985:13)

During the 1990s, the debate on the distinction between art and craft rose to certain prominence. Kasfir (1999:112) states that the artists that produced such artefacts “cross the boundaries separating craft from art in terms of their reception by a Western audience” and that the art craft aesthetic is a distinction mainly found in the West. Burnett (1985:[sp]) delivers the argument that the show included art from art schools, the well-off, the work places of the impoverished, to community centre workshops, museums, opulent collections, grass woven beehive huts, city centres and barren settlements. The basis for the inclusion therefore was not due to the work itself, but the social context from whence the work was chosen. Bruce Lincoln (in Kasfir 1999:102) states that the “problem with conventional high-art discourse is that it creates a major distinction between ‘the privileged sphere of art’ and all other goods.” The idea of ‘black’ – black art, or black artists – remains a precedent in understanding the work as well as the reason *why* the work was included, regardless of the actual work itself. Within this exclusionary view, one can deduce that Burnett (1985) still understood black art outside of contemporary artmaking criteria – applying a different criteria to artists whom he placed, sometimes by means of essentialisms, into functional categories for the exhibition. Burnett (1985:[sp]), in his curatorial essay states that “this exhibition is not about traditional, aesthetic absolutes [...] it unashamedly acknowledges social and contextual references [...] [I]n a post-colonial third/first world conglomerate such as this, assumptions about the supremacy of the Western tradition and its value system are not appropriate, [nor] entirely relevant” – although this is clearly disputable. Despite the fact that Hlugwani’s *Crucifix and* Seoka’s *Head* are exhibited within the contemporary art exhibition *Tributaries*, it can be argued that Burnett uses race as a category for inclusion, evident where a conceptual elaboration of the works escapes mention.

Under the category title of ‘A contemporary sophistication’, Burnett (1985:[sp]) states:

... the concerns and achievements of the white artists are many and various. We sought in this show to allow for a broad spread of preoccupations. Many white artists in South Africa are not only sophisticated in their skills and ambitions, but are also well informed about the drift of art development.

Norman Catherine’s work *Cultural Organisation* (Figure 6), included under the theme ‘A contemporary sophistication’, explores cultural identity as constricted and controlled by apartheid. His figures seem aggressive, although without clear reference to being either black or white. Catherine was known for a multicultural outlook. Both male and female, they seem to protest strongly between each other, with the words “till death do us part” and “to honour and obey” written in each speech bubble. The figures seem to reflect the colour and

mood of the background they are placed within, with limbs missing, and hands being cut off – perhaps symbolising the white artist halted by the colonial experience. Burnett (1985:[sp]) states that white artists cut off from the experience of “important art” (from the West) exhibit a self-congratulatory attitude when considering one’s own art. The discussion of the work of the white artist is marked as superior to the consideration of the black artworks – simply categorised as either ‘black rural’ or ‘black urban.’ Although Burnett (1985) initiated a change in perception by the inclusion of black artists, at this stage, the change in categorisation of black and white remained exclusionary, with different criteria of inclusion being applied to white and black artists. The focus was on diversity, which Burnett (1985) asserted to his audience at the time, should not be confused with a compromise in quality. Burnett (1985:[sp]) states that “drawing a simple and inflexible distinction between the good and the bad was just not possible, and more importantly, not appropriate.” Although, at this stage, until beyond the end of apartheid, *Tributaries* was seminal in changing contemporary art categories to include both white and non-white artist’s work, this inclusion was still clouded by a colonial viewpoint of ‘good’ white art, and ‘bad’ art, or craft produced by non-white artists.



Figure 6: Norman Catherine, *Cultural Organisation*, 1985  
Gauche, aerosol and crayon on paper  
805 x 1200 mm  
(Burnett 1985:27)

As conveyed through the analysis of *Tributaries*, Burnett (1985:[sp]) argued, “local conditions are infecting the work [of white artists] with a sense of local colour,” similar to the proclamation of Lemke (1998:9), who stated that blackness helped create the white aesthetic we today refer to as modernism, and *vice versa*. Curatorial perceptions and identitarian understandings of the late 1980s included viewpoints on multiculturalism, as seen in the work of both Catherine and Hlungwani. King (1991:47) previously stated, “Exhibitions are part of the process of cultural distribution, and discussion of work exhibited might therefore usefully be widened to include discussion on the reasons for those exhibiting artists having access to such processes, and, by extension, the reasons for the limits of access.” Thus, it can be argued that if the artworks themselves do not signify the mechanisms under which they are produced, distributed or exhibited, these mechanisms themselves can signify broader relationships within the social structure of society. Thus, in the case of *Tributaries*, the curatorial process and basis for inclusion of certain works under the auspices of ‘a view of contemporary South African art’ can provide insight into the social structure of society in South Africa in 1985, where certain identities were no longer excluded, but the understanding of such identity was still tainted within the understanding of art as a mirror to the West, where a need remained for authenticity within an exhibition stemming from Africa. Regarding *Tributaries*, Andrew Verster (cited in King 1991:43) had stated that “after the BMW exhibition opens nothing in our art world will ever be the same again.” Such a change in the views of identity are evident in the curatorial application of *Tributaries* and the exhibition is thus seminal in conveying a shifting attitude towards identity by including non-white artist’s work within the exhibition. Yet, *Tributaries* fails in terms of plurality, as it was still based on the modelling and moulding of a white perception of a non-white identity. Postcolonial views still remained grounded within a discourse dedicated to examining art versus craft, and multicultural understandings of identity, which remained grounded in restrictive, essentialist discourses.

## **2.2. Emerging from the margins: the construction of difference**

Since the time of the earliest travels to Africa, the continent has been described as the 'Dark Continent', a “stereotyped racist conception” which still affects conceptions of Africa today (Diab 1995:28). Diab (1995:28) confirms that the African image conveyed by Western ethnologists presented Africa as a place of savages, “who did nothing, developed nothing, or created nothing.” *Tributaries* attempted to promote multiculturalism, in order to rationalise inclusions of artwork that would have previously been excluded because of policy in South Africa during the time. Hassan (1999:216) argued that “the neglect of contemporary forms in African art is due to the preoccupations of Africanists with ‘traditional’ art forms, or so called

indigenous, 'authentic' art." Ten years after *Tributaries*, the *Africus* Johannesburg Biennale<sup>4</sup> held much hope for the emergence of a new art cultural arena in South Africa at the time - barely a year after the eradication of the apartheid system. An increasingly strong awareness of cultural, ethnic and racial differences was evident in the Biennale. Works on the Biennale explored race in a speculative manner, both on a curatorial and artistic level. Multiculturalism was used as the context for accommodating difference as a springboard for a new understanding of identity.

### **2.2.1 *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale, artistic direction by Christopher Till (1995)***

Christopher Till (1995:7), in his foreword to *Africus*, stated that it was the "vehicle through which a start had been made to begin a process of reconstruction and development." It was hoped by Till and his team of participating curators and artists, that South Africa would "emerge from its recent history, heal its wounds and play a role in the affairs of the world" (Till 1995:7). Lorna Ferguson (1995:9), in her article concerning the reasons for a Biennale in Johannesburg, proclaimed that, at the time of the 1995 Biennale, South African art was excluded from the rest of the world due to apartheid sanctions, which were seen to have halted the development of South African art making. The Biennale was thus an attempt to make contact with the West, and to begin an exchange between South African artists, curators and the rest of the world. Interaction was facilitated through the event in the form of a mass mentorship program between Western and South African curators, artists and art professionals. Curators from the West were then asked to train South African assistants in curating, with many of these assistants and co-curators being elevated to full curatorial status. The curatorial aim was thus to create a dialogue between national, international and foreign curators, and contemporary art. This was motivated by the ideal that this diverse group from various backgrounds would represent divergent opinions and extend understanding within "the complexities of a multicultural world expressed through contemporary art" (Till 1995:7). In an attempt to move away from exclusionary views within the arts and art-making (as seen in *Tributaries*), there was greater impetus placed on multiculturalism within the context of accommodating difference which would be used as the basis for a new understanding of identity. Till (1995:7) hoped that *Africus* would lay the path for marginalised South African artists, so that the impact of their work could be experienced in the West. A shift in perceptions in terms of identity was thus notable, not only in the inclusion of the work of marginal artists within the Biennale, but for the promotion of their work within the West. *Africus* represented a pinnacle of the desire for radical change within

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Africus*.

South Africa in the reception of difference by moving away from exclusionary views, and thus engendered a reflection of the social construction and shift in identity discourses.

In *Africus*, a focus was included on community art centres, with twelve projects curated into the Biennale. *The African institute of art (AIA)*, curated by Sokhaya Nkosi, and *Beyond boundaries*, curated by Terry-Anne Stevenson and Thomas Barry, will be considered as specific examples of curatorial practice dealing with difference in the sense of redress in regard of previously marginalised cultural groups. The aim of the AIA since the mid-1980s was to respond to the limited access offered to black artists and to establish an art education programme that would be able to reach and inform the larger community. Thus, the basis for the inclusion of community art centres in the Biennale should be understood as an attempt at being politically correct and including marginalised class societies. Similarly, *Beyond boundaries* – a community project which utilised the Biennale in order to gain exposure – aimed to bring art to the community in the streets. Dhlomo (1995:26), the self-described curator and director of *Beyond boundaries*, comments that community artists were previously referred to as anything, from transitional artists, resistance artists or cultural workers/township artists. Yet, this use of categorisation conveys a definitive move from colonialism and postcolonialism. Dhlomo (1995:26) has questioned with regard to this use of categorisation, as to whether there is any hope for a united art community within South Africa. Such categorisation continues to be ‘separatist’ in nature. This undertaking of re-labelling through categorisation has become synonymous with South Africa. Although previously undocumented as active artists, artists from the marginalised communities were “rearing their heads and making their voices heard” (Dhlomo 1995:26). According to Njami (1992:14), black artists bore no difference to black artists from around the world, who were often excluded and isolated from art trends. Many black artists are self-taught, or have only received a limited, ‘informal’ education. This was considered as a changing factor addressed in *Africus*, which aimed to use difference as a springboard for understanding a new identity. Yet, evident through the act of re-labeling marginal artists under that of community-run projects, these labels still inadvertently serve to define these artists as being situated within a particular category, with the understanding of such a category remaining static. Thus, difference is no longer a marker of identity. Bhabha (1994:2) states that difference must not be understood as fixed, and thus the curatorial understanding of this re-labelling to include community art within the Biennale, conveys an attempt to change the understanding of difference that is pre-given and based on essential stereotypes.

*Africus* took an indirect curatorial stance with Till serving as director and facilitator. The exhibition dealt with two main themes: *Volatile alliances* and *Decolonising our minds*.



The theme, *Decolonising our minds*, outlined a shift in the consideration of identity in an attempt to convey to a wider audience a move that was being made beyond colonial and apartheid thinking. The Biennale was used as a tool to encourage the public to consider African art and to focus on the global effects colonialism had on the arts in Africa, on the African diaspora, and on the relationship of art made in South Africa by people in diaspora to their cultures of origin (Ferguson 1995:9). *Cavewall to Canvas*, curated by Catharina Scheepers-Mayer and David Morris at *Africus*, included works by several self-taught or apprenticed artists from the marginal communities of *!Xu*, *Khwe*, *Naro* and *D/ui*, which were then exhibited alongside pre-colonial San rock engravings. The motivation for the exhibition was that “just as the people have been labelled by outsiders as ‘Bushmen’ or ‘San’ [...] so the arts of the past and present may tend to be conflated as parts of a single bushman tradition” (Meyer & Morris 1995:94). The curators thus focused on demonstrating difference overtly. According to Bhabha (1994:2) “the representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed table of tradition.”



Figure 7: Stefaans Hamukwaya, *Eland*, 1995  
 Linoleum print  
 245 x 240 mm  
 (Bowyer & Breitz 1995:94)



Figure 8: Rock engraving of an eland (undated)  
 (by unknown later stone age artist)  
 300 x 400 mm  
 (Bowyer & Breitz 1995:94)

The motivational objective of *Cavewall to Canvas* was that the artists of the present now asserted their names. Although the connection between the ancient rock art and contemporary works included in the exhibition is far from evident, the aim of this exhibition was to ascertain that there are few, if any, direct historical or motivational ‘strings’ linking this connection. An example of a particular work evidencing this difference in this exhibition is Stefaans Hamukwaya’s *Eland* (Figure 7), exhibited alongside rock engravings (Figure 8). Diab (1995:28) states that contemporary art, manifested by Africa, posed certain issues

within the universal art movement, which responded with stereotyping racial conceptions by connecting the work to paleolithic, and thus primitive, rock engravings. Thus, the curatorial connection alternatively implies the “widespread misconception that contemporary African art is a distorted copy of Western culture, and lacks authenticity” (Diab 1995:28). *Cavewall to canvas* conveys the curatorial assumption that the work of the marginalised artists are ahistorical, and thus deduced to the colonialist inscription of a connection with pre-historic Khoisan painting (seen in Figure 7 & 8), which is something which needs to be disputed against. In so doing the curators re-connect these artists to rock painting. The artworks of the marginalised artist are once again situated alongside the art of the primitive stereotyped other, reducing the contemporary artists’ work to an interpretation, weighted within traditional art, marginal art and informal art. The exhibition has thus been reduced to categories of the other, connecting the marginal artist to primitivist artists within a Western colonial history.



Figure 9: Rebecca Matibe at work, 1995  
Rebecca Matibe’s work was included on *Africa Earthed*, curated by Chani Collet (1995)  
(Bowyer & Breitz 1995:93)

The exhibition *Africa Earthed* within *Africus*, curated by Chani Collet, was motivated as an exhibition that would dynamically bridge the contradictions inherent in South African ceramics. The aim of the exhibition was to build a bridge between the colonial division between art and craft, as well as to investigate issues between group and individual work. A particular interest of curator Chani Collet was to re-assess women as artists using a feminist framework. The inclusion of ceramic works, such as the works by Rebecca Matibe (Figure 9) can however be viewed as problematic. Motivated as a showcase for contemporary South African art being re-introduced to the West, ceramics are generally considered as craft and

utilitarian rather than contemporary art. In his paper *Different values – universal art: the state of modern African art*, Diab (1995:28) questions the viability of labels that have constricted the understanding of Modern African art, such as authenticity. Diab (1995:28) states that:

there was no need for Africans to search for their identity because they had never lost it, though it was certainly hidden by a mask influenced by Western colonisation [...] it was a direct reaction against the European art movements and their philosophical theories about art in Africa which helped to accelerate Afrocentrism's reply.

Such a shift in perceptions on art is evident in this exhibition, as the inclusion of craft-type artworks were based on the marginal social standing of the artist, which in most cases on *Africus*, was reserved for so called 'authentic' African art.

Ferguson (1995:9) outlines the curatorial theme of *Volatile alliances* as encouraging "dialogue between cultural difference and identity" which, she proclaims, was often approached by curators as the dispute between approaching identity as constituted by Afrocentrism/Eurocentrism and dealing with themes of marginalisation, gender, race, sexuality, religion and land rights. Ferguson (1995:9) states that the intention of *Africus* was not to conceal problems concerning national unity or political realities in South Africa at the time, but rather to begin such a dialogue in order to move forward. The *Africus* exhibition *Taking liberties: the body politic* curated by Colin Richards and Pitika Ntuli (1995), considered the international discourse around the body in art practice, stating that the body is often conceived of "as the prime object of social regulation as well as a site of resistance" (Richards & Ntuli 1995:100). Their curatorial aim was to explore the "multi-dimensionality of the human body as reflected in contemporary South African culture(s)", and the way in which these produced racial and gendered subjects to construct conceptions of racial and national identity (Richards & Ntuli 1995:100). The exhibition aimed to explore the body as experienced and represented, in order to "capture the complex and contradictory dynamics of racialised, gendered, colonised and sexualized bodies..." (Richards & Ntuli 1995:100). The artists included, amongst others, Candice Breitz, Willie Bester, Jackson Hlungwani, Kay Hassan and Sandile Zulu.

Candice Breitz's work, *Ghost series* (1994-5), included in this *Africus* exhibition (seen in Figure 10), used postcard images of black women in traditional clothing. Breitz used Tippex™ to white out the skin of the black women on postcards in order to reconfigure new understanding of the visual images. The work can be interpreted as a reflection on the violence that can be performed by whiteness (Neri 2005). Farrell (2007:50) states of her *oeuvre* that Breitz constantly attempts to take images out of their original context in order to

reconsider the image. Breitz, according to Farrell (2007:50), has throughout her *oeuvre*, conveyed “dedication to a developed cultural critique” which has positioned Breitz as being “on the edge between artist and *avant-garde* cultural anthropologist.” As the body is often conceived of as the prime object of social regulation, it can be deduced that Breitz, through the use of correction fluid, was symbolically attempting to correct the view of the bodies of these women. Breitz’s techniques could also be read as the 'correcting' impulse of the colonialists, imposing their views and cultures onto indigenous cultures. Women on postcards are subjected to the colonial gaze, as something to be advertised and figures and destinations to be consumed by the West. The postcards used are examples of the portrayal of the exotic body. Enwezor (cited in Atkinson 1999:17) criticised white artists, and specifically Breitz, for commenting on behalf of the black body - announcing that Breitz’s work is absent of self-reflexivity and fails to offer a critique of colonial history. Enwezor’s view is grounded in the understanding that white artists and critics fail to free themselves of hegemony within South African nationalism. Enwezor (in Atkinson 1999:17), further critiques the new national identity of Rainbow Nation as:

...unmoored from what they [whites] have always known, that is the privilege of unquestioned whiteness from which everything is refracted, the Rainbow, now seem [sic] a motley reflection of images alien to the old sensibility. Very simple [sic] the Rainbow either opposes or seems antagonistic to whiteness.



Figure 10: Candice Breitz, images from *Ghost Series*, 1994-1995  
Chromogenic print on paper  
1015 x 685 mm  
Courtesy of White Cube/Jay Jopling  
(Candice Breitz 1998; Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:157)

It is evident that Enwezor's reading is grounded within the view that the white artist may not comment on the black body. Such a reading can be criticised as furthering and redividing, taking identitarian theory back to a time of separatism and reversing the modernising effect, as opposed to accommodating difference in order to understand a multicultural identity. Thus, it is evident that in Enwezor's critique of *Ghost Series*, he re-defines difference as separatist, stating that one culture is unable to comment on another. It can be argued though, that such curatorial or critical perceptions are changing, evident in Richards and Ntuli's original curatorial intention, which was to highlight the contradiction of such a stereotyped, racialised, gendered, colonised and sexualised body. The curator's aims were thus clearly opposed to a simple re-iteration of the differences between racialised bodies. As such, the overarching curatorial intention of *Africus* to use difference as the springboard for understanding identity was overturned through Enwezor's critique.

*Africus* dealt overtly with identity, a choice which Araeen (1995:16) in the *Africus* catalogue, argued was constructed as struggling against imperialism and representing the desire for an internationalism based on equality. If multiculturalism in the Western sense, is based on the division of the majority white population and the minority marginal population, Araeen (1995:16) questioned what then could be understood of the South African situation of the white *minority* and the marginal (according to the West) *majority*? He argued that the self and the other have been reversed (Araeen 1995:16). The definition of understanding art from this perspective is still defined by postcoloniality, which thus needs to be reconstructed to fit such reversals of the roles of the self and the other. Araeen (1995:17) questioned the way in which polarities such as self/other, centre/periphery and modernity/traditions that were enforced throughout apartheid were going to be reconstructed? Thus, Araeen (1995:17) called for a relocation of South Africa within Africa itself, and not entirely constructed on Western frameworks. The question concerning *Africus* that Araeen (1995:18) brought to attention was thus: "can decolonisation [*Decolonising our minds*] take place effectively if part of its process constitutes those people who have not decolonised their own minds? Wouldn't it be more likely that these [curators from the West, and the Eurocentric ideology they represent], being in the dominant position, sabotage this process of decolonisation?" Camara (1995:21), in an article in the catalogue of *Africus*, stated that "History justified as doctrine [...] should be revised to exactness in order to discern the continuity and the transformation within our own culture and that of other civilisations."

Thus, although curatorially a shift occurred in 1995, as demonstrated by the works included in *Africus*, and more telling by the curatorial intentions of *Africus*, the theories that guided the exhibition that originated from a Western perspective, failed to offer an understanding of

identity and a representation that did not originate from post-imperialist or postcolonialist times. Postcolonialism then failed to produce an inclusive understanding of identity, although it prompted the beginning of the process of developing a new understanding of identity. Although in many instances, difference was used as the springboard for understanding identity in *Africus*, many instances of viewing such difference in this alternative curatorial framework failed, with re-labelling being at the core of such failures, and thus rendering identity as static.

### **2.2.2 *Trade routes: history and geography (1997), Johannesburg Biennale, curatorial and artistic direction by Okwui Enwezor***

The second Johannesburg Biennale, *Trade routes: history and geography (1997)*<sup>5</sup> was held under the artistic directorship of Okwui Enwezor. His international curatorial team, and the logistical support of the Africus Institute for Contemporary Art, aimed once again at putting South Africa on the art map and establishing the Biennale as the premier contemporary art exhibition on the African continent, both locally and internationally. Christopher Till (1997:5) stated that the format of the exhibition was modelled around the conceptual framework of Enwezor with the help of his six curatorial teams, resulting in six exhibitions.<sup>6</sup> Enwezor (1997b:12) insisted that since contemporary art had become dominant in the West, it was not his aim to “reduce the qualitative contributions of invited artists by privileging only those who come from affluent countries”; thus, as a result, he relinquished any attachment to the concept of nationality as criteria for invitations extended to artists. This move from the traditional format required Enwezor and his curators to make selections in order to “present a focused and specific context” within which to present the dialogue and discourse generated around the exhibition’s theme *Trade routes* (Till 1997:5), giving testimony to complex issues inherent in globalisation and notions of culture in a time when culture was being contested.

Enwezor (1997b:8) has stated, in the examination of South African history, there was a common restlessness concerning globalisation, which places everything under one umbrella. Curated by Enwezor, *Trade routes* considered the impact of economic globalisation on contemporary culture, introducing Enwezor’s view that the “evolving nature of contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Now referred to as *Trade Routes*.

<sup>6</sup> The six curated exhibitions included were *Alternating Currents* (curated by Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya), *Graft* (curated by Colin Richards), *Important and exportant* (curated by Gerardo Mosquera), *Life’s little necessities* (curated by Kellie Jones), *Hong Kong, Etc.* (curated by Hou Hanru), *Transversions* (curated by Yu Yeon Kim), as well as the film programme, curated by Mahen Bonetti, and the projects section, curated by Okwui Enwezor.

culture today is transmitted from a very limited enclosure of eurocentrism.” Since *Tributaries*, we see a curatorial shift, from multiculturalism, to difference, to globalisation. The impact of global theory on *Trade routes* observed Enwezor’s concern with difference, and resulted in *Trade routes* being perceived, through its curatorial intention, as an attempt to transgress globalisation and to redefine difference as a basis upon which to comment on both black and white artists. Enwezor’s (1997b:7) statement of the works presented in the exhibition refer to the artists as prescient, “operating on the highest levels of investigation into philosophical, political, phenomenological and social processes, and speaking about culture in a time when culture is a beleaguered and contested notion.” Thus, the basis for the inclusion of the works itself, selected by the curator, indicates the shift towards plurality. The basis for understanding though, is through Enwezor re-constituting difference despite globalising processes within an understanding of an Enwezorian neo-postcolonialism.

For the sub-exhibition *Alternating Currents* curated by Enwezor and Zaya, the concept of technology and travel dominated, “because migration, diaspora, displacement, dislocation, relocation, exile, refugee and border culture, tourism and internet surfing are the focus of much academic theory, the concept of ‘travel’ unsurprisingly dominates” (Zaya 1997:64). *Alternating Currents* considered a ‘new order’ or global monoculture, a result of an immersion in technology. Zaya (1997:65) argued that cultural juxtapositions had replaced categories of the ‘exotic’, and thus the ‘other.’ Enwezor (1997b:7) further stated that one is unable to discuss globalisation outside of the rhetoric of colonialist exploitation, which he argued is a “difficult double-bind that a Western media critic [...] could not have anticipated.” Although Enwezor is deeply concerned with the cultural effects of economic globalisation within *Trade routes* - Enwezor (1997b:7) argues that the theories of globalisation are still ‘soaked’ in Western understanding, which he counteracts by re-inscribing ideas of difference, in order to balance such theories within African understandings.

Patrick Mautloa’s *Berlin Shack*, 1996 (Figure 11) is a documentation of a *squatter camp* room – as indicated through the title ‘shack’, loaded with signifiers from a South African township living space: *Iwisa mielipap* on the side table, tin pots, with plastic sheeting for a curtain. The irony of the title is found in the fact that Berlin is a quintessentially Western city. By translating the stereotype of a typical South African township living space within the geographical location of Berlin, the living space becomes transcultural in nature, present within a first world environment. At the time of the Biennale, the understanding of such an image would be set within theories around hybridity, with understandings of Mautloa’s work as embodying a hybrid space between African and Europe. Understood as hybrid, “theory is once again re-inscribed by the Eurocentre, denied of agency and locked within the

panopticon of the First World” (Zaya 1997:65). Enwezor (1997b:8) aimed to “respond to the evolving nature of contemporary culture today as transmitted from a very limited enclosure of Eurocentrism”, an objective that is evident in the work of Pat Mautloa. Mautloa’s work evinces ‘the other’ - a term Lemke (1998:144) acknowledges as being imperative in debates on multiculturalism and postmodernism (and postcolonialism) - which “quickly becomes obsolete as the ‘other’ and the ‘self’ are thoroughly interwoven [...] white and black cultures have been intertwined, they are mutually constitutive.”



Figure 11: Pat Mautloa, *Berlin Shack*, 1996  
Installation view  
Dimensions variable  
(Enwezor 1997a:147)

Enwezor (1997b:8) aimed to investigate the layering of discourses inherent in issues of globalisation and to contest historical interpretations of the world, often centred around the hegemony of Western imperialism. His investigation was centred on South Africa as the geographical site of globalisation within this context where such complex mixtures of



societies, cultural expressions, racial identities, and social procedure provide interesting testimonies to the process of globalisation. These aspects were again evident in the exhibition *Graft*, curated by Colin Richards at the South African National Gallery, which investigated notions of contact and exchange, cutting into difference and ideas around hybridity. *Graft* thus marked a tension between nature and culture within a hybrid investigation by cutting into differences (Richards 1997:234). *Graft*, according to Richards (1997:236) “counter-narrates notions of national collectivity as fixed and bounded entities [...] the dominant metaphor is that of the rainbow nation.”

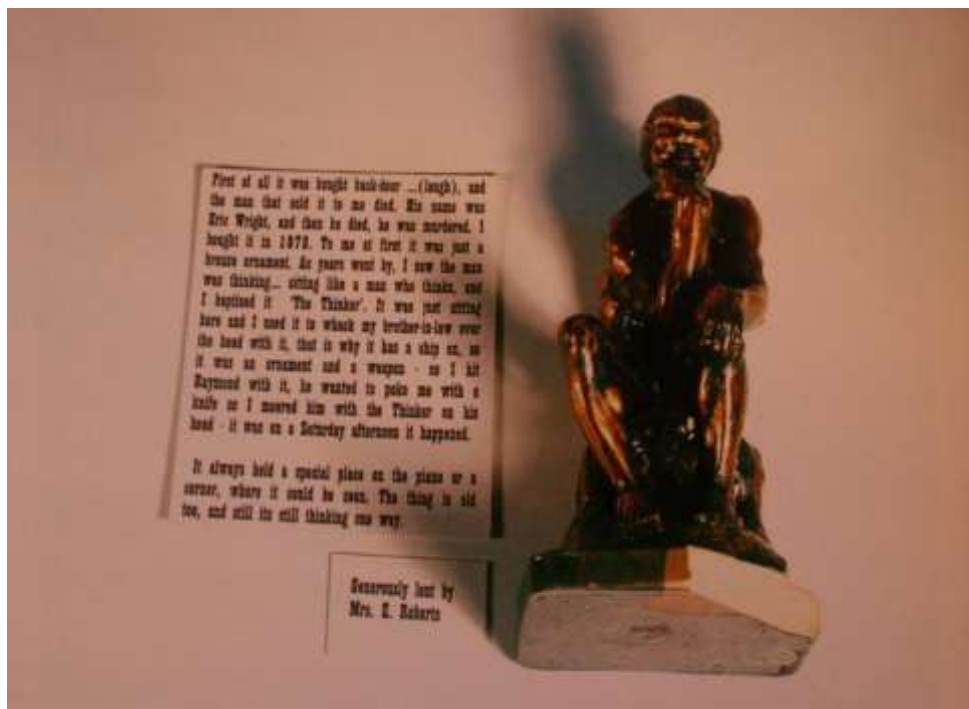


Figure 12: Tracey Rose, *Authenticity*, 1996  
 Found object and text  
 Dimensions variable  
 (Enwezor 1997a:261)

The work by Tracey Rose, *Authenticity*, 1996 (Figure 12) included in the sub-exhibition *Graft* in *Trade routes*, can be investigated in terms of the intersection of difference as well as the tension between nature and culture. The experience of the body and ‘self’ at the time of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale was being remapped. Enwezor (1997b:12) stated that the look at the production of meaning in art by investigating social, political and cultural procedures in operation “produced resilient cultural fusions and disjunctions”, which was evidenced by Rose’s work. Enwezor (1997b:9) was investigating a new manner of globalisation, a consideration of diaspora as forged through “migration, displacement, and exile”, which he considered as the new figuration of globalisation. This sees artists in South Africa as undergoing a sense of diaspora in their own nation state. Enwezor’s (1997b:9) aim was to

look at the “tendentious divisions operative in the narrow dichotomies of inside/outside, native/alien, self/other, straight/gay, citizen/non-citizen, East/West, North/South” in order to explore within the six exhibitions in *Trade routes*, the varying degrees of the way in which culture and space have been displaced within colonisation, migration, and through technology, and to “express explicitly and conceptually new readings and renderings of citizenship and nationality, nations and nationalism, exile, immigration, technology, the city, indeterminacy and hybridity.” Yet, Enwezor none-the-less failed to consider such readings beyond notions of binarism and exclusionary thinking through his preoccupation with defining difference. In 1995 during the first Biennale, Camara (1995:21) stated that “colonialism [and thus postcolonialism] continues to perpetuate the idea that there is only a White ethnology.” Camara (1995:21) reiterated, that “present art criticism [speaking of 1995], becoming a reality in some destroyed space that the colonizers are restoring, is confronted with failures that accumulate because of cultural policies not adapted to our realities.” Camara (1995:21) stated then already that postcolonial characteristics needed to be reviewed and that the notion of the Modern African citizen needed to be reinvestigated alongside a “new mentality generated by new necessity.” Yet, two years later, in the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale, Enwezor continued to apply binarism and exclusionary thinking.

Although written two years after curating *Trade routes*, Enwezor (1999:376) commented on work included as far back as the 1995 *Africus* and stated that “despite the sincerity of the artists who have brazenly maintained a relationship in their work with the black body, there is a certain over-determination that accompanies their gestures.” Despite the efforts to move forward to a more inclusionary view on identity, albeit with their own failures, Enwezor restates that white artists are unable to write or to comment on black subjects through their work. Enwezor (1999:376) reiterates that through the act of depicting aesthetic hybridisation, seen in Breitz’s *Ghost series* (1995), white artists “repeats that [sic] act of surrogacy that emphasises the subject’s muteness and silence, while embellishing their own positions as the voices of reality.” By stating his view of the black as other, abject and marginal and as a sensitive subject to be discussed from a ‘white’ point of view, Enwezor re-marginalises the other and reintroduces the notion of the other to the forefront of discourse on identity politics. Such re-marginalisation is also evident in his curatorial strategy in *Trade routes*, despite his acknowledgement of economic globalising processes.

Lemke (1998:144) argues that you cannot call the fusion of cultures an “affinity between the modern and the tribal.” This could thus be rephrased as a failure to call the fusion of cultures an affinity between African and Western, black Atlantic and Western and so on. The suggestion is “that Western and non-Western art are parallel structures that can never be

integrated” (Lemke 1998:144). I argue, along with Lemke (1998:144), due to the fact that cultures have been inextricably linked since the early twentieth century, that we should think of this relation of contemporary cultures as a merger “in which white and black cultures have formed something entirely new, culturally specific identities are no longer discernible.” Enwezor (cited in Atkinson 1999:17), notes that South Africa is “a ‘nation’ seeking a new identity, a new sense of itself, new images, new geographies with which to ballast its strategic and mythological coherence and unity”, yet, I argue that Enwezor contradicts this quest for a new identity discourse through his nostalgic preference for difference. Separatist discourses of identity politics were colonial and often post-colonial.

In *Trade routes*, there is a debate on issues of ‘multiculturality’: “one needs to debate multicultural agenda’s and postcolonial revisions”, as stated by Enwezor (1997b:9). I argue that the debate should not be based on a sensitised regression into difference and exclusionary racist discourses. By redefining difference, Enwezor hoped to situate his theory outside of that theory based on Western ideology. Difference is not the basis upon which to eradicate a Western view on identity discourse. Atkinson (1999:18) states that Enwezor views the notion of the Rainbow Nation as a “white resistance to its too-colourful symbolism.” By formulating what images should look like, how they should be portrayed and by stating who has the right to represent whom, essentialisms can be read in Enwezor’s *avant-garde* reformulation of postcolonialism. Diab (1995:29) claims that the critic “affirms the prejudice [...] and [the critic] maintains the monopoly and intellectual dominion over former colonies, insisting on imposing their standards.” In this case it is argued that the curator/critic has reinstated separatist views on identity. As demonstrated, such a view is anachronistic in a globalised world - a move away from such essentialist thinking and rigid categories is occurring and such separatist understanding is slowly disappearing in terms of West and non-West. Artists within South Africa comprehend diasporic experiences within their own nation state, but through globalisation, such a comprehension is translated into trans-consciousness where one is conscious of various cultural dialogues simultaneously.

Thus, although these curatorial intentions conveyed a definitive shift in terms of identitarian understanding, such an understanding failed to move beyond binarism, or theories derivative of Western ideologies of Africa. Here, Bourriaud (2009:25) can be followed, who in discussing the numerous theories been born as an attempt to discuss aesthetics, states that the ill-defined theories arising out of cultural postcolonialism has “failed to elaborate a critique of modernist ideology that does not lead to an absolute relativism or to a piling up of essentialisms.” As such, these techniques veto any possibility of a dialogue between people or cultures who do not share the same history or cultural identity. Bourriaud (2009:25) poses

a question as to whether, “if I am a Western white man, for instance, how can I exercise critical judgement on the work of a black Cameroonian woman without running the risk of inadvertently imposing on it an outlook corrupted by Eurocentrism?” Once again, we view the problem of postmodernism and postcolonialism – that the centre is always designated, even if it is situated as a periphery. Bourriaud (2009:38) states that the “identitarian compartmentalization on which the postmodern ethic is based is the foundation for a form of discrimination that is all the more subtle, and maintains Western cultural domination all the better for being practiced under the mask of generosity worn by an ideology of recognising the other.” Discussing *Africus*, Diab (1995:28) spoke of the emergence of a new generation of artists, incorporating Western ideas, techniques and mediums. He has argued (Diab 1995:28) that within this new aesthetic, there was no longer the need for an understanding situated entirely within Western perspectives, as there was a merge between various cultures and art aesthetics, cultures are emerging as trans-conscious. Diab (1995:28) argued that the question of the reliance on Western critics needed to be reconsidered, and that there was a need to “question the validity of Western critics as well as the authenticity of the authors in the entire development of universal art history.” Race, in terms of essentialism and cultural determination, can be disputed. Van der Watt (2004:47) states that it has become commonplace to say that race has no scientific basis and that it is “socially constructed.” Similarly, Gilroy (2000:99) has argued in *Against Race* that race and “raciology,” are often socially constructed. Seshadri-Crooks (2000:12, 21) states that the “scientific basis of race has been thoroughly discredited” and that race is “purely cultural, a construct, and the racialised body would be the imaginary corollary to that construction.”

Considering the afore-mentioned investigation and arguments in this chapter, it can thus be contended that African identity should be understood as residing within a complexity of identity constructions such as West/non-West binaries and othering processes; multiculturalism stemming from Western postcolonial theory and globalisation processes; and hybrid understandings of identity. In the following chapter, such intricacies will be argued as having produced trans-African notions of identity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TOWARD AN AFRICAN ALTERMODERN

We have lived through the politics of repression.  
We now have to survive the politicking of representation.

(Neville Dubow 1999:127)

After *Tributaries* and *Africus*, the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale *Trade routes* marked the end of the international South African based exhibition. The international impact of South African art extended to international mega-exhibitions, such as Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta XI* (2002)<sup>1</sup> – nicknamed 'Africa's Documenta' – and Simon Njami's *Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent* (2004-2007).<sup>2</sup> Curatorially, many hypotheses were considered around Africa and identity within these exhibitions. The more recent *Afro modern: journeys through the black Atlantic* (2010),<sup>3</sup> curated by Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter which was presented at the Tate Liverpool, is a seminal exhibition in the consideration of African identity within the hypotheses of the African modern itself. Although international art exhibitions concerned with African art are not limited to these seminal examples, in terms of the limitations of this study, these exhibitions provide insightful shifts within curatorial depictions surrounding mobility, globalisation and cultural remixing both within Africa itself, and the diaspora. The chapter encourages finding a renegotiated trans-African understanding of identity within both a local and global framework.

#### 3.1 *Documenta XI* (2002) and the postcolonial deconstruction

*Documenta XI* was presented over a period of eighteen months, over five platforms where mini exhibitions, panel discussions, lectures and debates were held in each prospective location around the world.<sup>4</sup> The use of the platforms and processes of each location contributed to the idea of a *Documenta XI* that "formulate[d] a critical model that joins

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Documenta XI*.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Africa remix*.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Afro modern*.

<sup>4</sup> The first platform focused on *Democracy Unrealized* (Vienna 2001), the second platform *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and The Processes of Truth and Reconciliation* (New Delhi, 2001). The third platform, *Créolité and Creolization*, was held in early 2002 in the Caribbean; and the fourth platform, held in Lagos, considered the title *Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos* which focused on engaging the current state of affairs of fast-growing African urban centres in a public symposium (Exhibition *Documenta XI* 2002).

heterogeneous cultural and artistic circuits of [the] present global context" (Suvecz 2002). The exhibition in Kassel was then presented as the fifth platform. My analysis of *Documenta XI* for the purposes of this study maintains a focus on the way South African identity was presented through the curatorial techniques, although these views can be understood in terms of *Documenta XI* as a whole. According to Kobena Mercer (2002), in his review of *Documenta XI*, the exhibition was publicised as being the first to deliver a "multicultural [...] post-colonial Documenta." An investigation is thus undertaken into the sensitivities surrounding Enwezor's treatment of difference in terms of the various modernity's presented, such as Enwezor's neo-postcolonial techniques adopted, and thus, into the failures of postcolonialism and multiculturalism.

Within the context of *Documenta XI* (2002), Enwezor aimed at structuring the exhibition around a 'new' postcolonial way of thinking in an attempt to offer an *avant-garde* curatorial structure. Despite being hyped as the first multicultural *Documenta*, the exhibition seemed weighed down by Enwezor's insistence on reiterating difference, through his employment of postcolonialism as a "tactical maneuver to expand both the public and aesthetic spheres in order to create conditions for an ethical engagement with difference" (Van Niekerk 2007:1). However, works such as David Goldblatt's works, *Joburg intersections*, 1999-2002 (Figures 13 & 14), juxtapose categorical stereotypes. Images of wealthy areas are contrasted with images of desolate poverty, and the viewer is provided with a double-sided view of the conditions of the city of Johannesburg. Goldblatt intended to convey the reconstruction of urban dwellings and to revisit the reconstruction of a South African society in the shadow of apartheid. Tuscan villages were juxtaposed against images of desolate squalor and mounds of pollution in the cityscape in the background. These latter types of images are then placed next to ultra-modern architectural buildings (Figure 13).



Figure 13: David Goldblatt, *Joburg intersections*, 1999-2002  
Photographic prints  
(David Goldblatt – Documenta 11 2002)



Figure 14: David Goldblatt, *Joburg intersections* - installation view at *Documenta XI*, 1999-2002  
Photographic prints  
(David Goldblatt – Documenta 11 2002)

The curatorial installation of *Documenta XI* encouraged the viewer to walk along the rows of installed photographs, intending to offer the viewer image after image of the varied social classes and city conditions of Johannesburg (Figure 14). All the photographic works are merged under the title *Joburg intersections*, yet remaining clearly segregated in terms of their display. Any interest in cross-cultural translation was somewhat hampered by the documentary style installation. The curatorial intention was to emphasise differences, with image after image of different socio-economical areas offered. Any middle class living conditions were exempt from the display, reiterating Enwezor's neo-postcolonial curatorial stance. Such a curatorial technique prompts the viewer into reading the city of Johannesburg as clouded within issues of exclusivity and othering. As such, the understanding of separatism was foregrounded, and the apartheid era was recalled through Enwezor's curatorial techniques.

British artist Steve McQueen's installation of *Western deep* (2002) took the viewer on a journey into the interior of the Tautona mines near Johannesburg, in South Africa. The viewer experiences the darkness, claustrophobia and noise of the working mine through McQueen's documentary style video (Steve McQueen's *Caribs' leap/Western deep* 2002) (Figure 15). McQueen's documentary technique consisted of factual material which produced mixed emotional results. In *Western deep* (2002), McQueen took a camera and microphone into a South African gold mine, which produced a pulverising soundscape, adding emotional depth to the images of the mine workers that flicker out of the dark. McQueen's *Western deep* (2002) critiqued the 'politics of representation' practiced by New

Labour<sup>5</sup>, which "frequently parades a multicultural exhibitionism that strives to show how inclusive and diverse it wants to be" (Mercer 2002).



Figure 15: Steve McQueen, still from *Caribs' leap*, 2002 (Left)  
 Steve McQueen, still from *Western deep*, 2002 (Right)  
 Documentary films  
 (Steve McQueen: *Caribs' leap*/*Western deep* 2002)

Curatorially, *Western deep* (2002) is juxtaposed with the installation of McQueen's *Caribs' leap* (2002), invoking images of forced labour. *Caribs' leap* (2002) depicts a man endlessly falling from the sky - one never sees him jump, one never sees him land. *Caribs' leap* (2002) recalls the grave story of the Grenada landscape in which thousands of Carib Indians chose mass suicide rather than slavery (Mercer 2002). The intention is to illustrate the conditions where people would risk their lives in the perilous conditions of mining grounds in Johannesburg, in an attempt to escape the slavery of poverty, despite arguably a form of continuing slavery, with its hard labour conditions and minimum wage. Through the curatorial stance offered by Enwezor, the viewer is encouraged to consider the labour force as socially separated and exclusive to the 'black working class,' as so rendered within the videos. As a result, the intention of conveying the working conditions of the mining industry in South Africa juxtaposed by the Carib allegory of slavery is indicative of the dilemma of inclusivity/exclusivity (Mercer 2002).

McQueen's *Western deep* (2002) was nominated for an award one week after the opening of *Documenta XI* (Mercer 2002). By awarding a black British artist for his comments, it once again encourages the question who has the right to comment on Africa and the African body? Here, a British artist is praised for his comments on the conditions of South Africa,

<sup>5</sup> In reference to the British Labour Party



finding critical acclaim. Ironically, Enwezor prohibits South African white artists living on the African continent from commenting on the conditions of their neighbours, who, one can argue, experience the country first-hand on a day to day basis, while celebrating the comments of a British artist, who is black, and therefore is awarded the right for comment on such a situation. Such an instance conveys race as a criterion of inclusion and exclusion. The curator situates the white South African artist outside of Africa, which corroborates the very tenets of Enwezorian postcolonialism. Thus prevalent conceptual holes in Enwezorian neoPostcolonial doctrine and sensitivity around difference, is evident. Modernity, as previously discussed, conveys that white and black cultures have been involved in a cultural dialectic for centuries, yet Enwezor still attempts to divide such modernities, by stipulating who has the right to comment on whom. Enwezor endeavours to bestow a doctrine within curating that separates a merging and prevalent global culture, which amounts to the multicultural intention of the exhibition failing due to the prevalence of binarism and misguided notions of inclusivity.

Mercer (2002), discussing sensitivity around difference, stipulating that "in the twenty years since writers such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak first defined the field of post-colonial studies, language remains an awkwardly unresolved issue [...] discourse surrounding *Documenta XI* unwittingly revealed that there is still no satisfactory or widely agreed vocabulary for dealing with 'difference' in contemporary culture." Difference is still understood and projected by Enwezor as premised on race, with no observable shift from the curatorial premises evident in the 1997 *Trade routes* Biennale. As such, it can be argued that Enwezor's understanding of identity is closed and based on exclusivity. Enwezor maintains a re-constitution of difference within globalising processes, theorised within a neo-postcolonialism. Enwezor (1997b:9) investigates globalisation as understood through displacement and diaspora, yet fails to comprehend the notion of the African diasporic experience within one's own nation state. Enwezor thus excludes the globalising processes of cultural exchange within his positioning of globalisation. He reiterates black Africa as a sensitive subject, and thus other through his curatorial perceptions. This conveys a need for an understanding of identity past multiculturalism, which remains peppered within postmodern and postcolonial theory.



Figure 16: Kendell Geers, two details from *The suburbia series*, 1999  
 Cibachromes  
 305 x 405 mm; 405 x 305 mm  
 (Kendell Geers – Documenta 11 2002)

Kendell Geers's work included on *Documenta XI*, *The suburbia series*, 1999 (Figure 16) consisted of photograph documents of warning signs on the fences and the walls of estates in well-off suburbs of Johannesburg. Geer's comments on the work (in Rattemeyer 2003), that "people protect themselves by creating jails in which they willingly sentence themselves to a lifetime of imprisonment and call it freedom." This work conveys a middle/upper class society, barricading themselves away from the community of South African society in heterotopic separatism. The curator asks the viewer to consider the exhibition as a whole, with curating, according to Marijke Steedman (2012:6), consisting of the "conversation" between the installation of the works with the viewer. The curatorial technique of using documentary-style imagery influences the implication of the depicted situations as the truth. Mercer (2002) states that "*Documenta [XI]*'s desire to redeem 'difference' inevitably revealed a persistent fault line that cuts between the huge questions of global politics and the small pleasures offered by art." Enwezor's inclusion of these artists defies the notion of global *mélange*, since the works seem to insist on views of separatism and difference, which is enhanced through his curatorial choices. One encounters a representation of South Africa clouded in a doctrine of separatism and exclusionism, where strong references to a theorisation of the binary relationship of centre/periphery implies a lack of connection between South African suburbs, and thus a lack of cultural exchange between communities.

Bourriaud (2009:25) states that “the numerous aesthetic theories born of the nebulous alliance of cultural postcolonialism have failed to elaborate a critique of modernist ideology that does not lead to an absolute relativism or to a piling up of ‘essentialisms.’” The downfall of *Documenta XI* was that such so-called difference was based on essential categories, rooted in colonial and postcolonial theory, which conveyed Enwezor’s insistence on difference. As such, Enwezor’s static view of identity is demonstrated. The language used surrounding the exhibition was refashioned from the language offered to us by colonialism and modernism, clouded with separatist terminology and centre periphery theory. Instead, a more convincing approach is encountered in Bhabha's (1994) view of “postcolonial theory as an active refusal of the ‘binary and hierarchical’ vision that characterizes Western universalism” (in Bourriaud 2009:26). Bhabha’s third space though remains situated within postcolonial and postmodern theory. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (in Bourriaud 2009:26) state that “postmodernism is indeed the logic by which the [sic] global capital operates.” Through such insensitivity to cultural difference, *Documenta XI* thus reinstated binarism as a way of understanding. Thus, although Enwezor claims to move beyond dated theories, he does not escape them.

### **3.2 Globalisation; creolisation and *Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent***

In *Africa remix*, which included 88 artists from 25 different African countries (Haupt & Binder 2004), Simon Njami intended to convey an African continent, comprising Northern, Central and Southern Africa, both black and white, “off the beaten track of pseudo-naïve art for the tourist industry” (Haupt & Binder 2004). According to Njami (cited in Haupt & Binder 2004) the show was an interrogation of contemporary Africa, with the curatorial concept to give an overview of current Africa in order to escape the “numerous traps related to the general vision of Africa.” With the youngest artist (N'Dilo Mutima, born 1978) being just 26, and the oldest artist Jackson Hlungwane, then 81 years of age - an obvious attempt was made to convey diversity among the artists. Critic Jean-Hubert Martin (cited in Haupt & Binder 2004) states that “the attribute ‘Remix’ [was] intended to mean a reshuffling of cards, to show that our present situation is hybrid in character and therefore a reflection of globalization.”

Njami attempted to curate an exhibition in answer to the failures of *Documenta XI*, which Martin (in Haupt & Binder 2004) states “was found unsatisfactory by many.” Gayatri Spivak (cited in Bourriaud 2009:26) says of the altermodern that it needs to “*dewesternize* [sic] the very concepts through which alienation is thought” [emphasis original]. Such an intention can be read in Njami’s chaptering of the period 1994 to 2004, in an attempt to assemble art

curated for the African continent, in order to convey Africa in terms of the diaspora, African nomadic identity and the African mutating identity. This was attempted through the construction of the exhibition around the themes *Identity and history*, *City and land*, and *Body and soul*.

Identity, as defined by Njami (2007d:62) entails history, diaspora, African nomadic identity and the African mutating *nationhood*, as well as the construction of an identity for the *individual*. Njami (2007d:62) placed an understanding herein on the African nations understanding of identity in terms of the consequences of decolonisation. Moving away from a pan-African solution of identity theory grounded in theories of nationalism, he suggests that new generations look for ways of defining their own identities in terms of their relationship to the world, as well as to their societies, heterogenous as these may be (Njami 2007d:62). Here, the chapter *Identity and history* for Njami (2007d:63) dealt with relationism, for the individual African to find an understanding of their identity within a global framework. Problematically though, Njami (2007d:63) seemed to have proclaimed that the African artist, in one way or another, will always be a foreigner within a global framework, or indeed within a local one.

South African artist Jane Alexander's work *African Adventure*, 1999-2002 (Figure 17) included under the chapter *Identity and history*, shows her characters in a kind of mutiny. Alexander's room-installation *African Adventure* 1999-2002 (Figure 17) consisted of a "hybrid African construct" (Haupt & Binder 2004) as a subtle way of "questioning the meaning of authenticity and of focusing on discrepancies in intercultural dialogue." Here, dichotomies and binaries were investigated visually, with the exotic merged with the civilised and the uncivilised, and the primitive (as understood alongside the uncivilised) is being investigated alongside the modern (associated with the civilised). One can read ideas of the 'civilised savage' in the work, Alexander's monstrous figures encompassing multiple categories of self and other in one animalistic amalgam. Haupt and Binder (2004) state that artists working within the theme of *Identity and history* often reflect on "social incongruities" as well as "historical understanding of nationhood." Alexander seemed to be questioning the very idea of the feasibility of hybrid as a way of understanding identity within the new emerging modernisms, placing a signifier of monstrosity before our eyes. The constructed hybrid becomes burdened by the same binary sense apparent in colonialism and postcolonialism. Njami (2007d:62) wanted to investigate identity in terms of diaspora, nomadic identity and the mutant African nationhood, yet problematically, his curatorial conception maintains that the African will continue to be situated on the periphery, as the

understanding of identity remains in context of the hybrid and similar to postcolonial conceptions of African identity.



Figure 17: Jane Alexander, *African Adventure*, 1999-2002  
 Mixed media  
 Dimensions variable  
 View of the installation at the Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town  
 (Njami 2007d:64)

In the theme *Body and soul*, the works concern the politics of representation, both in terms of the body, and the spiritual implication of understanding the body. This section seems to ask the viewer to reconsider racial typology, as according to Njami (2007a:114) the “African Body in *Africa remix* is multiple – Caucasian, Arab and Negro.” The attempt of the exhibition was to envisage the reality of such a body – to enter the field of representation – of how we perceive and represent our body, and negotiate our belonging to the world. Njami’s (2007a:114) understanding of such a field of representation is still moulded by understandings of self and other, although he acknowledges the other as being multiple. Njami (2007a:114) questioned the African artist’s exploration of representation, stating that “we [the African artist] describe ourselves for those who are far from us [...] to those who perceive an image of us that doesn’t correspond to the one we want to project [sic].” Thus, Njami places the African artist within a framework where the artist is forced to describe the African self to the European self. Njami (2007a:114) references Jacques Lacan, who states that “we only exist in the eyes of the Other, and that Other can in many cases be ourselves.” Thus, although Njami created an idea of African as multiple, he homogenises Africa and continues to situate the African self as a foreigner within the global framework, and thereby as an other in a global context.



Figure 18: Jackson Hlungwani, *Adam and the birth of Eve*, 1985-1989 (plus a detail image)  
Wood  
4040 x 1420 x 870 mm  
(Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent 2004)

Jackson Hlungwani's (1923 – 2010) sculpture, *Adam and the Birth of Eve* (1985 – 1989), Figure 18, stands tall against the wall. Here, Hlungwani, a Shangaan, combines traditional elements from his Tsonga heritage, with his Christian beliefs. His work is reminiscent of his personal spiritual philosophy (Johans Borman Fine Art 2012) and traditional African sculptural techniques have been revisited, a fusion of Western and African. Hlungwani's art served a spiritual and religious role, as the artist maintained that he was instructed by God to produce sculpture. According to Njami (2007a:115), Hlungwani's work is suggestive of the relationship of the body to the soul. Hlungwani has stated that his sculpture was birthed at the hands of God – the artist acting as the instrument between God and the earth (Njami 2007a:115). The body operated here as the transcendental medium and “fusion between the carnal and the spiritual.” The notion of the transcendental in art is historically a philosophy of the American Renaissance of the 1800s, as well as a popular modern phenomenon, exemplified in the art of Modern artists such as Mark Rothko.<sup>6</sup> Again, the understanding of Western art is drawn upon to contextualise African art, as Hlungwani's work was said to have transcendental properties. Rather, inherent within the work of Hlungwani as early as 1985, Western and African culture had become inextricably linked, emerging modernism was evident.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Rothko was a colour field painter of the mid-twentieth century, who aspired for his viewers to achieve a transcendental or spiritual experience in his work by painting the sublime experience achieved through extreme abstraction. Rothko formed a part of the American intellectual movement of transcendentalism, while searched for spirituality in art.

Within the theme *City and land*, the city was presented as linked with modernity and chaos and land was linked with ancestors and tradition within both the discourse as well as the selection of artwork (Njami 2007c:166). Njami (2007c:164) stated that land signified many things, and remained the foundation to every city. Njami's (2007c:164) conception of the African city seemed to have been grounded in the understanding that the city is of colonial import, although it brings together all parts of the African nation with its migratory flow. For Njami (2007c:165), the African city appears to constitute a "free zone", a cosmopolitan centre point where individuals blend, free from their origins or destinations. Thus, for Njami, the city is a nostalgic hub where the individual is freed from his/her roots, yet the individual still however longs to belong to the land. Njami (2007c:165) has stated that "this [city] is where they feel the melancholy of a former time and realise that they are like wandering peasants, nostalgic beings craving an elsewhere they have lost: the magic land of their birth." Thus, for Njami (2007c:165), the city housed the emergence of a "global, indistinct world" as opposed to land and countryside which breeds difference through disconnection. Njami (2007c:165) presented the observation that within the city there is suddenly "no longer one or the other, only a native land where all melds into one – a return to the initial balance."

Zwelethu Mthethwa's<sup>7</sup> *Untitled* series, seen in Figure 19, was included in *Africa remix* under the theme of *Body and soul*. According to Haupt and Binder (2004), *City and land* comprised of snapshots of everyday African life - often conveying a stark reality, or focusing on an urban utopia. Mthethwa's portrayal of the black figure in these images showed the worker as dignified, as not only worker of the land, but laying claim to the land. Within the theme, *City and land*, the notion of ownership was juxtaposed with the worker, who was very often portrayed as not owning the land, whilst being a means of economic gain. These images challenged commercial documentation of the African as no longer the oppressed victim and as characteristic of "Afro-pessimism", as termed by Enwezor (Zwelethu Mthethwa photography [sa]), but as the protagonist of the landscape, evident in his strong composition and use of vivid colour. These works served also to question culturally conditioned gender-specific stereotypes (Haupt & Binder 2004), one sees a female labourer enduring a hard life as a worker on the open field, although this new view of identity is celebrated within his work.

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<sup>7</sup> Mthethwa was born in 1960 in Durban, but currently lives in Cape Town, South Africa.



Figure 19: Zwelethu Mthethwa, *Untitled* series, 2003  
 C-Prints on plexiglass  
 Each 850 x 1080 mm (with frame)  
 (Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent 2004)

Moshekwa Langa is also included under the theme *City and land*.<sup>8</sup> Often using materials at his immediate disposal, such as black plastic bags in this work, Langa layers meaning within his work through his imagined maps, similar to the way he layers his materials. Olukemi Ilesanmi (2002) states that Langa's maps were "a complex diasporic identity that has taken him from rural South Africa, through Johannesburg to his current *sojourn* in Northern Europe." Within his diasporic setting, Langa (in Ilesanmi 2002) explained that he is an "inside-outsider", re-imagined within his intricate mapping, but always reflecting on his constant changing identity. Through his mapping process, it would seem that Langa conveyed that his identity is constantly shifting, and travelling, no longer static or cut off by his roots with the land of Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Langa was born in Brakenberg, Potgietersrus, South Africa. Langa now lives in Amsterdam and is thus considered as part of the African diaspora.



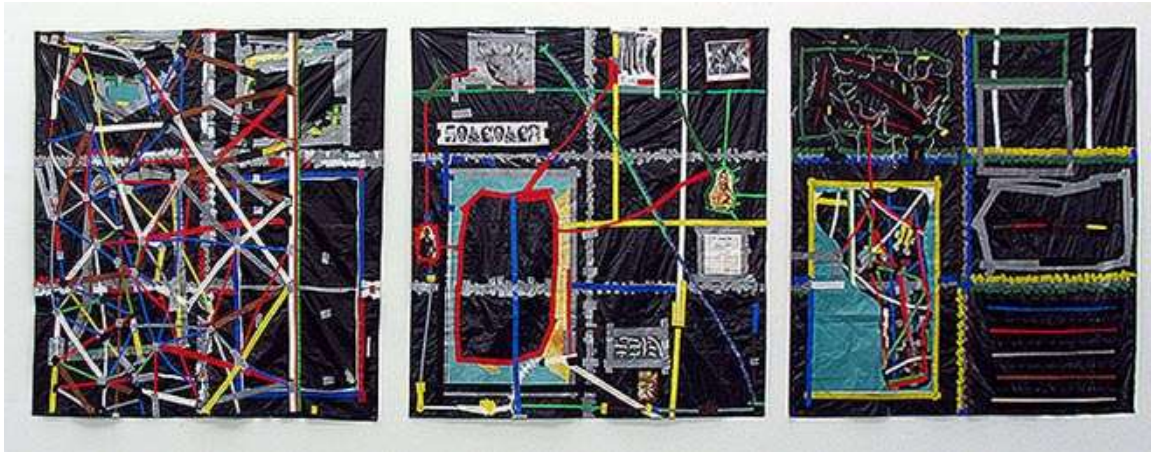


Figure 20: Moshekwa Langa, *Collapsing Guides i, ii & iii*, 2000-2003  
Mixed media on plastic foil  
i - 2440 x 2500 mm  
ii - 2480 x 2500 mm  
iii - 2520 x 2440 mm  
(Africa remix: contemporary art of a continent 2004)

It is perhaps fitting that the South African catalogue for *Africa remix* concluded with the theme *City and land*, where the self and other are no longer distinguishable as separate categories. *City and land* conveyed Njami's conception of Africa as shifting outside of previous theories. Although he conceptualised a fusion, it resulted in a complete homogenisation within Africa, based on hybridity theories stemming from postmodernism. Anthony Downey (2005:47) criticises *Africa remix* (2004), arguing that when representing African cultural production, one needs to be "curatorially conscious" of the homogenisation of Africa, and in terms of identity within *Africa remix* (2004) "of artists having to answer to presumptions of African identity if they are to be 'consumed' within the West" (Downey 2005:50). Njami thus conceives of the African as constituted as the outsider. Gilroy (1993:2) states that identitarian theories are leaning towards an idea of cultural nationalism once again; on the "over integrated conceptions of culture which present immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of 'black' and 'white' people." Within this notion of globalisation, one can see a type of nationalism that attempts to erase difference. On the other hand, Gilroy (1993:2) acknowledges alternative theories of 'over-integration' - his alternative to this is a conception of culture theorised in terms of "creolisation and hybridity," which remain problematically embedded within postcolonialism and postmodernism.

Enrootedness, devised by Bourriaud (2009:26) involves reconstituting a new modernity not based within binarism, nor within a postmodern standardisation. Curators at the time of *Africa remix* had evidently still not come up with a way of theorising emerging modernisms evident in Africa, outside of theoretical constructs. According to Bhabha (cited in Doy

2000:209), hybridity “emphasizes the remaking of boundaries where identity and difference are neither One nor the Other, but [that which] emerges *in-between*,” understood as a liminal hybrid. Bourriaud (2009:13) states that cultural hybridisation erases all the singular notions beneath a “multiculturalist” ideology, which he calls a “general standardisation of imaginations and forms,” still situated within the postmodern. Such a standardisation fails to exceed current racial discourse needed in order to understand globalised cultural mutation. Bourriaud (2009:26) states that “it is increasingly urgent that we extricate ourselves [from racial binarisms].” *Africa remix*’s curatorial vision sees that boundaries between blackness and whiteness, self and other have become blurred, and binary opposites have become merged, yet the African subject remains an other in relation to the West.

### 3.3 Cultural remixing

Nuttall and Mbembe (2008:1) focus on theorising the metropolis of Johannesburg, stating that “to write an African metropolis into the world is a complex and compelling task ... it requires a profound re-interrogation of Africa.” Johannesburg is “the symbol par excellence of the African Modern” (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008:1) and as such, representations of the city can be used as a starting point to gain a localised understanding of notions of identity within African altermodernism. In *Stylizing the Self*, Sarah Nuttall (2008:91) discusses attempts of self-representation in contemporary South African culture in terms of a youth cultural platform that she refers to as *Y-culture*. *Y-culture* (also known as *loxionkulcha*) moves across various media forms and generates what Nuttall (2008:92) refers to as “compositional remixing” which inspires a re-reading of race in the city. *Y-culture* finds success in a “dual remixing” of the bucolic and city life, as well as national and international influences (Nuttall 2008:96-7).

In colonial South Africa, “racism was [...] a way of maintaining biological differences among people” (Nuttall & Mbembe 2008:43), differences that were still maintained within the postcolonial theorisation of techniques of understanding identity. Within the African modern, however, this goal for separation becomes obsolete in the course of intermixing. Nuttall (2008:98) states that since 1994, subjects have “occupied these categories in changing ways, using them to elaborate shifting identities for themselves in the new *postracist* dispensation.” Previous classifications have undergone metamorphosis since 1994, according to Nuttall (2008:99), and youth cultures have moved beyond the resistance politics of the earlier generation, by remixing and remaking cultural codes. *Y-culture* has provided an opening in the theorising of contemporary identity in South Africa, as well as providing an

attempt at beginning to define notions of the “post-racial” (Nuttall 2008:107), and post-African.

### **3.3.1 Afro modern: journeys through the black Atlantic (2010)**

In 2010, the British Tate Liverpool, with the exhibition *Afro modern* (2010), curated by Barson and Gorschlüter, embarked on an ambitious programme that would consider a diverse and global approach to understanding African identity, using the current theories of African modernism, and marking a clear shift, in understanding identity outside of postcolonialism. The exhibition was based on the seminal theories of Gilroy’s *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness* (1993) and conceptually addressed the impact of different black cultures from around the Atlantic on art from the early twentieth century to the present.

The stated curatorial objective of the exhibition was to open an alternative reading of modernism and the impact of black culture on contemporary culture in an attempt to “define new registers of cultural expression that supersede those of yesterday” (Barson 2010:8). Barson (2010:8) states that the exhibition aimed to address “the shifting spaces, temporalities and formulations of modernism as it relates to black cultures and the black diaspora.” *Afro modern* (2010) considered these shifting formulations of modernism during various periods, with the themes ‘Black Atlantic *avant-gardes*<sup>9</sup> as well as ‘Maya Deren: The living Gods of Haiti’<sup>10</sup> as an initial investigation of the early twentieth century. *Afro modern* then investigated the ‘Black Orpheus: Negritude, creolization, Natural synthesis’<sup>11</sup> (1940s – late 1960s), and ‘Dissident identities: Radicalism, Resistance, and Marginality’<sup>12</sup> (1960s – early 1980s) in an attempt to investigate the historical process of the black Atlantic’s impact on modernism (Cf. Chapter 1).

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<sup>9</sup> The ‘Black Atlantic *avant-gardes*’ theme investigates the European *avant-garde* appropriation of African art, “characterized by a hyperbolic craze for black culture and the Surrealists’ fascination with ethnography” (Barson 2010:10).

<sup>10</sup> Maya Deren’s project began as an investigation into the anthropological study of African influenced dance, conveying intermediary movements towards “blurring the boundaries between the aesthetic and ethnographic (Barson 2010:12).

<sup>11</sup> Investigates modernist visual manifestations given form by the potentialities of *Négritude*, often mediated by Modernists, Cubists, and Surrealists (Barson 2010:14).

<sup>12</sup> An investigation into “counter-cultural politics of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements” to form the background to issues of identity, racial politics and visibility in visual arts, that has prompted much investigation into understanding contemporary art today (Barson 2010:16).

In *The black Atlantic* (1993), Gilroy maintains that “the black experience in the modern world has always been transnational.” Such critique is evidence of the changing perceptions on African identity and African modernism. Gilroy’s idea of the ‘black Atlantic’, in which he “prefigured many of the debates around the transnational, the intercultural and globalisation” has important implications for the study of art and culture today (in Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:10). Gilroy’s *The black Atlantic* (1993:2) outlines that ideas about “nationality, ethnicity, authenticity and cultural integrity are characteristically modern phenomena”, but yet he still outlines these factors, although being a part of African modernism, as being affiliated with the West. *Afro modern*’s conceptualisation of African modernism, which was inspired by the writings of Gilroy, still remains grounded in terms of diasporic African’s best representing the continent, and excludes an investigation of African modernism within Africa itself. Although this show based in Britain declares its subjects as the black Atlantic, this text proves seminal in using African modernism within their curatorial concept.

In order to consider the operational concepts of identity in the diaspora, double consciousness was theorised by WEB Du Bois (in Gilroy 1993) and later reconsidered and hypothesised by Gilroy (1993:30), in order to find a solution to the concept that identity is formed not only on the variables of the self, but “also happens to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation state.” Under the curatorial theme of *Reconstructing the middle passage: diaspora and memory*, which investigated aesthetics from the late 1980s to the present, a focus was maintained on the experiences of the diaspora artists alongside their experience of dislocation. ‘The Middle Passage,’ theorised by Gilroy (in Barson 2010:18), describes a micro-culture and micro-political system in motion, brought together through multiple histories of migration (such as slavery to post-war migration), which marked the beginning of “transnational dislocation, global inequity and violence” often prevalent in contemporary art (in Barson 2010:20). Thus, an investigation into a new understanding of contemporary art was situated historically, although problematically predominantly in terms of the African diaspora. The main aim of this study is to hypothesise a new mode of identitarian understanding, within African altermodernism, that problematises difference in cultural translation, trans-consciousness and global understanding, whereby Africa’s state-of-being is no longer dictated through the West or limited to diasporic or nomadic conditions of understanding. Thus, although *Afro modern* is an important precedent in theorising a new understanding of identity, Africa’s state-of-being in this instance is still dictated through the West and the diaspora Africans.



Figure 21: Ellen Gallagher, *Bird in Hand*, 2006  
Oil, ink, paper, salt, gold leaf on canvas  
2380 x 3070 mm  
Tate Liverpool, presented anonymously 2007  
(Barson & Gorschluter 2010:147-148)

Ellen Gallagher, African-American artist, born in the United States but of Western African descent, reconstructed this 'middle passage' in her work *Bird in Hand* 2006, Figure 21. Gallagher's work was made up of the figure of a black sailor from the Cape Verde islands, conveying the "symbol of black Atlantic mobility" (Barson 2010:20). Gallagher proclaimed in her work that the influence of the black Atlantic has spread, continues to be mobile and is no longer situated primarily within Western historical understanding. Gallagher's work evoked alternative readings of the story of *Drexciya*, "the home of the souls thrown overboard during the transatlantic journey" towards slavery (Barson 2010:20). Thus, Gallagher reappropriated historical stories within the contemporary, in a revisionistic attempt to resituate the black slave body within contemporary society. Gallagher's work aimed to reconstruct the transnational dislocation and global inequity of the past, encouraging a new theorisation of historical and current readings into processes of identification that were themselves no longer determined solely by history, but which convey movement in discerning the black body, as no longer static.

Within the curatorial theme, *Exhibiting bodies: racism, rationalism and pseudo-science*, Barson (2010:20) addressed the notion of the black female body that historically has signified a quintessential embodiment of otherness, which she argued needed to be rescued from a history which “erases her completely” to be explored more widely in terms of gender, race and inequality. An attempt was made to highlight that modernity was dependent upon the black Atlantic<sup>13</sup>. In *Afro modern*, a post-racist reading of works - both current and not - was encouraged, conveying a shift in contemporary understanding of identity, which was investigated in the work of South African artist Tracey Rose’s *Venus Baartman* 2001 (Figure 22).



Figure 22: Tracey Rose, *Venus Baartman*, 2001  
Colour photograph on paper  
1200 x 1200 mm  
Courtesy of the artist and The Project, New York  
(Barson & Gorschlüter 201:153)

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<sup>13</sup> The Black Atlantic can be referred to as a defining term “describing an alternative space for cultural and intellectual interchange and experience with specific regard to the African diaspora” (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:180).

Tracey Rose<sup>14</sup> reconsidered the historical allegory of Sarah Baartman<sup>15</sup> (also commonly known as the ‘Venus Hottentot’) in this work. Sarah Baartman is no longer presented by the artist as the subject of scrutiny by European onlookers, but as the scrutiniser and the protagonist. Resonant with the theme of *Exhibiting bodies*, the focus is on the representation of identity and performance identity within history, in order to come to a revised understanding of identity paradigms, and to produce a curatorial shift in understanding identity. Barson (2010:20) stated that the work could be read as a “commentary on the complexities of the (self-) representation of the black female body within modernism.” The work can be understood as Rose’s celebration of willingly naked black figures performing identity, such as Josephine Baker, who are acknowledged as active subjects in the making of the Modern. Thus, Rose’s work could be viewed as an attempt to redirect the modern gaze at the black body and to turn it inwards towards itself. Rose manages to shift perceptions of the black body, through confronting the colonial gaze that objectified the black body as a passive subject. The inclusion of this work on the show conveys the shift in perceptions concerning blackness within an African modern understanding.

Barson (2010:20) states that “since the 80s, a number of women artists have investigated the representation of the black female body and it’s framing, through devices such as ethnographic and classificatory photography, tourist postcards and other seemingly ‘documentary’ forms and conventions.” Although previously discussed in Chapter Two, Candice Breitz’s<sup>16</sup> *Ghost Series* 1994-6 (seen in Figure 10), included on *Afro modern*, infers for Barson (2010:20) a revisionistic curatorial understanding of this show, “as exploring the ambivalences of ethnographic imagery in relation to globalised multiculturalism and the commodification of ethnicity.” Barson (2010:20) acknowledges that the work was first shown during the time when the use of the black body by white South African artists was a contentious issue in itself. Art critic Octovio Zaya (in Barson 2010:20) says of Breitz’s work that she not only alters the women’s bodies aesthetically, but also metaphorically, “highlight[ing] the phantasmagoric nature that already pervades them, in the elision or erasure of the subjectivity of the women in the image [...] to exacerbate the laws of appropriation that categorize these presences as exotic and primitive fetishized absences.”

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<sup>14</sup> Tracey Rose, an artist of international standing, is a well-travelled, nomadic South African artist. Rose’s work is often a product of her travels. She is currently on a year long artist’s residency in Berlin, Germany (Tracey Rose 2012).

<sup>15</sup> The story of Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman, who was kept and displayed in Europe as an “object of scientific and medical research, forms the back-drop of European ideas about black female sexuality” (Saartjie Baartman’s Story 2008). According to Young (1997:699) Baartman served as the “central model for black female ‘otherness’ in the nineteenth century.”

<sup>16</sup> Candice Breitz was born in 1972, Johannesburg, South Africa. She is currently based in Berlin as part of the diaspora arts, and is Professor of Fine Arts at the Braunschweig University of Art, a position she has held since 2007 (Kunsthalle [sa]).

This is a far cry from Enwezor's neo-postcolonialist reading of the work. Thus, in a contemporary reading of Breitz work, the issue is no longer that a black body is being represented by a white artist, but rather that the intention of the artist is acknowledged outside of a racialised understanding clouded in exclusivity, and who has the right to comment on whom. Such a change in readings evident in Barson's (2010:20) curatorial techniques clearly demonstrates the shift in perceived understanding and curatorial consciousness.

This show's division into curatorial chapters conveyed a historical move from identity art of the 1990s toward a contemporary post-black/post-racist art. Within the curatorial discourse under the theme *From post-modern to post-black: appropriation, black humour and double negatives* Barson (2010:22) stated that this final section "examines the tactics used by contemporary artists to explore the profound complexities and ambivalences within black diasporic subjectivity." This section of the exhibition was aimed at redefining 'blackness' under the term 'post-black' in order to establish "a transnational and transhistorical revision of the story of modernism" (Barson 2010:23). Barson and Gorschlüter (2010:181) stated that transnational "can refer to a state of being (transnationality) that encompasses and describes associated terms such as diaspora, exile or nomadism, as well as pointing to instances of cultural hybridity." I argue that notions of transnationality apply not only to the diaspora, but to Africa as a whole and particularly to South Africa. Through globalisation, contemporary society has become 'transnational' as Lemke (1998:15) states, one can travel both in person or "in the form of global dissemination" which can occur in the form of the World Wide Web. Barson (2010:9) argued furthermore that Gilroy's thesis of the Black Atlantic "argues against essentialist versions of racial identity and racial nationalisms, in favour of a shared, though heterogeneous, culture that joins diverse communities." Although the curator proposes a move toward understanding identity outside that of binary identity theory, this section problematically considers mainly the African diaspora.<sup>17</sup> I maintain that a study concerning Africans living and working within Africa itself needs to be undertaken.

Although various theories are proposed to offer a new understanding of identity within contemporary society, the question remains of how Africa could be curated. There is a need to re-evaluate the question posed by Ogbечи (2010) thus, where he asks "what is the value of Africa as a sight of globalisation, as a place with its own history of development of a

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<sup>17</sup> All the artists included within this section were of diasporic descent – David Hammons (Born in Illinois, USA), Chris Ofili (Born in Britain), Glen Ligon (born in USA), Adam Pendleton (born in USA), Adler Guerrier (born in USA) Ronald Duarte (born in Mexico city, lives and works in USA), Coco Fusco (born in New York, USA), Lorna Simpson (born in USA), Ellen Gallagher (born in USA) and Kara Walker (born in USA).



specific visual language and strategies of visual representation?” *Afro modern* (2010), may offer insight into the current trends of dealing with the complex task of curating identity today, although Barson’s findings, aligned with those of Gilroy serve only as a surface investigation of the conditions of diaspora Africans. *Afro modern* generated a view of Africa outside of Africa itself. An investigation of the phenomenon of the African modern situated within Africa itself is thus undertaken.

Concerning Africa, approaches to curating identity up to the point of *Afro modern* (2010) had been based on notions of binary opposition, or were centred around an investigation of the African diaspora. Internationally, African identity has mainly been curated from a Eurocentric viewpoint, which remains embedded within marginalist peripherals and colonial viewpoints. According to Camara (1995:20), the postcolonial notions of centre and periphery are concerned with the way in which the West takes “stock” of art history. Camara (1995:20) accuses the West of offering inadequate discourses such as those resulting from multiculturalism as a way of covering up balkanisation<sup>18</sup> in the midst of the exposition of pluri-ethnicity.

This chapter conveyed a need to go beyond such problematics of identity towards a position where cultural expressions and identities are accepted as becoming intermixed within Africa itself as a site of globalisation. It can be contended that theories centred on postmodernism and postcolonialism are no longer conducive to the understanding of contemporary African identitarian issues. Although Barson (2010:8) attempts to resituate “the different spaces and temporalities at work throughout the Atlantic” within the African modern, the application of an African modern investigation can be applied to Africa curating itself. Such an application will be dealt with in the next chapter in a discussion of my curated exhibition *Trans-Africa: Africa curating Africa*, especially in terms of the ideas of translation and trans-consciousness. The exhibition aims to describe identity theory beyond the disappearing binaries, and rather as a product of globalised contemporary society, no longer restrained by postmodernism and postcolonialism.

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<sup>18</sup> Balkanisation originally refers to the processes of fragmentation or the division of regions into smaller regions – within this context, balkanisation can be said to imply the fragmentation of race in the midst of pluri-ethnicity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AFRICA CURATING AFRICA

The time seems right to reconstruct the 'modern' for the present moment, to reconfigure it for the specific context in which we are living

(Bourriaud 2009:15)

In this chapter, I consider African modernism from an insider point of view, contextualised through seminal artworks by South African artists that demonstrate such understanding of identity through art practice. The aim is thus to widen the spectrum of discourse on identity, using selected theories of the African modern and altermodernism, revised into what I call the 'alterAfrican', which I discuss within the context of my curated exhibition, *Trans-Africa: Africa curating Africa*.

#### 4.1 Reconstructing the modern

Ogbechie (2010) states that curatorial practice shapes the interpretation of the artworks, and thus it is the curator, working alongside the installation of the artworks, that constitutes the outcome of meaning understood by the viewers. Ogbechie (2010) continues, stating that “the contemporary artworld increasingly values the curator above the artist [...] the curator is displacing the artist to become the one who most directly benefits from the work of artistic production.” Thus, by discussing selected artworks that relate to the practical body of this study – the curated exhibition – I aim to convey the shift in the understanding of identity, by demonstrating the shifts in curatorial perceptions that concern identity discourses in terms of translation, transmutation and African trans-consciousness<sup>1</sup>.

Bourriaud (2009:16) concurs that there is no need to embrace previous concepts and discourses linked to past modernism, but that the present day modern is a passion for the “current [...] in a manner that distinguishes our modernity from preceding ones.” Although Bourriaud (2009) excludes Africa in his view of the altermodern, Nuttall and Mbembe (2008:3) have argued that “major cities of the South share many of the characteristics of the global cities of the North, including cultural and ethnic heterogeneity, transnational flows of

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<sup>1</sup> Double consciousness has been described by Gilroy (1993:1) as “striving to be both European and black.” Currently identity is no longer limited to being doubly conscious, but can rather be understood as trans-conscious – with multiple knowledge and understanding as a result of exchange. Diab (1995:28) has argued that there was no longer the need for an understanding situated entirely within Western perspectives, cultures are emerging as trans-conscious.

labor [sic] and capital, and uneven spatial and social development.” In terms of globalisation, Bourriaud (2009:18) has described the phenomenon of the “shrinking earth.” Hassan (1999:215) argues that “the field of African art in general requires new frameworks for understanding its forms and [the] aesthetics that engender them.” Aspects of the altermodern that situates identity theory past notions of self/other thus need to be considered alongside African modernism, in order to come to a current understanding of changing identity theory.

Within current consciousness of globalisation, the ability to locate the other is fast becoming a fading effort. It would seem that without actively searching for one's roots, the notion of the other is disintegrating and society is becoming trans-conscious. Gilroy (2000:105-6) states that “new hatreds and violence arise not, as they did in the past, from supposedly reliable anthropological knowledge of the identity and difference of the Other, but from the novel problem of not being able to locate the Other's difference.” Such a problem was demonstrated in the 1990s by Enwezor's futile attempts to re-define difference. This caused discomfort within the South African contemporary art scene, as his aim was to segregate and enforce difference as a basis on which to discuss art. White artists were seen as unfit to comment on non-white artists' works, re-segregating the artworld into a ‘who's—who’ of racial logicians, despite experiencing the South African situation first hand. As a society emerging out of apartheid, such a view served only to re-institutionalise difference. According to Atkinson (1999:24) “artistic production in South Africa is integral to an ongoing review of our political and cultural status quo” and helps to assess and assert “the value of culture to the democratic process”, which allows the tracking of the development and “nurturing of a culture of criticism in which assumptions about race, gender, ethnicity and class can be identified and debated.” Enwezor (in Atkinson 1999:25) has stated in contradiction to this that “what needs interrogation is usage of any fixed meaning of blackness as an ideology of authenticity or whiteness as a surplus enjoyment of superiority.” Although discussing race in order to eradicate any sense of stereotypical superiorities in the understanding of people, one can thus note the need for a new understanding of African identity, where difference, notably racial difference, is no longer static, and is no longer maintained as integral to the understanding of identity discourse. Transmutation and exchange are thus now considered integral to identitarian understanding.

In this chapter, I postulate the grounds of what could constitute identity construction within alterAfrican. The objective is thus to dismantle racial categories, and as a result, to surpass stereo-racial boundaries. One may ask the question though – what of difference? I investigate assertions of translation, which contradict creolisation as merged and indifferent,

but rather convey difference in terms of change through globalisation. Featherstone (1990:6) regards this process of globalisation as leading to a “global ecumene”, which he defines as a “region of persistent culture interaction and exchange” producing cultural translation, as well as transnational orientation invoking a sense of global understanding.

As a white female curator, understanding is changing to acknowledge my voice as no longer outside of racial dichotomies, but as a product of a post-racial society, with transcultural consciousness. Jayna Mistry, a third-generation South African Indian artist, born and raised in Gauteng, works with the location of difference, as well as transgressing fixed stereo-racial understandings within contemporary culture. Her *Alter-native*<sup>2</sup>(2011) series (Figure 23) conveys Mistry’s interest in “narcissistic power, transgression, and the boundary hybridisation that occurs when the ‘self’ and ‘other’ become enmeshed” (Mistry 2012/08/14). Mistry affiliates with burlesque Bollywood culture, despite having a South African Indian upbringing. This in itself is misleading, as burlesque dancing originated in Europe with dancers such as Josephine Baker taking central stage during modern renditions. Similarly Bollywood is modelled on the American film industry in Hollywood, indicated at once through its very moniker. In this work, Mistry attempts to come to a clear understanding of both her South African self as well as her own Indianness, in an investigation into these globalising processes, and in consideration of her mixed identity.

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<sup>2</sup> *Alter-native* was a 2011 series of thirty-five digitally manipulated documentary photographs, where Mistry exposes herself to various forms of exotic, erotic and alternate entertainment – referencing celebrity culture and the idea of the “attention whore.”



Figure 23: Jayna Mistry, *Alter-native* series, 2011

Left: *Untitled (i)*, 2011

Middle: *Untitled (ii)*, 2011

Right: *Untitled (iii)*, 2011

Framed digital print on archival paper

(Left) 1200 x 800 mm, (Middle) 592 x 419 mm, (Right) 592 x 419 mm

(Images courtesy of the artist)

Mistry (2012/08/14) states about the title of her work that “*Alter-Native*, suggests [that] what is represented is my alter-ego.” She refers directly to the performed self, alongside burlesque dancers and alternative performers. Mistry’s interests also lie within the incompleteness of the photographic ‘representation’ and the power relations in place through the process of documenting. Through the photographic image, the viewer is at once aware that one is being prompted to view the other through the colonial gaze; although in this case the other is surrounded by a merge of both Western and non-Western imagery and the other is thus not able to be located. The subject is at once exotic and familiar, a mix of both the West and the East.

Within African modernism, black diaspora artists have adopted stereotypes surrounding the body in order to dismantle them – what Stuart Hall (in Archer 2010:37) has theorised as a “turn.” The self, also aligned with this notion of the model white identity, was continuously fixed as white, American/European and middle class for example, by colonialism. Mistry is interested in her position as a South African Indian by default, and uses this self-same ‘turn’ – although she re-appropriates herself as simultaneously self and other – eradicating the binaries of such a previous discourse. Mistry received the majority of her academic education from a Western perspective, although from a popular perspective a significant amount of Indian popular culture forms the majority of her personal entertainment. Mistry aesthetically describes her position as ambiguous. In terms of Bollywood, Mistry, in her

artist's statement (2012/08/14) argues "Indianness is defined against a corrupt West", where the West becomes other from such a perspective. Mistry (2012/08/14) says "the trouble is that it's easy to fall into a reversed set of essentialised thinking, that replicates the problem that certain questions were initially set out [sic] to criticise." Using Lemke's (1998:9) discussion therefore, of this "dialectical formation of an aesthetic and cultural identity" which, when referring to the arguments of both Edwards and Archer (2010:32), was moulded since the twentieth century, aesthetic and cultural identity has become inextricably linked.

In order to dismantle the racial categories of the previous century, one needs to review essentialism in identity discourse. It is my contention that curatorial identitarian perceptions are changing as a result of cultural intermixing, erasing the clear boundary between the Western/non-Western, and self and other. Mistry's work aims at an alternative understanding of identity, clearly stated within the actual titling of her series: *Alter-Native*. The aim of the series, according to Mistry (2012/08/14), was for the alteration and transmutation of the negotiation of the self between social, cultural, political and religious difference (Figure 24). My interest in curating Mistry's work resides in the fact that it could be understood as an alternative - alter-*native* - understanding in terms of perceptions of the idea of *native*, and in keeping with my own understanding of contemporary identitarian theory – an alterAfrican perception. Mistry (2012/08/14) states "the human body is an organism in culture, a cultural artefact even, and its own boundaries are unclear, and unclear boundaries disturb us." Mistry (2012/08/14) thus states within this series that she purposefully celebrates the notion of difference and the 'exotic' – although she acknowledges that this clarified difference is an alter-ego, her actual self not as clearly defined erotic and thus conveying an attempt at dismantling these essential stereotypes within her own understanding of identity.



Figure 24: Jayna Mistry, *Alter-native* series, 2011  
Left: *Untitled (iv)*, 2011  
Right: *Untitled (v)*, 2011  
Framed digital print on archival paper  
(Left) 419 x 593 mm (Right) 560 x 840 mm  
(Images courtesy of the artist)

From a curatorial perspective, the effects of globalisation can be seen in Mistry's work. Curatorially, one needs to acknowledge difference in terms of Mistry's understanding of herself, that in order to clearly define difference is to be performing the alter-ego – and she refers to something erotic and even nostalgic within her *oeuvre*. Mistry (2012/08/14) demonstrates here how – in her own words “the self and other have become ‘enmeshed’ – the erotic requires that one's identity be understood by how one feels and knows, yet this is complicated, fluid and always changing – erotic knowledge cannot come out of a fixed, static and essential identity.” Bourriaud (2009:28) states that *essentialism* “refers to what is stable and immutable in a system or concept [...] That the origin thus takes precedence over the destination in the life of forms and ideas turn out to be the dominant postmodern motif.” Bourriaud (2009:29) argues that “art criticism willingly views itself as a kind of neo-anthropology that aspires to be the quintessential science of otherness”, which is demonstrated within Mistry's work, in the artist's own attempt to eliminate essentialist difference by conveying them as performed. Thus, by dismantling essential difference within the work, Mistry has demonstrated how both cultural and curatorial perceptions are changing, and how essential racial categories are used as tools to convey the disappearance of such categories, which no longer constitute the terms of understanding contemporary identity.

#### **4.2 The trans-identitarian: transmutation and the accumulation of culture**

In the postmodern context, two main cultural models were outlined that contradict hybridity (associated with postmodernism and postcolonialism) – the notion of *repli-identitaire* and creolisation (Bourriaud 2009:20). *Repli-identitaire* involves the notion of withdrawing into national, ethnic or cultural identity in an attempt to completely avoid any notion of contemporary globalisation (Bourriaud 2009:18-20). According to Bourriaud (2009:20), creolisation is “a process involving acclimatization and cross breeding of heterogeneous influences.” Yet, creolisation, associated with the hybrid, has become an insufficient postulation with which to understand this notion of a new identity as a product of globalisation. Such a term implies a fusion of two or more binaries, clearly discernible in one body. Cultural intermixing (transmutation), however, implies that identity has gone beyond a fusion, and has transmuted beyond mere hybridization. Binarism are no longer easy to locate, cultures have intermixed and exchanged beyond the location of essential cultural differences. Rather, identity differences change according to a given person's position within the world at that time. Gilroy (1993:15) states that “the fractal patterns of cultural and political exchange and transformation that we try and specify through manifestly inadequate

theoretical terms like creolisation and syncretism, indicate how both ethnicities and political cultures have been made anew.”

Bourriaud (2009:13) states that ‘cultural hybridisation’ – a typically *postmodern* notion, erases all the singular notions beneath a “multiculturalist” ideology – which he calls a “general standardisation of imaginations and forms” (2009:13). In the time of the altermodern, one may argue that the world is growing increasingly uniform. Édouard Glissant (cited in Bourriaud 2009:20) states that “the world is becoming creolized [...] that is to say that the cultures of the world are furiously and knowingly coming into contact with each other, changing by exchanging.” Such an altercation becomes integral within the understanding of contemporary identity. Although such an exchange is occurring, Bourriaud (2009:35) reminds us that previous examples have taught us that “anticolonialism is not a substitute for political thought, it can by no means provide the basis for a viable aesthetic and cultural project.” The anticolonial can be understood as the antithesis to the colonial, where the colonial was based upon political and cultural othering. Such a denial of difference within the anticolonial model is by no means viable: “the anticolonial model repels modernism, but fails to replace it with another relevant theory” (Bourriaud 2009:39).

Commenting on African countries that have recently gained independence – a situation relevant to South Africa in terms of socio-political status – the consideration of identity should take place against the conception of hybridity/creolisation. Identity within the altermodern needs to be viewed as translated within the globalised context, whereby a possible dialogue between past and present has been established. The definition by which the self and the other is understood has been transformed – it can now be understood that people are different but that they are equal, and that the binary of mainstreams and marginalisations cannot be tolerated. Thus, difference within the understanding of the essential story is understood in the changed (or translated) understanding of difference through globalisation. These exchanges or translations are considered as factors of the trans-identitarian.

#### **4.2.1 *Forgoing roots, translation and the condition of the wanderer***

Senzeni Marasela's series, *Covering Sarah* (2012) (Figure 25) conveys a reinterpretation of Sarah Baartman within our contemporary globalised climate. Marasela's (2012:[sp]) current interests involve using documented works and altering them, as an attempt to rewrite history. In this work, Marasela uses archived images of the *Hottentot Venus* (Sarah Baartman), which she redraws in red watercolour pencil and places herself within the work in an attempt



to cloth the naked Sarah Baartman, who was placed on display in the 1800s across Europe<sup>3</sup>. Often Marasela inserts herself within the work, because of the personal nature of the archives she deals with (Marasela 2012:[sp]). The images conveyed, although referring directly to the colonial period, are much more modernised in the aesthetic treatment of the work. Marasela (2012:[sp]) states that "the use of the colour red acts as a mark-up [sic]" or a score, in order to "rewrit[e] a history that is brutal and largely untold" (Marasela 2012:[sp]).

Bourriaud (2009:21) draws on the figure of the *exote*<sup>4</sup> - a figure encompassing difference through globalisation. The *exote* is a figure of travel, expedition and global dislocation (Bourriaud 2009:21). The figure of Baartman within Marasela's work can be considered as a kind of *exote* – Baartman suffered displacement, displayed as she was as an exotic other to a European audience. However, the shift in the understanding of the figure of the *exote*, and thus the essence of roots and origins, conveys a shift in contemporary understanding, or a translation of difference. Marasela's depiction of Baartman attempts to alter historical narrative of these events, thereby historically translating them. Marasela attempts to convey difference in the understanding of the story of Baartman through a changing understanding towards difference through globalisation. Marasela inserts herself, as a contemporary and globalised figure, in the place of Sarah Baartman, creating this view from within.



Figure 25: Senzeni Marasela, *Covering Sarah Series*, 2012  
From left to right: *Covering Sarah I, II, III, IV and V*  
Red water colour pencil on paper,  
405 mm x 305 mm (each)  
Image courtesy Fried Contemporary Art Gallery and Studio (2012)

Gilroy (1993:19) states that "modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes."

Altermodernism and contemporary culture calls for an alternative view of identity as

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Baartman was taken as a slave from Africa in the early 1800s and was placed naked on display in Great Britain as the epitome of the image of the other – under the name of "The Hottentot Venus."

<sup>4</sup> Taken from Victor Segalen's *Essay on Exoticism* (1919, cited in Bourriaud 2009:21) in which Segalen had already perceived the consequences of the twentieth century and argued against the generalised flattening of differences – an *exote* is a figure of travel, expedition and global dislocation (Bourriaud 2009:21).

conveyed by Marasela's understanding of the roots of identity. As such, essentialism is being translated and eradicated all at once. Uniformity as understood in history is no longer being applied to Marasela's understanding of identity, as difference has thus been translated, with Marasela transplanting herself within Baartman's story, and thus translating difference within the contemporary climate. Bourriaud (2009:22) states that within the altermodern, one needs to set their roots in motion – “staging [their roots] in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviors, exchanging rather than imposing.” This altermodern attitude is conveyed in this shift in history through Marasela's series *Covering Sarah* (2012). Bourriaud (2009:22) calls this condition “the condition of the wanderer – a central figure of our precarious era, who is insistently emerging at the heart of contemporary artistic creation. This figure is accompanied by a domain of forms – the domain of the journey-form – as well as by an ethical mode: translation.” The wanderer becomes a metaphor for the contemporary person, or artist in terms of this study, who neither conforms to essentialist criteria, nor to the criteria of postmodern hybridity. The wanderer is a constantly fluctuating identity, according to his or her position within the world at that time, intact with the roots of their origin, but not rooted by their origin.

Bourriaud (2009:21) states that it is this notion of holding on to your “*roots* that make individuals suffer; in our globalized world, they persist like phantom limbs after amputation.” Thus, in our understanding of Marasela's reinterpretation of the Baartman legacy, she attempts to transform such limbs that may hold us back in contemporary society, in order to introduce an entirely new understanding of identity, with no fixed roots, or mythologised origin, but an origin that has transmuted. Bourriaud (2009:21) states that “[...] rather than set fixed roots against another, a mythologized ‘origin’ against an integrating and homogenizing ‘soil’, wouldn’t it make more sense to assign them to other conceptual categories, ones suggested by a global imagination in the process of mutation?”

It is evident that there are shifts in the perception of identity, indicated both through the artworks of contemporary South African artists, and the curatorial perceptions of installing and displaying such works. It can be maintained that the wanderer, as depicted by Marasela, along with the theories of the African modern, convey an understanding of roots that have been translated into the trans-identitarian compass that is the African altermodern.

#### 4.2.2 *Trans-consciousness and the global understanding*

Double consciousness<sup>5</sup> was founded on the intent to find a solution to the antinomy of the black diaspora within the West – which Gilroy (1993:1) described as “striving to be both European and black.” Originally, the term was used to describe the way in which black Americans were deprived of a “true self-conscious” – a term implying the contradiction found in the state of being of ‘African Americans’ (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:180). Du Bois (in Gilroy 1993:126) also referred to this concept to express the experience of people of colour “as a means to animate a dream of global co-operation.” However, within globalised contemporary culture, the term has now come to connote a “state of belonging to a culture but being simultaneously outside it, denied access or ignored within it” and was thus used by Gilroy to describe “conflicting and/or overlapping forms of identification” (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:180). In a globalised, contemporary South African society, identity is no longer limited to being doubly conscious, but can rather be understood as trans-conscious – with multiple knowledge and understanding as a result of exchange. Accepting this analysis conveys how, within South Africa, one can be simultaneously uninvolved within a culture, yet through transcultural intermixing, experience trans-consciousness understanding. Through transcultural intermixing, the majority of society has become trans-conscious.

Emerging South African artist, Lwandiso Njara, demonstrates this contemporary condition in his installation sculpture *Catholic altar boy bombarded by choices between the Christian doctrines and slaughtering for the ancestors* (2012) (Figure 26). A need to acknowledge transnational and transcultural identities is demonstrated in this work by Njara, who translates conflicting identities (being both South African, Catholic and a part of traditional Xhosa culture) within one trans-conscious body in his installation. As Bourriaud (2009:17) states “today’s artists, whatever latitudes they live in, have the task of envisaging what would be the first truly worldwide culture”, which is what Njara has attempted to envision within his installation, in terms of the local situation in South Africa.

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<sup>5</sup> A term first used by WEB du Bois to describe the contradictions in social valued and daily experiences felt by black people in America (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:180). Gilroy (1993:126) states that double consciousness was initially used “to convey the special difficulties arising from black internalisation of an American identity.”



Figure 26: Lwandiso Njara, *Catholic altar boy bombarded by choices between the Christian doctrines and slaughtering for the ancestors*, 2012  
Mixed media installation  
Dimensions variable  
Photograph courtesy of the artist

Njara's work consists of two cement cast cattle skeletons, two bibles which are also cast in cement, and a small metal spear. Njara (2012/07/21) states that "the skeletons are infused with mechanic cogs that reflect Western ideologies alongside a strong social influence on African indigenous people." The use of the bibles in the installation refers to Christian doctrine, as well as to Njara's Catholic upbringing, having attended a Catholic school in the Eastern Cape, where he became an altar boy for the local church. Furthermore, the uses of the metal spear and the *Nguni* cow hide references Xhosa ancestral rituals.

Njara (2012/07/21) states that in life, he is often faced with a choice between Xhosa native customs and the Catholic belief system – contradictory realms according to Njara, within which he finds himself aligned, despite the contradictions inherent in this. Njara (2012/07/21) maintains that "it is my aim to discover the truth for myself and to find out whether the two realms have something in common and where they intersect." Njara's installation forms a bridge between the South African Catholic, and Xhosa ritual, which intersect to form something entirely new. This newness or trans-conscious identity is translated – signified by

the contemporary robotic and seemingly evolved figures sitting around a table, giving the impression that these figures are technologically progressive.

Gilroy (1993:3) refers to the notion of “cultural insiderism”, namely the notion of an absolute sense of ethnic difference, which distinguishes people from one another and at the same time acquires an “incontestable priority over all other dimensions of their social and historical cultures and identities.” The tensions noted in such discourses, such as the claims made that the diverse nation of South Africa is more belonging to a pluralistic culture than being simultaneously outside it, forms the basis of my argument regarding identity. As such, I argue that binary cultures are being translated, and can no longer be understood as a completely separate concept.

Wandile Kasibe (2008:79) comments on his conscious as being “*Not quite black, not quite white,*” articulating his “coconut consciousness” and his sense of “restlessness, groundlessness, rootlessness, instability and displacement” that lies at the core idea of being a stranger on one’s own continent, due to socio-political ambivalences of the geo-political space. He goes on to state that this sense of ‘in-betweenness’ may be directly linked to his understanding of language – when using English he is estranged from his mother tongue, isiXhosa – yet he thinks and speaks in English. Kasibe (2008:81) argues that he has to acknowledge his ‘Englishness’<sup>6</sup> – originally associated with the Western other. He has thus become inter-mixed, English has become a part of him, it is no longer a foreign language. Kasibe (2008:81), in his understanding of identity, embodies what can be described as trans-conscious - in his (Kasibe 2008:81) own words “vacillating between blackness and whiteness,” the Western other and his embodiment of his Westernised self. Kasibe (2008:81) says of this consciousness that he is an unstable entity “that belongs in neither black nor white spaces, but is a product of both” and can thus be a product of trans-consciousness. Kasibe (2008:83) goes on to state that to question this positionality places one within the position of ‘post’, which as mentioned previously, is insufficient as it serves simply to lump previous theory together.

A more fluid and cross-pollinated sense of identity thus emerges within trans-conscious, which is simultaneously experienced and indicated by Njara in *Catholic altar boy bombarded by choices between the Christian doctrines and slaughtering for the ancestors* (2012), Figure 26. Njara’s work should be situated within theories no longer associated with dualist notions of self and other. Thus, it is demonstrated how both Njara and Kasibe have articulated their

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Englishness’ is not employed by Kasibe as a geographical term, but rather as a term referring to language.

understanding of identity in an entirely new way, no longer associated with dualist notions of inside/outside, but as trans-conscious, and as active participants in the global ecumene.

With so many cultures having, to various extents, become cross-cultured, Du Bois' (in Gilroy 1993:126) "dream of global co-operation" is increasingly becoming relevant. Cultural insiderism does not imply a national, ethnically homogeneous construct, but rather describes an attempt to comprehend the cultural intermixture that distinguishes certain nation states. Erna Bodenstein's work considers the question of South African psychologist Chabani Manganyi – "is being black-in-the-world different in fundamental respects to being-white-in-the-world?" (Bodenstein 2011:[sp]). Bodenstein, who describes herself as a white, a-typical Afrikaans speaking woman, has worked with the subject of her three adopted black children for some time in an attempt to investigate notions of identity and reality formation within their particular transmuted cultural situation. The work, *Mbeki Series*, 2011 (Figure 27), focuses particularly on Bodenstein's youngest son, Mbeki, who as the youngest had been raised almost exclusively by Bodenstein and her late husband since he was a baby, in an Afrikaans-speaking home. The work investigates the impact thereof on his identity with regard to culture and is a response to how he has coped with adolescence and the development of his identity during this age. Bodenstein (2011:[sp]) articulates their family unit as 'designed' – "being simultaneously black-white-white-black" (*Designs of Self* catalogue 2011).



Figure 27: Erna Bodenstein, *Mbeki Series*, 2011  
 Ink, watercolour, masking fluid, bleach  
 140mm x 300mm  
 (Designs of Self Catalogue)

*Mbeki Series* is based on a repetitive portrait of Mbeki, not in an attempt to capture who he is as a person, but rather, in an attempt to map out his visual identity, based on his physical features alone. Bodenstein has represented Mbeki's identity as being in a constant state of flux. Each image of Mbeki leaves old binaries behind. Black ink is used to depict Mbeki's portrait and has been drawn, bleached and redrawn to eventually embody the representation of someone both in-between and plural. The work results in the "fleeting catching of a likeness and then letting it go through the effects realised by the inherent fluid nature of the media [sic]" (Bodenstein 2011:[sp]). It can be argued that Erna Bodenstein and her family are trans-conscious and experience this notion of cultural insiderism through their pluri-cultural understanding of their family unit and society. I argue that such cultural insiderism has evolved to become trans-conscious, where there is an acknowledgement of difference although these differences are no longer static, but are rather translated. Thus, within transculturalism, cultural insiderism distinguishes the roots of ethnic difference, although one can no longer locate extensive cultural difference within our globalised world. Trans-consciousness has invoked a sense of global understanding. Therefore the position of the white curator is no longer a contentious issue; rooted in the theories of African modernism and the altermodern, the globalised subject is placed within an awareness of multi-

positionalities as a global subject. There is an acceptance of difference through translation but a conscious move away from rooted differences, categorised in terms of essential features or non-progressive constructions of race.

#### **4.2.3 *Transnationalism, the trans-societal and third culture***

Within previous understandings, the term ‘transnationalism’ was associated with the physical act of crossing national borders. In the globalised climate, with access to television, internet and various other social media, the transnational experience can no longer be exclusively defined by way of the physical act of travelling. Transnationalism within the African modern can also referred to “a state of being that encompasses and describes associated terms such as diaspora, exile or nomadism” (Barson & Gorschlüter 2010:183). The understanding of the modern political and cultural formation needs to be classified through a “desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (Gilroy 193:19). Although Gilroy’s argument remains specific to the black Atlantic, his model theory can provide insight into the situation of the Global South. The transnational experience needs to be investigated within Africa itself and not limited to the African diaspora. Transnationalism needs to be considered outside of theories that emphasise hybridity, in order to situate transnationalism within the African modern, or altermodern understanding and within this study of the transAfrican experience.

Transnationalism, according to Barson and Gorschlüter (2010:183) “challenges the legitimacy of cultural nationalism and racial essentialism, and questions notions of regional intellectual autonomy.” Artist Michele Mathison<sup>7</sup> challenges and questions symbols associated with regional intellect, referring simultaneously to South Africa and Zimbabwe. His work investigates the way in which practical objects have become symbols of control and power within the tumultuous times of both regions, with symbols such as sjamboks, pangas, palisade fencing and passport covers taking central stage. Mathison’s art is influenced by his own transnational understanding of the Global South, having lived and worked on both sides of the South African and Zimbabwean border over the last decade.

For Mathison (2012/09/20), contemporary Southern Africa forms an example of a “distinct and new social condition.” He works with the idea that a political border defines two political incarnations of African democracy, which he states has “created a vast, transient community

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<sup>7</sup> Michele Mathison was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1977. Mathison, primarily a mixed media sculptor, achieved a BA in Fine Arts in 2000, and for over a decade, has been living and working in both South Africa and Zimbabwe.



of *displaced*.” As seen in Mathison’s work, *Black Africa* (2010) (Figure 28), the purpose of the functional object has been removed in order to amplify their symbolic value. Mathison transforms the utility object, the passport, which should provide international access by definition, into a symbol associated with oppression and juxtaposed this alongside razorwire fencing. Mathison (2012/10/18) states that “the confrontation between nationality and identity becomes evident when crossing borders. The question of how difficult or easy this process will be, is always being asked as immigration policies constantly change. This causes people to try and change their identities to fit in with nationalities of foreign countries.” The symbol here is the complete opposite of freedom, and rather presents the viewer with the idea of the passport of African continents as burdensome. Mathison refers to Africa *en mass*, while also referring specifically to South Africa through the symbolic reference of razorwire fencing, a South African invention. Mathison’s aim with his work is to examine the function of the everyday mass-produced items that represent the lives of the people who use them, which he reworks, repeats and builds into geometric visual fields presented to the viewer in order to discover the way in which the viewer relates to the symbol once its meaning has been transformed. According to Mathison (2012/10/18), “this motivates the question of how identity is affected when communities are displaced and forced into new social groups.”

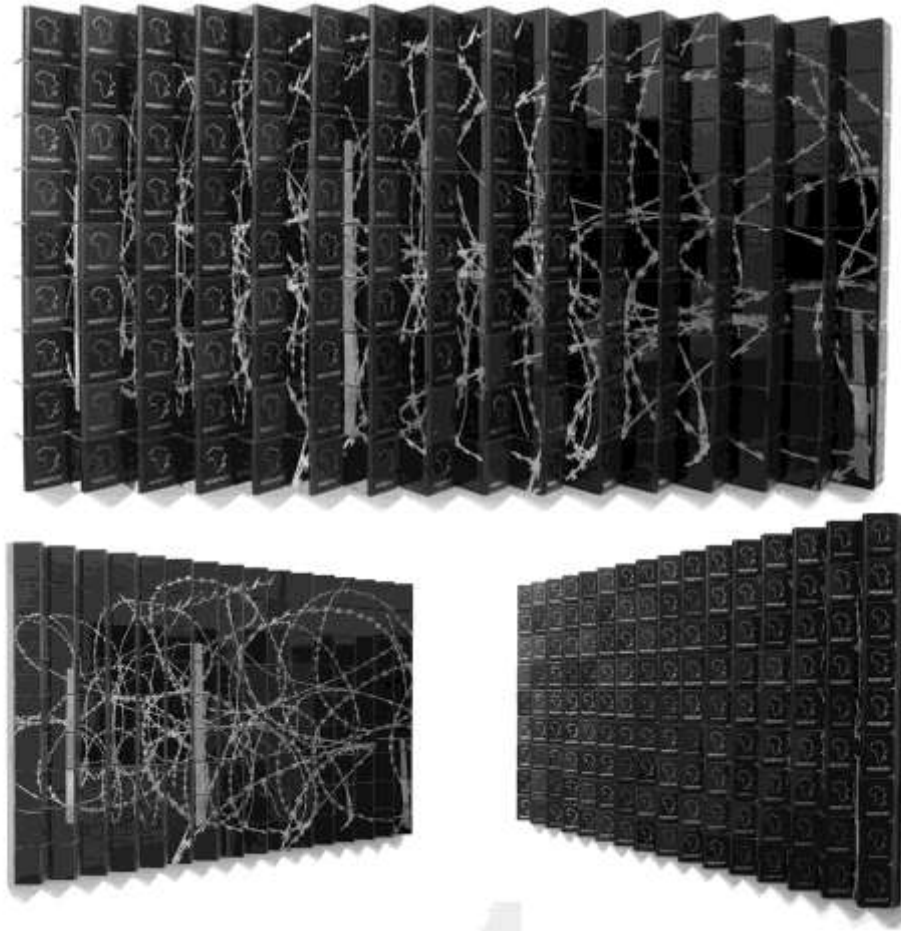


Figure 28: Michele Mathison, *Black Africa*, 2010  
Passport cover, Perspex  
2240 mm x 1180 mm  
Images courtesy of the artist

Mathison creates a visual narrative of the region's social changes. His work considers both the South African and Zimbabwean socio-political turmoil, drawing reference from the passport as a tool for refuge and a symbol for greener pastures. The work is transnational in nature, appealing to both political situations in South Africa and Zimbabwe to represent a transnational political identity. According to Mathison, the grouping of these artefacts carries a darker question alongside the work, encouraging the question of transience. Thus Mathison's work enables a sense of connectedness within the Global South, an African trans-consciousness. African trans-consciousness can be defined as neither limited to one race, nor one culture, but appealing to the whole.

Previously associated with notions of cultural hybridity, transnationalism refers to a state of being within the cosmopolitan situation of the globalised state/city and as no longer limited to diasporic or nomadic conditions. Transnational is no longer hybrid. I argue that the transnational is defined by the trans-consciousnesses of various national intricacies,

although these cannot be reduced to a single source. Transculturalism, emerged out of the understanding where transnational refers to a state-of-being of this new world culture by which an entirely new identity is formed, no longer defined or understood in terms of binaries.



Figure 29: Sikho Siyotula, *Remainder 004* (left) with details (right),  
From *Remainders of the ephemeral* (2011)  
Caul fat, thread, rope and wire  
600 x 1200 x 600 mm  
Images courtesy of the artist

South African artist Sikho Siyotula explores the fleeting aspects of material cultures and cultural expressions, alongside her interest in the tendency to 'hoard' cultures. Producing *Remainders of the ephemeral* (2011) (Figure 29) after she spent a two month artist's residency in Paris, Siyotula's interests turned towards investigating the need for cultural expressions to allow for change. Siyotula (2011:6) said of Paris:

Paris feels like a place where many things have been hoarded; hoard this building, hoard that painting. That is the problem with not letting go of things; you will always hang onto the work of the masters and not see your own light. You will believe their works are better than your own, your struggles inferior to theirs but this is not the case. Not only does Paris have too many people; but it's also got too many times competing to exist in the present [sic].

The works from the series *Remainders of the ephemeral* reference various anatomical structures, which she built by wrapping caul fat over a skeletal structure, in order for the fat to dry for it to take its shape (Figure 30). Siyotula's first encounter with the medium of caul fat, or *Umhlelo* was during the ritual custom of *Emigidini* – the standard slaughtering of an animal (Siyotula 2011:5). The caul fat or *Umhlelo* would then be hung in the kitchen and left to dry. Siyotula remembered from then, the lacy quality, fleshy tones and aesthetic value of the medium.



Figure 30: Sikho Siyotula, *Remainder 001*  
From *Remainders of the ephemeral* (2011)  
Caul fat, thread, rope and wire  
25 x 60 x 27cm  
Images courtesy of the artist

Siyotula's investigation of cultural change stems from both the medium she uses and from the very ephemeral quality that the works themselves embody. *Umhlelo* as medium was used both as significance for the meaning of the material within the culture in which she originally experienced it, as well as for its aesthetic lacy character. The volatile and changing nature of the medium – at first a concern – became a priority within the concept of the work. Siyotula's medium began embodying both ideas of life, time, and memory, while at the same time allowing for change to occur constantly within the work, echoing Siyotula's (2011:5) idea that "cultural expression can be as corporeal and ephemeral as the culture that produces it." Caul fat, because of its volatile nature, is in a constant state of decay, thus Siyotula (2011:6) states that "it is within discourses that explore the volatile, corporeal and ephemeral nature of cultural expressions and more broadly, the materiality of culture itself, that this body of work can be located." Siyotula acknowledges and encourages the aspects of this work to be continually renegotiated and reconceived – which can be linked to translation and the changing understanding of difference through globalisation. Sikho (2011:6) proclaims "I am in [sic] the opinion that the remainder of cultural expression is something that is breathing, something that sweats and something that is alive, but also

dies.” Similarly, Mike Featherstone (1990:1) comments on the “trans-societal cultural process [...which] can be regarded as being embedded.” He goes on to state “people, information, knowledge and images give rise to communication processes which gain some autonomy on a global level”, which sets the stage for emerging “third cultures” (Featherstone 1990:1). Understood within Siyotula’s objects, they begin to embody something entirely new. Siyotula references the idea that some historians situate themselves within the belief that the death of one cultural expression makes room for the birth of another. Thus, Siyotula’s work references a culture where one is unable to hoard – but rather must embrace change and transformations, over time becoming a transculture. Due to globalisation processes, cultural perceptions are intermixing, resulting in the formation of a new, transculture. Similar to Siyotula’s message, culture should not be hoarded throughout history, but rather – like her work itself as a symbol of cultural expression, free to change and embodying something completely new within the processes of cultural globalisation.



Figure 31: Amita Makan holding up *Self portrait*, 2012  
Hand stitched embroidery on organza silk netting, silk thread, vintage sari, sequins  
Size variable  
Photograph courtesy of Carla Crafford and the artist

Bourriaud (2009:164) argues that the art world today is dominated by the vague ideology of multiculturalism, which “claims somehow to resolve the problem of the end of modernism in a quantitative manner.” Multiculturalism represents a Western historical construction, which is situated in the centre of an ideology that naturalises the culture of the other (Bourriaud

2009:165). Amita Makan's *Self portrait*, 2012 (Figure 31), alludes to the ideas of fluidity, plurality and an integrated understanding of the self. Bourriaud (2009:165) states that a viewer would need to be naive in order to believe that a contemporary work of art is an expression of the exclusive culture from which it comes, "as if culture were a self-contained, closed and independent universe [...] not yet contaminated by the white colonialist." Bourriaud (2009:165) points out that the alternative to this view would be based within interculturalism, which he states is based on a double-dialogue "one that the artist maintains with his or her tradition, and a second dialogue between that artist's tradition and the corpus of aesthetic values inherited." Such a double dialogue should be understood alongside trans-consciousness and transculturality. Such an intercultural artist's work, such as in this example, convey the richness of plurality as an expression of identity, both within the materials used, as well as the conceptual content.



Figure 32: Amita Makan, *Self portrait* (front and back view), 2012  
Hand stitched embroidery on organza silk netting, silk thread, vintage sari, sequins  
Size variable (photographed un-stretched)  
Photograph by the author

Amita Makan's *Self Portrait* (Figure 32), is hand-stitched embroidery on silk tulle netting, with silk thread, pieces of vintage sari's belonging to her late mother, and sequins, which can be viewed from both the front and back. The silk netting serves as a metaphor for skin, which according to Makan (2012) is something that 'absorbs influence', is organic and is likened to the evolutionary process similar to the evolving processes of globalisation. Silk also evokes

to the fragility of life, when one considers that the cocoons are seized before the new life is able to develop. Makan has embroidered her self-portrait onto the silk tulle or netting; using her late mother's vintage sari's as medium.<sup>8</sup> The irony in establishing her own identity through her late mother's clothing as an attempt to establish her roots, is not lost – Makan's mother lives on through her work. Through her own mother's loss of sense of identity when faced with a deteriorating disease, Makan attempts to re-establish her own sense of identity while at the same time maintaining conscious of change in identity both in one's self and through one's society. The mediums used enrich the meaning of her work in terms of her identity, translating difference within her ancestral roots. The work aims to demonstrate a progression from the original culture, to this transculture, never compromising on her understanding of her identitarian journey, yet at the same time illustrating knowledge and understanding of changing senses of identity within contemporary globalised society. The work borrows and shares from a number of cultural ideologies and offers something entirely new to the viewer.

Makan's *Self portrait*, (2012) also refers to her cobbler ancestors from India, who stitched shoes and leather goods by tradition. Throughout the background, Makan has stitched Western style shoe silhouettes onto the silk tulle, which are echoed through the shapes of the ends of her hair. Bourriaud (2009:163) determines that the nature of globalisation is economic in nature. He argues that "the gap that still exists between the centre and the periphery does not separate traditional cultures from cultures reformed by modernism" (Bourriaud 2009:163). The reference to the Western shoe in Makan's work alludes to this idea of economic globalisation, where most women wear similar shoes and the identity of a shoe no longer refers to a specific cultural background. The background thus represents Makan's space in the world, along with the references to the shoes and the mirrored style sequins. The iridescent sequins are a contemporary take on the traditional mirror work techniques used by Gujarati women in their embroidery. The mirror work was used for protection and to deflect the 'evil eye'. The sequin is essentially a dot and alludes to the point of life, 'the beginning' and infinity. 'Amita' incidentally means infinite in Sanskrit. Makan (2012) refers to this portrait as "the point of the human race" articulating the transcultural within herself and thus positioning the artist within the constellation that describes her culture within a larger one. Here, Makan's identity is both progressively fluid, as well as a reference to her ancestral becoming.

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<sup>8</sup> Amita Makan's mother passed away in 2009 after a long battle with Alzheimer's disease.

Makan (2012) refers to the quote, taken from Ted Hughes' (1999) book *Tales of Ovid* that:

Some are transformed just once  
And live their whole lives after in that shape  
Others have a facility / For changing themselves as they  
please...

Thus, Makan (2012) argues that one needs to celebrate the notion of a multi-faceted society, commenting about a globalising culture that "what is interesting is this process we are going through to become one." Makan's work articulates the notions of the common ground and openness. Makan's *Self portrait* (2012) was not intentionally meant to convey the exotic in relation to her aesthetic result, but this came about as a by-product of her treatment of the materials. Perhaps this can be seen as a contemporary twist on the old, where the new transculture is seen as moving towards something new, and the binary understanding of this transculture and its artefacts are seen as completely ulterior. There is a clear underlying motive within the work of moving forward toward a holistic understanding on identity. The *Self portrait* is intended to be viewed from both sides of the matrix. The back of the netting can be seen to convey a sort of unravelling, the unravelling of the exotic, of the other, and the self and binarism into a transmutation that remains open. Makan (2012) says "art is a personal process, however the message is universal ...."

Nuttall (2008:107) argues that "the emergence of new stylizations of the self, embedded in cultures of the body, represents one of the most decisive shifts of the post-apartheid era", writing about a continual remixing and shifting of self-representation, mutually implicit within African modernism. Thus, viewed within the selection of artists to be included within the curated exhibition, this shift in terms of self-understanding and self-representation is conveyed. Understanding identity in terms of the self and other have become indefinable, transmutation and intermixing have dismantled racial categories, and translation refers to difference as evolving alongside transnationalism and transculturalism where trans-consciousness allows a global understanding of identity. Identity has thus become inclusive, and not solely based on race alone.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate identity in terms of a synthesised reading of African modernism and altermodernism, in order to come closer to an understanding of ‘authentic’ African identity. Emphasis was placed upon the notions of changing curatorial perceptions on identitarian understandings, with particular reference to Africa as a site of globalisation. The curator’s position is to assert meaning alongside artefacts; curating is thus integral to conveying views on identity, both in terms of the public and private domain. The main objective of this study was to focus on identity politics and cross-culturation, within the curatorial domain, considering changing curatorial consciousness around identity from the 1985 exhibition *Tributaries*, to the more contemporary exhibition such as *Afro modern* (2010). Aspects of geo-political location and patterns of socio-political activity were investigated with regard to previously curated exhibitions, focusing on how curators approached identitarian issues and shortcomings. The investigation considered globalisation processes, in order to consider identitarian understanding and the changes therein. Inherent within the investigation was an outlining of intercultural exchanges that have shaped contemporary culture, and the view that separatist understandings of such cultures have become superfluous, since binary distinctions between various cultures have transmuted. These factors were considered in terms of curatorial practice.

It was argued that present-day contemporary identitarian formations have become indicative of a culture which is entirely new, allowing understanding on behalf of race/gender/culture, which was previously deemed preemptive. I investigated African identity in order to convey an understanding within Africa itself, and thus avoiding a typically Western perception of the continent which has, up to this point, been based on essentialist categorisation and separatist terminology. The curator’s role of presenting interpretations of a series of works extends beyond the academics of the contemporary art world; thus the critics’ and public’s responses to the various exhibitions remained integral to my investigation. Sey (2007:40) stated of South Africa in 2007 that “there is no doubt that our country’s current sense of its own art history, its conception of our artistic lineage and profession into the future, is bogged down by a persistent need for artists, curators, art critics, historians and theorists, to distance themselves from colonialism and cultural imperialism.” This study avoided links with and disputed colonialism, postcolonialism and postmodernism by conveying their failures, and offers a new conception of identity consisting of an understanding of identity based within translation and transmutation as well as trans-consciousness. Such an amalgamation of the

contemporary discourses of African modernism and altermodernism's investigation, should be considered as based on globalisation.

In Chapter 2, an investigation into issues surrounding the aesthetic encounter between Europe and Africa was undertaken, in an attempt to corroborate African modernism and to historically avoid the typical ahistorical view of Africa. An investigation into blackness/whiteness studies and racial stereotypes, which historically traced the roots of ideas surrounding self/othering processes within the seminal mega-exhibition of South African origin, mainly *Tributaries* (1985), *Africus* (1995) and *Trade routes* (1997) was undertaken. Wallace (in Lemke 1998:4) uses the term 'other' in quotations to convey the term is flawed, yet it has been previously indispensable within identity discourse. Lemke (1998:4) states the term 'other' an "apparently neutral term connotes devaluation or disrespect" when aligned with ideas of African primitivism, exoticism and African alterity, still acknowledged within postcolonialism and multiculturalism. I have argued that this view proceeded to re-introduce stereo-racial essentialism. Although the exhibitions discussed conveyed a desire for radical change within South Africa in the reception of difference, and thus engendered a reflection of the social construction and shift in understanding identity, the exhibitions convey a sensitised regression through re-constituting difference within globalising processes that remain situated within postcolonial understanding. I demonstrated that South Africa comprehends diasporic experiences within their own nation state, but through globalisation, such a comprehension is translating into trans-consciousness.

Chapter 3 considered the seminal international exhibitions *Documenta XI* (2002), *Africa remix* (2004) and *Afro modern* (2012). Although all these exhibitions were conceived and held abroad (except for *Africa Remix*, which also travelled to Johannesburg), all convey a clear shift in perceptions of African identity issues. In early 2002, the understanding of identity was still grounded within postcolonial debates and multicultural understanding, with no progression since *Trade routes*. Following this, Simon Njami attempted to curate identity outside of postcolonialism, but ended up merely creating an "overview of contemporary art from Africa and [the] diaspora in one exhibition" (Kellner 2007:9). The exhibition demonstrated a curatorial progression towards a sense of identity within the post-racial, in order to escape the stereotypical traps typical in conceptions of Africa, yet Njami's solution offered an ahistorical view of Africa and proceeded to homogenise African cultural production. Njami's exposé of Africa still situated the African as a foreigner within the West. Downey (2005:47) states that curators ought to be "curatorially conscious" when representing Africa, "of artists having to answer to presumptions of African identity if they are

to be ‘consumed’ within the West” (Downy 2005:50). Thus, Njami was criticised for offering an ahistorical perception of African identity.

*Afro modern* (2010), curated by Tate Liverpool curators Barson and Gorshluter, attempted to overcome the previous failures of exhibitions concerning Africa in Britain, by focusing on the contemporary discourses of the post-cultural, double consciousness, postblack, transnationalism, interculturality, postculturality and contemporary globalisation, which proved useful within this study. *Afro modern* however, generates a view of Africa outside of Africa itself, and has thus remained exclusionary, although the exhibition’s conception of African modernism proved insightful. Thus, this study demonstrated that there still remains a need to consider Africa itself as a site of globalisation, where cultural expressions and identities are becoming intermixed, not only within the diaspora, but within the conceptualisation of the globalised continent itself.

The need for a stronger link to identitarian issues within globalised Africa itself had thus been pointed out, and as such, lead to the attempt to hypothesise a contemporary understanding of identity from an inclusive perspective, undertaken in Chapter 4. As curating is part of critical cultural practice (Eigenheer 2011:4), the opportunity to posit a contemporary understanding of African identity within the public domain is integral within this study, and has lead to the practical realisation of the curated exhibition. I used the theories of both African modernism and altermodernism as a basis for understanding contemporary identitarian issues today. I consider African modernism from an insider’s point of view, arrived at through trans-consciousness and contextualised through seminal artworks by South African artists that demonstrate this contemporary understanding of identity within art practice. The aim is thus to widen the spectrum of discourse on identity. I considered globalisation alongside the notion that cultures have become intermixed, that contemporary culture has been accumulated through globalisation, and that contemporary society now needs to be considered alongside the trans-identitarian and beyond the typical postmodern notion of the hybrid.

By studying previous seminal exhibitions dealing with African identity issues and the curators’ representation of meaning alongside the critical reviews herein, this study analysed changing perceptions of identity, with particular reference to a South African identity and identity within the Global South. This study conveyed the shift away from postmodern and postcolonial understanding, reconstructing the modern in order to situate Africa as a product of globalisation and no longer static. Identitarian understandings beyond notions of hybridity and multiculturalism, which favoured simply lumping differences together, have been

demonstrated. Rather, the study postulated that within globalising processes, transmutation has occurred, rendering society as culturally intermixed, and thus dismantling essential racial stereotypes. The study rather investigated identity exchange in terms of transnationalism, trans-consciousness and translation, where the understanding of difference and the essential story is to be considered in terms of changing understanding of difference through globalisation. In order to surpass stereo-racial boundaries, this study postulated that identitarian understanding is now trans-conscious, no longer limited to double consciousness as being either inside or outside, but pluralised to the point of being racially exchanged. The outcome of such an understanding is explained as no longer limited to the understanding of African identity seen in terms of diasporic or nomadic conditions. As such, these shifts examining changing curatorial perceptions, no longer position the white curator commenting on the non-white artist as a contentious issue, due to cultural intermixing and transmutation. Such a review of curatorial perceptions of identity and the failures therein show the ability to come to an understanding of identity that is not reliant on binaries and self and othering processes, but rather through the transmutation of culture, translation of difference and trans-consciousness, which results in a transnational understanding.

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